

**Emergence of New Woman: A New Feministic Approach in the
Select Novels of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur,
Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**Emergence of New Woman: A New Feministic Approach in the Select Novels of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De**” has been prepared under the guidance of Dr. Jaideep Randhawa, Assistant Professor(Former Head and Assistant Dean), Department of English, Lovely Professional University. No part of the thesis has been formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that **Priyanka Mahajan** has prepared her thesis entitled “**Emergence of New Woman: A New Feministic Approach in the Select Novels of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De**” for the award of the Ph.D degree of Lovely Professional University, under my guidance. She has carried out the work at the Department of English, Lovely Professional University.

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(Priyanka Mahajan)

ABSTRACT

The thesis entitled **“Emergence of New Woman: A New Feministic Approach in The Select Novels of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De”** discusses the evolution of new woman in India after the partition through an analysis of selected Indian fiction. It explores the “New Woman” presented in the select novels of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De. Various domains of her growth i.e. social, political and psychological remain the focus of the present investigation. The choice of the authors has been done on the basis of time period to which they belong and their literary works that project different facets of Indian new woman. The underlying purpose is to explore the voyage of development of Indian new women through their female characters. It starts with the subaltern fiction of Mahasweta Devi to urbanized fiction of Shobha De and to the contemporary discourses of Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa on the issues of girl education and marriage. The objective is to highlight the fact that if the social situations, economic scenarios and religious patterns of female characters of each of the chosen authors are diverse, their forms and manifestations of growth are also varied. The new image of Indian women presented by novelists under study is ambitious, power hungry and audacious. The traditional image of ideal Indian woman has become out-dated. A new woman is career-oriented because she knows that it is her economic dependence which empowers a male to dominate his wife and subject her to physical and mental torture.

Feminist historiography, feminist writers and critics from the West as well as East have already done a laudable job by revealing the historical process of

women's subjugation, their rising out of various suppressive power structures and the emergence of 'New Woman' both in society and fiction. It is significant to note that throughout the history of mankind from its stone civilization, the worship of goddess was widely ubiquitous, and families were matriarchal in their structure. But in the course of time, the society and culture were overtaken by patriarchal dominance, and the worship of the male deity became the prevailing thought. Male ego got to hold and control in all the spheres of social activities such as ritualistic performances, politics, religion, ethnic which in turn submitted women to the place of utter subordination, a secondary place; the insignificant. The dynamics of feminism, one of the leading subjects of present-day literary studies can be attributed the credit of bringing out the women out of prison of patriarchy. The seeds of feminism were sown centuries ago but it evolved as a revolutionary group in 1966 with Betty Friedan's formation of 'National Organization for Women' (NOW) in America. NOW brought forward the women from forbearance of their own exploitation to confrontation and rebellion, from Victorian prudery to Renaissance humanism, from timidity to bluntness, from ignorance and savagery to learning and faculty, from weakness to control, from absurd to normal, from male reliance to self-sufficiency, from panic to self-confidence, from domestic to individual, from social conventions to the need of life what G. B. Shaw calls 'life force' after all she attains 'so many freedoms. Rousseau's cry "Man was born free but he is in chains everywhere" provided for the nourishment of feminist movement.

Woman's journey of growth began with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's work *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* in 1792. Woman attained

shifting characters in modern time like ‘modern woman’, ‘new woman’ and finally ‘newly born woman’. Mary Wollstonecraft was followed by J.S Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill presented powerful arguments for improvement to women’s legal situation. Feminism by the end of the 19th century had become a revolution both in thoughts as well as practices. In America, it detached the woman's movement from Christianity and conservative decorum and became the part of broader ‘revolt against formalism’ (Allen 7). These new feminists were determined to ‘realize personality’, to achieve self-determination through life, growth, and experience, thereby giving birth to new woman. Charlotte Perkins Gilman described her as: “Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman” (32). It was Henry James who invented the phrase ‘new woman’ (Stevens 27) when he used it to describe American emigrants living in Europe. Sensitive women who possessed material wealth showed a free spirit in their attitude and behavior. They became responsive as a result of various social, political and economic forces and took up the new positions in cultural, social, political and economic life.

