The novel is now recognized as a distinct form of literary art and its subject matter is portrayal of life. It is the most popular form of story-telling and essentially a Western art form which has its roots in the Western culture and world view. It is usually about a group of human beings or a single man-in society and man in the universe. In the earlier phases of civilization, man was a lone creature and his subjective thoughts, his sorrows, his anger, his love as also his frustrations and his achievements alone could provide the material for a story. As human life grew more complex and various kinds of human relationships developed, the story ceased to be a simple narrative or unfolding of events and took on more complex forms. From its genesis in the eighteenth century periodical essays, the novel has travelled a long way adapting both its content and structure to the changing conditions of life, taking on a variety of new forms and presentation of new modes and styles. Though the novel in the course of its long history of growth and development has passed many stages from the simple straightforward story of personal exploits into an area of human psychology and undergone many structural changes, its basic concern remains the same. It is a study of man, man in society which very often broadens into a humanistic document with a reformist motivation. This reformist motivation in some cases leads to a vision of the future, to Utopian dreams of a better world to live in. In other words, one has to study a novelist not only as a story-teller, social critic, satirist and reformer but also a visionary, a dreamer or a futurist. It should also be seen how a novelist’s
vision controls, determines and influences his themes, narrative modes, technique and style. According to Michael Zeraffa, the novel is the first art to represent man explicitly as defined historically and socially. (Fictions: The Novel and Social Reality, 11). The emergence of the novel as an art form affirms that society and history are interlinked. In the words of Lukacs, the novel is the only literary genre in which the novelist’s ethic becomes an aesthetic problem of the work (The Theory of the Novel, 6). Thus the novel as a literary genre and as an art form developed continuously and became the most influential vehicle of literary expression. In the history of modern novel Virginia Woolf occupies a very prominent place. She was the most distinguished woman writer of her generation who made use of the “stream of consciousness” technique in her novels. In the traditional novels, the novelist deliberately sets the scene, manages the action, and gradually draws together the threads with an eye to a climax. On the other hand the method of Virginia Woolf is poetic and she introduced into the novel the poetic images through pattern, colour and harmony. She has absorbed the poetic experience of life and developed a new kind of poetic prose to express it. In fact, she transferred the drama of life from the outer sphere of action to the mind which is the source of all action. Anita Desai was very much influenced by Virginia Woolf. James Joyce, Henry James and D.H. Lawrence are the other novelists who employed the stream of consciousness technique in their novels.

The origin and growth of the novel in India is generally attributed to the Western literary impact. Though fiction as a literary genre was not new to India, it
was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the novel made its appearance on
the country’s literary scene. The Indo-Anglian novel, properly speaking, made its first
uncertain, but significant start in the Thirties, when most of the vernacular literatures
in India had already achieved a full expressive power in the medium of fiction
reflecting the universal consciousness of change as well as the constantly expanding
horizons of national aspiration. Since the Thirties, the Indian novel written in English
has not only established itself on the native soil but has also been the spearhead of
progressive ideas and experiments in the novel. According to A.V. Krishna Rao, it has
also acquired a status of meaningful independent existence in the complex body of
Indian Literature, providing, as it were, a direct access to the Indian mind and heart,
which is denied to outside readers by the language barrier, inherent in the vernacular
literatures. (A.V. Krishna Rao, 10). With the introduction of English education,
Indians came into contact with the European literature and were influenced by it.
Foremost among the Indian writers was Bankim Chandra Chatterji who set a pattern
for the novel in India by adopting European forms and techniques, but using
essentially Indian characters, themes and settings.

History as the theme of creative fiction seems indeed to exercise a special
fascination for many an Indian novelist of yesterday and today. (K.R. Srinivasa
Iyengar, 323). Historical themes like partition dealing with alienation have found an
important place in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Manohar Mulgonkar, Kushwant
Singh, Chaman Nahal and Nayantara Sahgal. The growth of national consciousness
and the search for national identity made Indian writers writing in English give
expression in their literary works to multitudinous vibrations of the Indian soul during the transition. Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Monohar Malgonkar and Kamala Markandaya have written novels with a strong ideological commitment. In other words, their basic concern is man who is caught in a world of age-old social evils from which they struggle to liberate themselves. Some of the Indian writers were influenced by the ideals of Gandhiji and the Freedom movement and did a great deal in rousing the national consciousness of people. Novels like Inquilab by K.A. Abbas, Waiting for the Mahatma by R.K. Narayan, Kanthapura by Raja Rao, The House at Adampur by Anand Lall and Into the Sun by Frieda Das illustrate this point.

The Indian novel written in English, particularly in its later phase, is a significant documentation of what happened to those ideals of the Gandhian-Nehruvian era with which the nation began its pilgrimage—the ideals of democracy, of mixed economy, of the politics of the middle path. Novelists like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharaya responded to the demise of these ideals without nostalgia. They showed how the model of the great era of Gandhi and Nehru was dismantled, fractured and ruptured from within. Sasi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel is a classic example of a post-modernistic fiction. The theme of immigration and consequent alienation of the self has been the thematic preoccupation of Indian novelists writing in English like V.S. Naipaul, Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee. They are chiefly concerned with the cross-cultural and racist encounters between the characters on socio-cultural plane.
The emergence of women’s writing in India during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is of great significance, in the sense that it makes the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian women. Distinct feature of the creative writings by women during the last two and a half decades has been one of increased awareness of the abuses which the women are subjected to. This sensitivity among the writers can undoubtedly be attributed to the influence of the Feminist movement. Feminist criticism has shown that women readers and critics bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experiences. Elaine Showalter draws attention to this critical revolution in the following words:

While literary criticism and its philosophical branch, literary theory, have always been zealously guarded bastions of male intellectual endeavour, the success of feminist criticism has opened a space for the authority of the woman critic that extends beyond the study of woman’s writing to the reappraisal of whole body of texts that make up our literary heritage. (The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, 3).

According to Toril Moi, the words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ are political labels supporting aims of women’s movement of the 1960’s. (Modern Literary Theory, 204). Elaine Showalter divides feminist criticism into two distinct varieties. The first is concerned with woman as reader-woman as a
consumer of male produced literature. The main concerns of the feminist
critique are the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of
and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male
constructed literary history. The second type is a specialized discourse that is
concerned with woman as a writer-with woman as a producer of textual
meaning, and with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by
women. Victimization and survival are the basic themes of women’s fiction all
over the world. They are an intrinsic part of the feminine psyche, and reveal
themselves in women’s writing even if the authors do not directly engage in an
open critique of the patriarchal society or present the woman’s attempt to
achieve selfhood.