In England, Women’s lives were undergoing a spectacular change on various fronts, most easily noticeable for daughters of middle and upper classes. Women’s participation in found in the previously male domains of business and the professions dramatically increased. When Bernard Shaw wrote his famous play *Candida* (1895) the feminists were campaigning for equal rights of women and the ‘New Woman’ was the key issue of the period that attracted the attention of the intellectuals.

'New Woman' is a Post- World War II occurrence in feminism. Modern day woman is concerned about her individual self and wishes to lead life on her own choice. She does not want to become a doll in the hands of overbearing man. She wishes to stand on equal footings and demands for her rights and status no less than a man. The literary and critical works like Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Judith Shakespeare*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Elaine Showalter's *Towards Feminist Poetics* all epitomize the change in women's attitude and their quest their own personality independent of man. A woman entering into the indissoluble conjugal ties chosen by her parents and bearing the seven oaths taken during her matrimony has now become the things of past. Today, she wants to live life on her own terms and conditions. She wishes for the fulfillment of all her desires whether social or unsocial, whether traditional or anti-traditional. She has freed herself from marital confinement. Now she prefers to be in the state of happiness.

This research work analyses the emergence of new woman in post-colonized Indian society through an analysis of fiction of selected Indian authors. The use of interdisciplinary and comparative approach shall add a new dimension to the study of the creative literature of selected writers. First selected writer is a celebrated Bengali writer and untiring campaigner, Mahasweta Devi. With her, a new wave of activism started in the post-colonial India. Born in 1926 in Dhaka British India, she took up the cause of the subaltern tribal women and brought to the forefront a new woman who was fiery, revolting and struggled to find new tools of survival in a harsh social system. The literary works of Mahashweta Devi have given Indian literature a fresh & new life and have worked relentlessly to

bring consciousness and responsiveness in Indian women. This research undertakes the critical investigation of her novella *Rudali* to study the emergence of new woman in India.

Manju Kapur, an internationally commended Indian woman novelist has penned down five novels. She earned worldwide fame and recognition through her very first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998). Kapur's fiction takes into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values in her plots. Her women under patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to physical torture and social ostracism. They are more discriminated and are biased in lieu of their gender. But they do not want to be rubber dolls in society rather they continuously strive to assert their identity. The key issues investigated by Kapur in her novels are education, marriage, and polygamy. The novels taken up for the present study are *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*.

Rupa Bajwa, a prolific Indian writer hailing from Punjab, published her debut novel *The Sari Shop* in 2004. The work has been highly applauded by the critics and reviewers who called Bajwa 'India's new literary find'. With Bajwa, the woman assumes a new identity. Her introspective and psychological settings reveal the subconscious and unconscious world of the psyche of her women characters. All her female characters are sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative. Her women protagonists revolt against stereotyped roles assigned to them by the society. The new woman emerges out of her, in the context of her socio-cultural ethos and values prevailing in the society. The image of a woman and her roles determine her predicaments and adjustments in her relevant world. The new woman as a professional also faces conflicts and challenges against her career,

inside and outside her home. The present thesis attempts to study socio-cultural ethos and values prevailing in the society that gives birth to the new woman in her seminal work *The Sari Shop*.

Shobha De, a model cum journalist, is hailed as the ultra modern writer in Indian literary world. She has authored so many novels like *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Spouse: the truth about marriage*, *Uncertain Liaisons* (1993) and *Strange Obsession* (1992). Apart from being the author of so many novels, she has also been the writer of many admired soaps on television, including India's second daily serial, *Swabhimaan*. Shobha has presented for the first time a new urban woman. Her literary works break patriarchal hegemony. She seems to be gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. In fact, as a writer, she differs significantly from other Indian women novelists writing in English. In her opinion, people regard women inferior to men because of their different sex. De believes in very frank telling of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. One does not find anything reserved in her fiction from the narrative point of view. That's why she has been criticized by the conformists in India for her frank discourse on sexual matters. Despite all criticism, her fiction has got a remarkable response not only from several European countries but all over the world. It is no less an achievement. The works taken for this thesis are *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights*.

In spite of the substantial contribution these chosen authors to Indian literature in English, their works have not been fully explored. There are many books and critical research papers on writers under study but the critics of past and present have not so far fully explored the socio-economic and socio-political

forces/causes which resulted in the emergence of a 'New Woman' in the post-colonized society of their fictional world.

Precisely, this thesis shall have the following objectives:

- To study the etymology of the phrase 'new woman' & its usage in western context and outline the position of an Indian woman from a historical perspective.
- To critically investigate the psychoanalytical theories of Dr. Karen Horney and Sigmund Freud and study their impact on postcolonial writers as well as writers under study.
- To make a comparative interpretation of new woman presented in the novels of Mahasweta Devi, Rupa Bajwa and Manju Kapoor and Shobha De, in the light of theories propounded by western feminists like Kate Millet, Elaine Showalter, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir.
- To reconsider the emancipation of woman in India and arrive at the socio-political and socio-economic forces that emphasized the growth of this new urban woman.

Since this research is a critical and qualitative investigation of the feministic issues of the select novels of Mahasweta Devi, RupaBajwa, Manju Kapur and Shobha De, a qualitative research paradigm has been used to study and understand society which afflicted the women protagonists of the novelists and find out various social, political and economic forces which gave birth to the new woman in the post-colonial Indian subcontinent. The dissertation is divided into following parts:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Growth of Subaltern Women with Mahasweta Devi’s Aesthetics of Activism: An Analysis of *Rudali*

Chapter 3 – Emergence of Shobha De’s New Urban Women: An Analysis of *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights*

Chapter 4 – A Study of ManjuKapur’s New Women Through Her Discussion on Marriage, Education, and Polygamy in *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*

Chapter 5 – Diverse Facades of Bajwa's New Women amidst Glaring Inequalities of Urban India: An Analysis of *The Sari Shop*

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Chapter – 1

Introduction

Any discussion on the emergence of phrase ‘new woman’ needs thorough insight on the term ‘Feminism’. The term ‘Feminism’ means a deep consciousness of individuality as a woman and responsiveness towards womanly problems. History shows that the woman was suppressed even in the olden times and this repression has been the root cause of all psychological disturbances in society. ‘Feminism’ has come out as a strong defiance to the existing constitutions of control and gender equations at various levels such as the family, the society, the politics and the economy. Different writers, critics, and thinkers have defined feminism in different ways. Janet Richards (1981) states that “the essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex; the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism” (Richards 3). The movement of feminism “includes any form of opposition to any form of social, personal or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sexes” (Bouchier 2). Famous American historian Gerda Lerner (1986) observes thus:

Feminism is not always a movement, for it can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organized effort. The feminist consciousness is a consciousness of victimization by the dominating males of the society which leads to woman’s subordinate status and their consequent oppression. (Lerner 237)

In her article entitled, “Recent Trends in Feminist Thought: A Tour de Horizon” (1991), Sushila Singh writes that “as a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep - seated causes of women’s oppression. It is a concept of ‘raising of the consciousness’ of an entire culture” (Singh, *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* 22). Eienstein (1963) understands the term feminist or feminism thus:

In my understanding of the term ‘feminist’ then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although, centrally about women, their experience, and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change. (Eienstein 58)

In simple words, one can say that feminism is basically a set of ideologies and movements that have a common aim of defining, establishing and achieving equal rights for women in all domains of life may it be social; political; cultural; religious; economic etc. The word ‘feminism’ brings to the mind a radical group that took up a crucial role in upholding the position of women.

The present thesis analyses the emergence of the new woman in post-colonized Indian society through an analysis of the fiction of selected Indian authors. This process of tracing the origin and growth of new woman requires an investigation of the growth of Western feminism and feministic trends which have impacted the women of the East also. So, an exploration of western feminism & feministic theories forms an essential part of this study. Now, let’s have a brief discussion on the history or to put the other way the journey of Western feminism

from 19th to 21st century. Mary Wollstonecraft pioneered in the field of women empowerment when she came out with her first masterly feminist discourse *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Mary precisely talks about women's impediment towards independence in these two sentences: "Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (Wollstonecraft 58-9). She claimed that "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves" (81). She promoted equality of genders on moral & social fronts. She is hailed an elderly figure of British Feminism. Mary's thoughts gave birth to the idea of 'woman empowerment'. J.S Mill followed Mary Wollstonecraft in his work *On the Subjection of Women* (1869). Bishun Kumar in "Contemporary Feministic Echoes in Anand's Novels" (2011) observes thus "the female journey of progress began with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft work and has got the shifting characters in present time like 'modern woman', 'new woman' and finally 'newly born woman' (Kumar 64).