Both Anita Desai and Shobha De have specialized in depicting the
undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human
situations and emotional relationships. Their attention is also focused on
feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains in Indian society,
having strong past moorings. Both the novelists explore human relationship in
modern Indian society, particularly the husband-wife relationship in their
respective novels. A careful reading of the novelists like Kamala Markandaya,
Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee and Shobha De reveals a
common concern in their experiences as women writers. They portray the
consciousness of the urban middle class woman, who, in quest of her identity
undergoes a metamorphosis – from a silent sufferer to a hard-core rebel,
breaking with the age-old and restraining ethics of the male-dominated world. At times, the rebellion of the woman takes the extreme forms such as sexual promiscuity or extramarital relations which serve as a device for her to assert her “self.” And it is this theme of self-assertion which is also central to most of the novels of Shobha De.

The third important stage in the development of Indian English novel came in the beginning of the 1980’s. It was then that Indian English writing received international recognition, mainly through the writers of Indian origin who have settled abroad. A new landmark was created in 1981 when Salman Rushdie won the Booker Prize for his novel, *Midnight’s Children*. This was the first well-known international award for an Indian English work since the historic Nobel Prize for Tagore’s *Gitanjali* in 1936. A new interesting feature was added to the scene when in 1993 Vikram Seth was given fairly a decent amount as royalty for his novel, *A Suitable Boy*. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* brought both the Booker Prize for 1997 and a great deal of money for her. Among the Indian women novelists Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai and Shobha De are the most outstanding personalities and popular novelists. The mid-1950’s and 1960’s mark the second important stage when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their works that changed the face of Indian English novel. Interestingly, the appearance of women novelists added a new dimension to Indian English novel. They, with their feminine sensibility, opened up a new vista of human nature and
man-woman relationship. Discussing Indian women writers in English fiction K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes thus:

In Prawer Jhabvala’s work the social background is rather more important than the characters who enact the various comedies, tragicomedies and farces; in Kamala Markandaya’s, the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the divers backgrounds, economic, political, cultural, social; but in Anita Desai’s two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lighting, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility - the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists. (Indian Writing in English, 464)

Perhaps the most striking feature of the contemporary Indian English fiction has been the emergence of feminist literature – feminist in the sense of being written by women novelists as well as in the sense of giving voice to the sufferings, aspirations and assertions of women in a traditionally male-dominated world.
The novelists before the advent of Anita Desai dealt with the man and his world in relation to the social reality. They used their art as a powerful “public instrument” (Daiches 1965: 01) to present the social problems but Desai discarded the traditional approach to fiction. Her main preoccupation is to study the complex human relationship, human existence and human predicament, her exploration being a quest for self. She is the novelist dealing with the psychological problems of women and her theme is the individual pitted against herself and against the milieu. Like Joseph Conrad, she has a double function – to pull away the individual from the social milieu, so that “he can be put in extremis, and to act as an agent of self-confrontation”. (Allen 1954: 303). The Indian novel till 1970s treated themes of political and social import. It exhibited a splendid array of portrayals: princes and paupers, saints and sinners, white men and babus, farmers and labourers, untouchables and coolies, prosperity and adversity, cities and villages. Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya were the pioneers in this field. Writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya and Khushwant Singh deal with more impressive and sophisticated themes like the country’s independence movement, East-West encounter, tradition and modernity, materialism and spiritualism. The very notion of gauging the unexplored recesses of an individual’s mind, of transcending the narrow and shallow the conscriptions of the physical self were alien to them. It is Anita Desai who introduced these themes in her novels. Thus by shifting the realm of her novels from outer to inner reality and fathoming the nocturnal recesses of the human psyche, she brought the Indian novel into the mainstream of European and American fiction.
Anita Desai and Shobha De are the two contemporary women writers who have very much contributed to the Indian novel by taking up novel themes and by adopting new novelistic techniques. It will not be out of context if a brief mention is made on their development as modern women novelists of India.

Anita Desai was born in 1937 of a Bengali father and a German mother. The confluence of oriental and occidental culture factors has produced in her a mixture of oriental disinterestedness and occidental concern for basic aspects of life. She had the advantage of being nurtured in a highly cosmopolitan city – Delhi. Moreover, the study of English literature at the University of Delhi added a new dimension to her view of human life. Since the 1950s Anita Desai has lived in various cities of India, including New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, among others. She has received such recognition as membership of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Arts and Letters. She has also been abroad on teaching assignments at Girton College and Smith College in England, and at Mount Holyoke College in the United States. The year 1993, however, came as a turning point in Anita Desai’s life when she got the job of a creative teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Since then she has been staying there for a semester each year while spending the rest of the year in India. Anita Desai has also been felicitated as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London, in addition to receiving the Guardian Award for children’s fiction for the novel *The Village by the Sea* and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award for *Fire on the Mountain*. She has also been awarded the literary Lion Award in 1993, and been nominated Helen Cam visiting Fellow, and
Honorary of the University of Cambridge. She has also written short stories. The themes of her stories are more or less the same as that of her novels - the problem of women and children, of human relationships, of the oppression of the innocent and suffering under insensitive and brutal people and various other forces.

The most significant social issue that Anita Desai focuses in her novels is the institution of marriage – particularly in the novels where woman is the protagonist. When a woman is caught in the trap of marriage, she has only one way left that is to languish in misery. Every attempt the woman makes to redefine herself inevitably ends up in lack of communication. This leads to the theme of alienation and each novel of Anita Desai is progressively a search of the self for a heightened female awareness. Anita Desai, like most women writers, turns her eye inward and writes about the flickering psychic reactions. She records the dilemmas faced by the Indian urban individuals. Also, she portrays and analyses human relationships in the context of emotionally related kin which is a fertile area for exploration.

Anita Desai’s treatment of her theme begins as a simple personal story of an individual woman gradually developing into a wider conflict for her identity and ends up exploring possibilities of transition in the tradition bound Indian society residing in metropolitan surroundings. She brings about a new dimension to the Indian novel by drawing upon the troubled sensibility of a woman in an absurd world. Anita Desai finds the existentialist theories compatible to her themes. Her characters like Maya, Sita and Nanda Kaul are lonely, anxious and estranged, and suffer from a sense of alienation that is not merely physical but also psychic. Their estrangement stems from
a lack of companionship with which they could feel secure. She explores the inner working of her protagonists’ minds unfolding the inner recesses and revealing the fundamental human condition by placing the individuals in situations of extreme tension. She thus, introduces the psychological vein and a ‘dissociation of sensibility’ in her novels and she has an innate ability to peep into the inner recesses of the psyche of her characters rather than the outer spectacle of action. She has enormously contributed to the growth of Indian fiction in English by incorporating psychic aspect of her female characters who have suffered privations and humiliations, neglect and silence, aloofness and alienation. Alienation has been the thematic motif that organically connects Anita Desai’s fiction. This makes her exceptionally a unique novelist.

Like Anita Desai, Shobha De is also a modern Indian novelist writing in English who has the gift of exploring the subdued depths of women psychology. She was born in Maharashtra in India in 1948 and was educated in Delhi and Bombay. She obtained a degree in psychology from St.Xavier’s College, Bombay and began a career in Journalism in 1970. Since then, she has founded and edited three popular magazines—Stardust, Society and Celebrity— and has also been Consulting Editor to Sunday and Mega City. She is presently a freelance writer and columnist for several newspapers and magazines including The Times of India, The Statesman and The Sunday Observer. In 1988, she shot into literary limelight by writing her first novel, Socialite Evening. Her other works are Starry Nights, Sisters, Sultry Days, Strange Obsession, Snapshots, Second Thoughts, Shooting from the Hips, Small Betrayals.
Surviving Men and Speed Post. She believes that a man’s personality can be judged in a true perspective only when one goes into his interior more than his exterior behavior. Her novel Socialite Evenings presents a picture of the institutions of family and marriage obtaining in the wealthy classes of the Indian society. Karuna, the protagonist of the novel who craves for independence is defiant of all authority but indulging in introspection she discovers that snapping of family ties was traumatic and detrimental. She is pleased to be back within the fold of the family and wishes to remain there for a while.

A careful study of Shobha De’s novels shows the novelist’s perceptive portrayal of the secret depths of the human psyche; her accurate characterization; her racy and captivating style which invokes vivid images and compels the reader to identify himself or herself with the characters and situations. In short, Shobha De has tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual concerns of modern society in which a hapless and forsaken woman longs for pleasure and freedom. She is an established novelist of the twenty-first century who has taken on many roles, a super model, journalist and best-selling author. Her career started with her unplanned entry as a teenager into the glamorous world of modeling, then moving on to magazine editing, Columnist, T.V. script writer and author.

Most of the Indian writers especially women novelists deal with the themes of family, career, recognition of the self, the patriarchal society and marriage in their writings and Shobha De is of no exception. In fact, most of the women characters depicted by Shobha De are economically independent and socially uninhibited who
are conscious of their self-respect. The women in her world are enterprising, bold, innovative and ever ready to face challenges. In focusing exclusively on the plutocratic society, particularly, the elitist section of Mumbai she shatters the bourgeoisie notion of a fairy-tale happiness for the elitist women. Her works reveal the trauma, insecurity and agony that lie beneath the opulence of such women’s lives. Her writings seem to be a definite attempt to drive home the fact that the trials and tribulations faced by these women are no less if not greater than the pangs of the comparatively economically weaker women.

Both the novelists Anita Desai and Shobha De share between themselves certain common features. They portray the psyche of their sensitive emotional and sensuous characters in their respective novels. Their main concern is not with the society or social forces but the individual psyche and its interaction with social values. They are mainly concerned about things that every individual longs for – the courage to live and the capacity to love as well as be loved. Interestingly, in their novels the theme of domestic disharmony and marital discord is confined to the family and at times to the maladjusted or ill-adjusted self. Their protagonists suffer from lack of parental love, disturbed infancy, broken homes and Oedipus or Electra complex. Parallels can also be drawn from the novels of Anita Desai.

Anita Desai’s first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* presents the story of a young sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable loneliness. The very beginning of the novel highlights the theme of alienation of husband and wife by unfolding the relationship
of Maya and Gautama. The novel is Maya’s story, the story of her married life with Gautama and almost the entire story is “remembrance of things past” by Maya herself. The action of this novel is located in Delhi, but the city’s presence is neither obtrusive nor obsessive. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, is a young girl married to a friend of her father named Gautama who, with his academic and detached nature, totally antithetical to her. Their opposing temperaments cause marital conflict. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Maya is a girlish Mrs. Dalloway, and Anita Desai has obviously been influenced by Virginia Woolf’s ideal of fictions and even by her prose style. (Indian Writing in English, 467). Her second novel, Voices in the City is a tragic exploration of personal suffering, which arises out of the feverish sensitivity of this young intellectual who has lost his way in contemporary India. It explores in a convincing way the innate climate of youthful despair and is permeated by the existential angst. This novel, Voices in the City continues the theme of maladjusted marriage with a wider aspect. It is not only the husband and wife who are faced with this existential predicament but the impact is also felt on their children, relations, friends and even acquaintances. In Voices in the City, the scene shifts from Delhi to Calcutta – that area of smoke and darkness of noise and squalor of disease and death. The Maya – Gautama tragedy is reenacted in the Monisha-Jiban marriage, for Monisha commits suicide unable to stand the strain of living in her husband’s house. The maladjustment between Raman and Sita in the novel, Where Shall We Go This Summer? is based on the clash of values, of principles, of faith even, or between normal, double social standards and the iconoclastic attitude of uncompromising
honesty. The marriage of Mr. Kaul and Nanda in Fire on the Mountain is based solely on physical lust and circumstantial convenience of the husband, who lives his double life without any commitment to either his spouse or his mistress. Nanda becomes the victim of forced motherhood, producing umpteen unloved, unwanted children. Anita’s Desai’s next novel, Bye-Bye, Blackbird is an authentic study of human relationships confronted by cultural encounters. Of all the novels of Anita Desai, this one is most intimately related to her own experiences. The novel captures the confusions and conflicts of alienated people. In the novel Where Shall We Go This Summer?, she returns to the theme of alienation and loneliness in married life. The novel tells the story of Sita who is fed up with the mundane routine of a meaningless existence. She feels suffocated in her posh flat in Bombay and wants to return to the island Manori where she had spent her childhood days with her family to seek peace and pleasure. In the core of her heart, she believes that the magic of the island will wipe out the evil spell and her unborn child will remain within her womb forever. Her tragedy is mainly due to her constitutional inability to respect the values and the attitude of the society-and her irreconcilable temperament. The marital discord results chiefly from the dichotomy between the two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposite viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband, Raman.