Industrial society and liberal politics provided an environment to the growth of the First wave of feminism. Krollokke (2006) opines that the first wave of feminism was associated with "both the liberal women's rights movement and early socialist-feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States and Europe" (Krollokke 1). The first wave of feminism was concerned about the access and equal prospects for women. It influenced "feminism in both western and eastern societies throughout the 20th century" (1). Singh (1997) opines that "...the early feminists did not use the term Feminism. Had they given any name to themselves, possibly it would have been something like "defenders" or "advocates" of women" (Singh, *Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis* 14). Most

of the people falling in this category were sensible and used to abide by the traditional propriety. They were not activists. They remained silent on the issues like birth control, abortion and reproductive rights of women. The first wave of feminism was a global movement with its strong authority in Europe. “The seeds of feminism were sown centuries ago but it evolved as a revolutionary group in 1966 when Betty Friedan formed ‘National Organization for Women’ (NOW) in America” (Kumar 64). It gave birth to the “second wave of feminism in the 1960s to 1970s” (Krilokke 1).

This wave was a transitional phase bringing out the women from passive acceptance of their own maltreatment to confrontation and rebellion, from Victorian decency to Renaissance humanism, from tension to frankness and candidness, from lack of knowledge to erudition and ability, from weakness to manage, from difficult to fair, from dependability on men to self-belief, from family to individual, from social acceptance to the individual requirements of life. The scope of this wave was widened as second wave feminists debated on a variety of issues such as sexuality, family, and political and legal inequalities. Apart from claiming equal rights for women they also emphasized the primacy of females over males. They considered women as a sensitive, compassionate and caring whereas men are rational, competitive and aggressive. They advocated radical changes on a political level. A fight against women’s refuge, amendments in guardianship and annulment laws also remained the key objectives of second wave feminists. In their view, looking upon women as inferior sex was the basic form of subjugation. They believed that women are oppressed through sexual slavery and forced motherhood. Generally, a woman is observed from two perspectives, what she is (physically) and what she is to be created and developed by the society she lives in. Betty

Friedan promoted the cause of women empowerment through the publication of her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar further activated the movement in 1979. Many books and journals appeared during these years and woman's question became a very popular subject of debates. The novel ideas presented by Karl Marx in his work *Das Capital* held up further the theoretical debates of feminists. The Marxian belief that nature is not inbuilt rather is shaped by the society further guided the feminists to consider patriarchy, not as something so obvious but as a different form of repression. Marxists upheld various causes such as elimination of physical exploitation, division of labor and equal support of males in the rearing of children, liberation to women in family planning and suggested various birth control methods like use of contraceptives.

A chain of books like Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970) and Juliett Mitchell's *Women's Estate* (1971) contributed to the commencement and growth of western feministic theory. Second wave feminists considered gender discrimination as the main reason of women's belittled position in the society. Simon de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) observed that men fundamentally oppress women and treating them as 'Other'. Man occupies the role of the subject and woman is the object to be suppressed by the subject 'man'. He is absolute and supreme whereas a woman is doomed to immanence. Confrontation, rebellion, learning, openness, self-sufficiency and exposure of body are the features of contemporary women. "The term masculine and feminine are used systematically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. Actually, the relation of the sexes is not quite as if that of the two

electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and negative whereas, the woman represents only the negative” (Beauvoir 97). Kate Millet, a renowned American writer in her seminal work, *Sexual Politics* has defined gender as a “personality structure in terms of sexual category” (Millet 3). It is an admitted fact that gender differs from sex as sex is based on the physiological composition of a person whereas feminine/masculine is decided by socio-economic and socio-cultural forces. These forces further govern activities of men and women living in a society. The critics like Elaine Showalter and Helene Cixous have introduced feminine perspectives in both critical and creative literature. Showalter in her essay entitled “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979) has discussed the period of development in three stages- Feminine, Feminist, and Female.