In Fire on the Mountain she explores the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her great-granddaughter, Raka. Their loneliness and isolation have been artistically presented in detail in this novel. In other words, Fire on the Mountain is the story of marital unhappiness personified. Carignano is a major symbol in the novel as the
island in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Carignano was originally set up as a life-sustaining health resort, built because of the concern of a husband for his wife. In Nanda’s case it is the only way out, Carignano eventually became the place of English women, neurotic and single. The house has been haunted by fugitives who have run away from the plains. Throughout the novel, Carignano is associated with death, and it is a place where memories reside. Carignano was no longer a sought-after but a deserted house after independence. Both the place and Nanda have become irrelevant for people. Carignano thus stands for irrelevance, rejection, escape, put-on withdrawal, loneliness. *Fire on the Mountain* has a neat tripartite division with Carignano, synonymous with loneliness, uniting them. Three kinds of loneliness have been dealt within the three sections of the book. One section is about glamorized loneliness, another about reveling in loneliness and the third is a case of circumstances imposing loneliness on the person. The novel is set in Kasauli which has a rich store of images of all kinds. While some images like Carignano, charred, unbuilt houses, the statue of Buddha, the mountain and fire assume symbolic proportions, other images have been effectively used to underline the state of mind of the characters. *Fire on the Mountain* is a remarkable attempt to probe the various facets of loneliness. The novel, *Clear Light of Day* deals with the theme of time in relation to eternity. Explaining the theme of her novel, Anita Desai says: My novel is set in Old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family under goes since 1947. (*India Today*, 142).
Though this novel does not seem to have a tangible story it throws some significant light on the discord at various levels. Again, this novel presents the theme of maladjustment in marriage on a more realistic and broad scale with a social concern. The marital disharmony takes its cue from the chronic physical ailment of a diabetic wife that suffocates the whole family. Also, the novel describes the cultural decadence of Old Delhi through the family life of Misras.

Anita Desai’s novel In Custody reveals individual human nature, the relationship between people and the relationship of the individual to society. In her two novels In Custody and Baumgartner’s Bombay, the novelist explores the psyche of a male protagonist outside the circumscriptions of familial ties and obligations. She makes a departure from her earlier obsessive preoccupation with the interior landscape of hypersensitive and neurotic women. In fact, Baumgartner’s Bombay belongs to the genre of the novel of the ‘absurd’ and it is about Baumgartner, a wandering Jew in quest of roots. The bitterness of a neglected childhood, the horror of being hunted and hounded out of his own country, exposure to an outlandish ambience in an alien land, forever condemned to the life of an exile, he moves from one existential dilemma to another. The novel focuses on the absurdity of his existence both in Germany and India. Strangely, in Germany he was a Jew, alienated from the mainstream of life; in India he is dubbed as a Firangee, unwanted. Journey to Ithaca by Anita Desai is a compassionate portrait of people struggling to find a spiritual home. It delineates Matteo’s alienation and the concomitant quest for spirituality. Her novel the Zigzag Way narrates the story of Eric Browse, a graduate
The novelist has departed from her usual theme of marriage and deals with the theme of search for identity in this novel.

The artist protagonist, Deven, in *In Custody* is endowed with a different kind of sensibility. He is not an alienated self, in the sense the female protagonists of Desai’s earlier novels are. Anita Desai has thus delineated in most of her novels the problems and plights of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. She excels particularly in describing the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women, disturbed by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness and of desperation. The existential problem of the alienated self finally emerges to the central theme of her novels. The *Village by the Sea* is an award winning story about families’ survival in a small fishing village in India. It is about a real village called Thul on the western coast of India and all the characters in this book are based on people who live in this village; only their names have been altered. With their mother ill and her father permanently, Hari and Lila have to earn money to look after their two young sisters. In a mood of desperation Hari runs away to Bombay and Lila is left to cope alone.

The novel *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai is a paradoxical story about an Indian family that deals with the theme of marriage. While Aruna the sister brings of a good marriage, her brother Arun who is studying in America, is affected by the alien culture. The characters in the novel have their own individual dreams and desires. In
the journey of life some of his dreams are fulfilled and many of his dreams remain only as dreams leaving behind long trails of owes and sufferings.

Shobha De who started her career as a journalist in 1970, has emerged on the literary scene of Indian fiction dealing with the vital aspects of existence and survival in the high class society of India. Closely acquainted with the Bombay cinema and the world of modeling, she has beautifully mirrored the shattering human values of this glittering society. Her novels occupy themselves with the themes of over-powering materialism, lack of spirituality and the resulting inner conflict, the lack of identity of women, and the crumbling moral values. Her women characters reflect the true picture of the modern Indian women. She burst upon the literary scene with Socialite Evenings in 1988 and published Starry Nights in 1990, Sisters and Strange Obsession in 1992, and Sultry Days in 1994. She is indeed, a prolific writer. The fact that her novel has been prescribed in courses designed by the universities of London and Bombay has made Shobha De even more popular. So has the publication of her anthology on love and sex, which she has co-edited with Khushwant Singh. Shobha De claims to be writing “popular fiction,” saying that she is “a pioneer” in this field.

Through her novels and essays, she has tried to shatter the patriarchal hegemony in the Indian society. Like her earlier novels, Socialite Evenings and Starry Nights, Shobha De’s explosive novel Sisters is unique for its ‘narrative quality’ and its ‘ostensibly intimate view of glitzy side’ of Bombay life. Sisters is a novel that deals with the psychic conflict of a woman-protagonist who is caught between a ‘personal self’ and a ‘societal self.’ The novel thus focuses as much on the seamy side
of the business life as on the inner turmoil of the protagonist. This novel, set in the corrupt world of big business, appears to tell an interesting story of two wealthy and socialite women who, driven by ambition and lust, are involved in an unending rivalry. But it is in Mallika that we encounter a woman who struggles against the constraints of being a woman and finally completes her odyssey towards being herself. The structure of the novel is cinematic with its climax, being reminiscent of one of the most make-believe scenes of the modern pop cinema. But Sisters, which covers four years in the life of Mallika, is a fine study in the traumatic experiences of a woman caught up in the whirlpool of complex human situations. The narration, simple and direct, adds to the authenticity of the story.

Shobha De’s maiden novel Socialite Evenings discusses the story of Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite, who escapes the nightmares of a broken marriage, failed relationships and a mentally disturbed sister. The modern Indian woman who is at the centre of fiction of Shobha De, is no longer a model of Vedic, or pre-Vedic dignified woman, nor is she modeled on the post-Aryan woman who is passive in nature and accepts the dominance of men in society. Both in the era of woman’s lib, they are to a certain extent an extension of the woman based on mythic models from the Ramayana and the Puranas. The modern Indian woman born in post-war generation in an atmosphere of bewilderment and confusion has become bold and capable of surviving in degrading moral values of life. These characters suffer a humiliation as far as their social, economic and cultural life is concerned but they also find themselves capable of struggling, compromising and realizing their existence in the end. Shobha De’s
characters are ready to flout the conventional canons of morality and decency prevalent in the patriarchal social order. Shobha De bears a striking affinity with the “vamp” group of feminist authors with special reference to her *Starry Nights*. Gilbert and Gubar are of the opinion that the ‘vamp’ artists, like other feminists, demand total liberation from the male-domination, are-writing of female discourse and deconstruction of the binary opposites of culture/nature, man/woman, mind/body, day/night, reason/imagination, etc., in their works. They dislike the phallocentric standards of art, culture and history. The singularity of the ‘vamp’ artist lies in his defiantly inspired and demonically sensual attack on—indeed, a seduction and betrayal of—patriarchal system of thought. (*The Future of Literary Theory*, 145). Shobha De’s feminism admits of no redemptive formula for the ‘fallen women and no millennium for the liberated women. Her women characters who endeavour to liberate themselves, often meet with disaster. Before this happening, they send a whole host of taboos devised by patriarchal order cart wheeling. They act according to the dictates of their own will and defy the conventional codes of the social system.

Like her counterpart Shobha De, Anita Desai, the great Indian woman novelist and a pioneer of feminism, brilliantly exposes the grinding suppression of women in India:

> Even if in reality she is nothing but a common drudge, first in her father’s house and then her husband’s – a beast of burden bearing an endless string of children, putting up with any brutality or disloyalty or failing of
her husband’s – she has no alternative: she must live as Sita did, as Draupadi did; she is Durga incarnate. The myth keeps her bemused, bound hand and foot. To rebel against it – either in speech or action – would mean that she is questioning the myth, attacking the legend, and that cannot be permitted: it is the cornerstone on which the Indian family and therefore Indian society are built.

(Times Literary Supplement, 972)

Set against the backdrop of the Bombay film world Shobha De’s novel Starry Nights presents the chronicle of a young girl Aasha Rani who catapults to stardom surrendering her body, soul and psyche. Her novel, Sisters unfolds the life story of two sisters – Mikki, the legitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal and Alisha, the illegitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal and Leelabhen. When the narrative opens, Mikki, the protagonist, compelled by the untimely death of her parents in an air-crash, leaves America for Bombay to take charge of her father’s industries which are verging on collapse. She is in reality, unprepared for any responsibility that can deprive her of her personal freedom. In reality, Mikki, with the demise of her parents, feels lonely. The existence of Alisha, although strangers to each other, gives her a sense of solace and she is strengthened morally. It is not Alisha’s wealth that makes Mikki think of her, but her faith in human values that prompts her to establish relationship with Alisha. Preoccupied as she is with her own self, Mikki is determined to save the industries from going bankrupt. Despite being warned, Mikki marries Binny. Though she has
been enamoured of the life of freedom, she is not averse to being a wife. What she
does not like is the inhuman subordination of the woman and confining her to four
walls of the kitchen. With her education in America and progressive thinking, Mikki
gives in to Binny whom she loves very much. In his company, she not only gets an
insight into her real ‘self’ but also feels a sense of security. Thus she prides herself on
being his wife. The narrator tells:

She felt liberated, uninhibited and aroused to the point
of primitive abandon. If this was what her man wanted,
if this was what made him happy, should give it to him.
She would give him every bit of herself, her body, her
mind, and her soul. She was in love with him. And he
was finally hers. (Sisters, 109)

It is this total submission, a characteristic of the traditional woman, which
adds to the superiority of man and consequent exploitation of women. However, her
honeymoon with Binny is to end in a fiasco. Binny, a womanizer has already got a
family and his marriage with Mikki is only to keep up his image in the society. In
fact, her disillusionment with Binny is total when he goes in for a divorce. All her
efforts to live with him fail. Mikki is determined to retain her industries with which
she identifies herself. However, long before she does anything, she again finds herself
in the saddle, when Binny along with his illegitimate family meets his death. Mikki is
a changed woman now. Her experience with Binny gives her an insight into her
‘being’ as a woman and an individual. The transformation of Mikki from a mere
social butterfly to a mature woman and to a kindly mother-figure is apparent when she
turns her attention towards her estranged sister. Mikki’s encounter with different men
helps her grow into an independent-minded woman, while Alisha, failing to get any
hint from her experience, becomes an introvert. Ironically, Mikki and Alisha are
united only after the death of the latter’s mother. With her motherly affection, Mikki
attempts to soothe the wounded self of her sister. She helps her get over all the
emotional hurdles in her life. The novel comes to an end with both the sisters realizing
the need to live together. In Strange Obsessions Shobha De reiterates the theory that a
woman gets real peace and security only in the home of her husband. It is the story of
Amrita Aggarwal, a young beautiful super model of Bombay. Within months of her
arrival in Bombay, she is the envy of its beautiful people. Then, one day, she attracts
the attentions of a mysterious woman called Minx. As the months pass by and the
demands of her unwelcome suitor grow, Amrita’s life turns nightmare. It is an
unforgettable novel of sexual obsession and its consequences. Sultry Days infers that
a woman with a fully integrated personality, can face the challenges solve many
problems in her life and she need not be a victim, a fact manifested through the
powerfully drawn character of Nisha Verma, who initially worked in an advertising
agency subsequently adopting the career of a journalist. Transparency in man-woman
relationship constitutes the main fabric of Sultry Days in which the novelist has
portrayed a variety of women belonging to different classes and has shown diverse
attitudes in each. Marriage is not regarded as essential in Sultry Days. Deb remarks:
“Who knows about marriage – sharriage… I am happy as I am.” (Sultry Days, 27)

When he does condescend to marry Nisha, it is not of practical considerations:

“If you want, I don’t mind a shaadi-waadi-I know that
will make you feel better. Theek hai-we can be
bourgeois and go through with that marriage rubbish…
Give me my daal-roti, a warm bed, twice-a-week
maalish and a daily screw. That’s all I expect.” (Sultry
Days, 159-60)

The fact that Deb never marries Nisha, although he has a prolonged affair
with her, speaks voluminously about his belief in the irrelevance of the institution of
marriage. When Snapshots was first published it created a sensation among the
reading public and Shobha De was accused of sensual titillation due to her bold sexual
imagery and vivid expression of pre-marital, extra-marital, incestuous and lesbian
relationships. This novel centers on the reunion of a group of school friends several
years later in life, most of whom are married women. The get-together of the friends
is arranged on the insistence of Swati, requesting her friends telephonically to bring
snapshots of their schooldays. Men take advantage of the loneliness, ignorance and
frustration of women, while women suffer from inner fragmentation in the absence of
proper diversion. Social oppression leads to an identity crisis in women. The get-
together of these ‘Sisters of the Subcontinent’ at the house of one of them, Reema,
begins well. Despite their problems and initial resistance, they all attend it. There is so
much to catch on and memories start to surface – some happy, others bittersweet and some downright poisonous. As Swati, the spirit behind this get-together, tells them:

We aren’t here just to chit-chat, I want to know everything about everybody from the time we left school. Every single dirty detail. What happened to all the boyfriends? Where did the schools crushes go? And the breathless infatuations? (Snapshots, 90).

Infidelity, incest, rape, lies and even death and the evil that lurks beneath the apparently placid everyday lives of these six women form the substance of the novel appropriately called Snapshots. These women represent different kinds of urban women in India. They are hardly better than “schoolgirls playing adult games”. (Snapshots, 181). Forced to confront dark secrets that they thought lay buried deep in the past, these women begin to turn against one another and the mood of the party turns nightmarish, ending with the suicide of one of them. It is through their behaviour and conversation that Shobha De throws significant light on the predicament of women in India.

Shobha De’s next novel Second Thoughts demonstrates a candid study of woman’s imbroglio in the contemporary Indian metropolitan society while she struggles to find a solution between tradition and modernity. The arranged marriage between Ranjan Malik, an America-trained business executive from Bombay and Maya, an educated, freedom – loving girl from Calcutta is doomed to failure because of their entirely different attitudes to life. The gender issue of male chauvinism, the
non-acceptance of a liberated woman by the traditional Indian society, the growing question of sexual, familial, and individual dilemma have been dexterously handled by Shobha De in Second Thoughts.

Written in a voice that is consistently confident and candid, Selective Memory: Stories from My Life is remarkable for the honesty with which it captures the essence of a fascinating woman who has become a legend in her own time. Selective Memory, as the title suggests, provides an overview of a journey. Shobha De’s writes in her epilogue thus:

I’ve experienced much in these years, met a great number of interesting people, raised a large family, tried hard to lead an integrated life. Today, I’m prepared to provide a peep into the past without indulging in a voyeuristic catharsis. The one world that has inhibited me all along has been ‘indulgence’. Self-indulgence. A detailed chronicling of one’s own life seems the worst kind of narcissism, with its in-built assumption that there are people out there who are at all interested in you. (Selective Memory, 527-28)

Again, talking of her character, the woman in Selective Memory, she says:

The woman you meet in Selective Memory may not be the woman you think you know. But it’s me all right. Dates, times, events, place . . . I’ve tried to get them
right. But the book is not about chronological
correctness, it has more to do with perceptions and
feelings. I wasn’t working with files and papers, just
emotions and textures. It’s possible I’ve got sequences
jumbled up and a few vital facts hopelessly scrambled.
However, I’ve sincerely tried to marshal as many
relevant, significant details as it was humanly possible
to recall while writing the memoir. (Selective Memory,
528)

Shobha De’s book, a non-fiction, Surviving Men: The Smart Woman’s Guide
to Staying on Top has been viewed as provocative. The book deals with men in
general and the men in Bombay in particular. The Truth About Marriage is yet
another documentary by Shobha De published in 2005 in which she expresses her
views about marriage frankly believing that marriage is all about trust,
companionship, affection and sharing. Spouse has been widely acclaimed as a
delightful book about society’s most debated institution – marriage. She writes about
how and why marriages work – or do not. With her usual disregard for rules, she
reinvents tradition and challenges old stereotypes, addressing all the issues that are
central to most Indian marriages.

Shobha De’s fourteen short stories collected under the title Small Betrayals
effectively deal with life situations. Her concerns in these stories are varied and more
focused. By projecting issues from various angles through the realistic dramatic
situations set in the metropolitan city of Bombay, Shobha De has tried to show the complexity of human relations and responses. The story “The Motor-Cycle” shows how a fifty one year old Parsi bachelor, Pesi, and a girl of nineteen, Mohini get attracted towards each other during their meeting in a motor garage. They have a very brief courtship period, decide to get married and lead a life of fun, enjoyment and travel without bothering about their caste and religion-oriented parents. They take the ‘progressive’ step and undergo the marriage ceremony in Arya Samaj, Mohini calling this a secular system and place. But their pre-governed religious attitudes, customs and beliefs, and their hatred for each other’s religion and culture come to the fore. In the third story “The Fair One”, we see how monotony comes in the marital life of a middle class couple after a few years of marriage, but a little romance bridges the monotonous gap between the husband and the wife.

The story “The Decision” presents a very peculiar and disturbing situation when Manisha, a bank employee, makes up her mind to live an independent life in India and not to join her very loving, caring and adjusting husband Mohan, who has settled in America. The story “The Trip” gives us a glimpse of the marital life of a temperamentally mismatched husband and wife. In the story “The Transfer”, Shobha De brings out the gender-bias prevailing in our society: mothers discriminating between their sons and daughters, and the shallowness of the modern ‘kitty’ culture. How the frustrated, depressed and lonely men in their search for happiness and companionship take shelter in clubs and wine parties but find no solace there, vividly is shown in two stories “The Bar Man” and “The Fern Lady.” “Dheeraj”, the
protagonist of the story “The Fern Lady” is also professionally successful, materially rich, having all the luxuries at home, but there is no happiness, love and warmth in his marital life, though he had married twice. His first wife had deserted him and married someone else, and the second wife is too much preoccupied with her job at Delhi to share life with him. Utter loneliness leads him to excessive drinking, to while away his time in the club and he looks for ‘love’ outside marriage. Whereas Dheeraj’s frustration in his marital life leads him to the chambers of club and bottles of wine, the sexual frustration of a rich widow, Simran, turns her to her own body worship.

After the death of her husband, whom she always wished to die as she would not have to sleep with him, she spends all her time with a meticulous daily routine, caring for her beauty with the choice of creams and lotions brought from many countries. Through the portrayal of the nauseating “beauty-maniac”, Shobha De reveals the inner hollowness and frustration of the rich women finding outlet in such stupid obsessions. Another tale of marital incompatibility, lack of love, warmth and sharing is “The Repeat Performance” in which a twenty eight year old male protagonist Ashish, a super star, loves to remain surrounded by his fans. His first marriage with Sunita broke down because she did not like his over self-worship, his fads and style of life and he too was happy to get rid of her as she did not come to his expectations as a star’s wife. His marital relations with Ambika (a divorcee) a very modern and smart woman, too are very shallow, formal, functional and kind of repeat performance. They happily agree not to have children, not interfere in each other’s life and maintain a compatible and functional relationship.
In the next story “Diwali”, Shobha De portrays the marital life of another couple—Kalindi, a career woman, and Suresh, a successful businessman. Their marriage began well and Suresh encouraged her to be at the top in her career. But when she achieves great success, Suresh, out of jealousy, starts taunting her and finding faults in her management of home and expects from her to take care of his smallest needs like a traditional wife, though she had not been neglecting him and the house, and maintaining a balance between the work and the home.

“Flowers’ is the pathetic tale of a foolish and immature woman. Vandana, who, against the wishes of her parents, had married Vasant fifteen years ago, a handsome man who flattered her beauty and charms. Their courtship period had lasted for three years, but whereas Vasant’s love for her was over in the first year, hers had increased by and by. In the story “Late Arrival” like “The Transfer”, Shobha De again highlights the gender-bias in our society and the victimization of women by women and male sex. The last and a very gripping story of this collection “Bindi” deals with the aftermath of the communal riots which flared in the wake of bomb-blast in Bombay. The story also portrays very effectively how these riots affected the marital life of a Muslim boy Asif, and a Hindu girl Sushma.

A study of her short stories, reveals that through the realistic presentation of frustrations, conflicts, crumbling marital values, discrimination on the basis of sex, caste and religion, and the gruesome impact of the communal riots on the individuals and society, Shobha De voices her concern against the negative forces rampant in the contemporary middle class Indian society. Anita Desai’s short stories also deal more
or less with the same theme. What is interesting to note in these two novelists is their primary concern for women in dealing with the theme of incompatibility in marriage and the marital discord that seriously affects the whole family relationship. They are diligent in their own ways in presenting artistically the plight of their characters with their oddities and limitations in their respective novels. The popularity of Shobha De’s novels is due to their contents, her mastery over the art of story telling, and her use of the language. In fact, her novels seem to be the modern version of picaresque novels of the eighteenth century. The picaro in this case is a woman, but she, too, is avid of experiences, in search of which she goes from place to place. Shobha De began her career as a journalist in 1970 in the course of which she founded and edited three popular magazines – Stardust, Society and Celebrity and acted as a Consulting Editor to Sunday and Megacity. It may be partly on account of her experience as a journalist that she is able to say things interestingly and with a courage of conviction in a language uniquely her own. Her novels also owe their incomparable popularity to her intimate understanding of the psyche of women and their problems. Shobha De claims to be “a pioneer” in the filed of “popular fiction” writing. She also claims to be “among the first to explore the world of the urban woman in India.” (The Illustrated Weekly of India, 6) Through her novels and essays, Shobha De has tried to shatter patriarchal hegemony. Women’s significant difference underlies her sexuality, and it is from her sexuality that most of their problems arise. As Alice Jardine puts it,

The putting into discourse of ‘woman’ as that process diagnosed is intrinsic to modernity; indeed, the
valorization of the feminine, woman, and her
obligatory, that is historical, connotations, as somehow
intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking,
writing, and speaking. (Gynesics: Configurations of
Women and Modernity, 25).

Any sensible analysis of a literary work in the feminist point of view will do well to bear this fact in mind. It is this factor that lends authenticity to Shobha De’s treatment of women’s problems. Shobha De’s fictional world has aroused curiosity and interest on the one hand and downright rejection and denunciation on the other. When first published, Shobha De’s novels evoked hostile reviews. Despite their titillating details, Shobha De’s novels indicate the arrival of a new Indian woman eager to defy rebelliously against the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels are not just a series of “bodice riper.” (Seminar 384, 40). To David Davidar, they are serious attempts at “discovering India through Indian eyes.” (Seminar 384, 43) One may not like everything in Shobha De’s fiction, but her treatment of the contemporary urban Indian woman’s challenges, predicament, values and life-style is surely not without significance. She once 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.” (The Hindustan Times Magazine, 3)
Shobha De tears to pieces all notions of respectability associated with marriage. Her women discuss and practice sex with unusual candour. All sexual taboos are broken by them with gusto. The verbal encounter between conservative Malini and Rita, a frustrated wife and a busy body, is illustrative of the attitude of the novelist to marriage and sex. She does not present them for any idealistic purpose or aesthetic effect. Like Deb of her *Sultry Days*, she herself might declare: “I am what I am – take it or leave it.” (*Sultry Days*, 4). The novelist has touched upon different facets of an urban woman’s life and her plight, but no issue has received the same kind of full-throated expression as the question of matrimony and sex. Attention has been drawn to women’s exploitation, discrimination and commodification, but Shobha 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 (*Snapshots*, 109) or interference from the relatives. (*Starry Nights*, 16). She seems to be emphasizing the value of what is most conspicuously missing in the Indian context, namely, ‘communication,’ full-blooded interpersonal normal relations. Conscious of the evils originating from patriarchy, the women novelists would not endorse the wisdom of Tennysonian separation of roles and spheres of activity: “Man for the field and woman for the hearth: Man for the sword and for the needle she” (*The Princess*, V.427). Indian women novelists have concentrated on women’s problems in their work and have given vent to a new approach to and consciousness of the emerging phenomenon. What was just a beginning in writers like Anita Desai has assumed a strident posture in Shobha De and others. Anita Desai’s subject, comprising interpersonal relationship,
alienation, obsession with death and violence, conformity and non-conformity and impersonal forces like those of place and time, has a universally recognized significance. In Anita Desai’s work, images make the emotion obvious; the emotion dictates the images which shape the novel. Images shape theme; theme controls images. Meenakshi Mukherjee who believes that imagery reveals the author's natural mode of awareness, commends Anita Desai for her distinctive style and intensely individual imagery which is marked by “sensuous richness, a high-strung sensitiveness and a love for the sound of words,” (Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English, 188-89). Thus, Anita Desai brings to her novels a technique suitable for projecting the isolation and alienation and the spiritual desolation which are increasingly seeping into Indian ethos. Anita Desai’s novels depict a world of alienation, loneliness and suffering. In Anita Desai’s novels, it is common to confront characters who suffer from a metaphysical anguish, a matrimonial boredom or a tragic sense of loss. Besides, there are the symbolic journeys which her characters undertake and which highlight the futility of all human endeavours establishing thus the ultimate absurdity of human life. The East-West interface is a recurring motif in Indo-Anglian fiction and in her novel Bye-Bye, Blackbird, Anita Desai deals with it lightly. But Baumgartner’s Bombay elaborately deals with the lone encounters of Hugo Baumgartner with the milieu of the locales. Husband-wife alienation resulting from lack of communication and temperamental incompatibility form the theme of Nayantara Sahgal’s Storm in Chandigarh and The Day in Shadow and Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This
Summer? Nayantara Sahgal’s women seek to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves, where there is no need for hypocrisy and where the character is judged by the purity of heart and not chastity of body. Husband-wife alienation and the consequent break seem to be inevitable when these women fail to build up a relationship based on companionship, communication and equality. A perpetual quest for meaning and value of life, an attempt to grasp the incomprehensible and the external existential struggle of the individual who refuses to float along the current, form the core of Anita Desai’s novels. Her characters are distinguished by the qualities of introspection, introversion and a refusal to surrender their individual selves. The emerging picture is that of the battered and bruised individual writhing in pain and anguish.

Anita Desai’s women long for love and communion of the spirit which they perceive as the panacea of the ills of the world. Their refusal to compromise and surrender and the inability to accept the perspective of their partners inevitably results in isolation and loneliness. Her concept of free woman “transcends the limits of economic or social freedom and becomes a mental or emotional attitude.” (Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction, 66). On the other hand, Anita Desai’s psychological concerns make her deal effectively with the depths of human psyche.

Many critical works have been brought out on the novels of Anita Desai dealing with her major themes, her feminist consciousness, her mind and art and her fiction. Similarly, the novels and short stories of Shobha De have also been critically
analyzed focusing on her themes and characterization. Both of them have established themselves as reputed women writers writing in English and have attracted the attention of the academic circles both in India and abroad that have brought out numerous articles on their writings, and interesting papers presented in seminars in their journals and periodicals. Among them, The Fiction of Anita Desai by Suman Bala and Dr. D. K. Pabby, Woman Writing: Some Factes by Rashmi Gour, Indian English Fiction : Reading and Reflections by Kajendhara Kumar, Perspective on Indian English Literature by Vinoth Kumar Maheswari, Human Bonds and Bondages: The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamal Markendaya by Usha Pathania, Anita Desai : the novelist by Madhusudan Prasad, The Mind and Art of Anita Desai by J.P. Tripathy, Six Indian Novelist in English by Ramesh K. Srivastava, Indian Fiction: New Writers by H.M. Williams, The Novels of Anita Desai : A Critical Study by Manmohan Bhatnagar, Critical Essays on Anita Desai’s Fiction by Jaydipsingh Dodiya and particularly articles that appeared in journals such as, The Literary Criterion, The Journal of Indian Writing in English, Kakatiya Journal of English Studies, The Common Wealth Review, The Literary Voice, The Quest are worth mentioning.

Many critical commentaries have also been published on the novels of Shobha De. For instance books like, The Fiction of Shobha De: Critical Studies by Jaydipsingh Dodiya, Changing Faces of Women in Indian Writing in English by Khan, The Postmodern Indian English Novel: Interrogating the 1980 and 1990s by Viney Kirpal, Indian English Fiction Readings and Reflections by Uday Shankar
Both Anita Desai and Shobha De are prolific writers and they have dealt with the problems of women in their novels. The family relationship in their novels is very much affected by problems such as incompatibility in marriage, maladjustment, lack of understanding causing psychic tensions, and their eccentricities. Though these two writers have received much critical attention and numerous articles and critical commentaries have been published in journals on their novels separately, no serious attempt has been made to study these writers in comparison with reference to their common major themes, concerns and narrative techniques. This dissertation tries to fill this gap by discussing select novels of these two writers in a comparative frame work, focusing on the theme of marital discord and nuptial relationship in their novels. It is also a systematic interpretation and evaluation of works of the two woman writers, comparable because of their affinities in themes and problems. A comparative study of novels of both these writers, while it makes an exercise in comparative criticism enables one to understand the mind and art of each of these writers in new perspectives. Though an attempt has been made in this dissertation to
discuss all the novels and short stories of Anita Desai and Shobha De, the study is mainly confined to analyze the select novels of Anita Desai, namely *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody*, and *Fasting, Feasting* and Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings*, *Sisters*, *Starry Nights*, *Sultry Days*, *Strange Obsession*, *Snap Shots*, and *Second Thoughts*.

A judicious combination of the sociological, the formal and the psychological approaches becomes necessary in the comparative study of their novels and every effort can be made to bring to bear on this study all these approaches in a greater or smaller measure. In addition to this, brief comparative references have also been made to the styles and narrative techniques of these two writers, particularly to the use of the English language. However, the principal focus of this study has been on the themes, motives, characterization and their feminist concerns. One of the real achievements of the feminist criticism has been to draw attention to the fact that the gender and relationship between men and woman are the central themes in literature. The thematic study includes the study of such aspects theme, character, dialogue, vision, and message. A study of common major themes relating to art, society, and family in the novels of Anita Desai and Shobha De reveals that there exists a psychological affinity between these two writers evidenced in the treatment of the moral crisis of the contemporary society.