The first stage i.e. feminine phase dated from about 1840-1880. In this phase, women through their creative writings made an effort to become equivalent to their male counterparts on intellectual fronts. The distinctive feature of this period is that the women wrote under some male fictitious name. This manner of writing was first initiated in England in 1840’s and later on, it developed into a nationwide movement of British women writers. The literature produced by the women writers of this phase is characteristically twisted because of the inferiority complex which these writers had already been experiencing in the society.

The second stage commonly known as feminist phase had its influence on women writers for nearly 38 years from 1882 to 1920. The association of new women became powerful as —women became successful in winning the voting rights. Now the literature became a tool in the hands of women writers for depicting the sufferings of wrong womanhood.

The third stage or current phase is called the female phase. It is ongoing since 1920. Here in this phase, women discard both imitation and complaint. They become aware of the fact that both imitation and rebellion have a tendency to project them as slaves of their male counterparts. Women now understand the importance of female experience. Women show a flair for independence in their attitudes. They realize that the female experience holds a significant place in the development of art and literature and empower women to produce independent art. Their own experiences are distinctive and original. Female writers began to focus on the genres, styles, and methods of writing literature. This phase was represented by Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf who even started thinking of male and female sentences. Elaine Showalter came out with a new form of feminist criticism called 'gynocriticism'. This form of criticism limits itself to the study of writings of women and the writings related to women's experience. Helene Cixous suggested 'Ecriture Feminine' signifying a type of women's writings that challenges reason and sagacity of the male power structures.

Third Wave of Feminism started in the mid 1990s. The movement came up as a reaction to the failures and repercussion against plans developed by the second wave feminists. The thinkers of this movement believed that there is a difference of ethnicity, religion, color and cultural background among women. This variety and transformation are considered by the third wave. Where the second wave of feminism laid overemphasis on female individuality and the incidents related to the lives of upper-middle class white women, the feminists of the third wave focus more on the definition of gender and sexuality given by the post-structuralists. Western feminism primarily sought to understand the prevailing hegemonic power structures in the society, social institutions, practices and male supremacy which

resulted in the marginalization of women. In 19th and 20th centuries, the feminism kept its focus on the attainment of a few privileges to females like voting right, right of the wedded woman to undertake the transactions of sale & purchase of assets and the right of defendants to have females on a panel of adjudicators. Margaret Homan, a learned Professor of English and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies from Yale University, America opines that the idea of feminism attempts to make a social and cultural analysis by contemplating on very basic questions about understanding, creating and the education of literature. It involves the interplay of various disciplines like sociology, political science, and economics etc. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) pointed out that “women were not allowed to walk on the grass” (Woolf 126). Females were not treated as individuals or independent persons. In her view, the woman did not write in the beginning as it now, the clear reason was “a woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction” (126). Economic self-sufficiency means a lot to women. They can have control, independence and their personal space to be in the pensive mood. Chaman Nahal in *Feminism in English fiction forms and Variants in Feminism and Recent fiction n in English* (1991) describes feminism “as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religious group. When women will free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life the idea of feminism materializes” (Nahal 17).

The thoughts and movements of western feminists had also some impact on the women of emerging countries like India. As the Indian society forms the fictional corpus in the works of the authors taken up in the present research work, it becomes necessary to have insights into various forms of western feminism that

have influenced the lives of Indian women. The critics of the West have primarily outlined seven types of feminist thought: Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, Radical, Psycho-analytical, Existential and Post-modern feminism.

1) Liberal Feminism:

Liberal feminism started with the appearance of Mary Wollstonecraft's work *A Vindication of the Rights of the Women* in 1792. She was, later on, followed and supported by the writers like Maria Steward, The Grimke Sisters, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Molly Yard and Patricia Schroeder etc. Liberal feminists believed that if we talk about wisdom; women are equal to their male counterparts. They are both therefore competent to perform the public and realistic roles at any level.

2) Socialist-Marxist Feminism:

Social-Marxist feminists underline a dichotomy between private and public domains of actions. This distinction is made by the capitalists for their own wellbeing. They believe that if this separation of activities is not done, higher are the chances that women will come at par with men. The writers belonging to this category of feminism are Karl Marx, Gilman, Engels, and Kollontai Eisenstein etc.

3) Radical Feminism:

Radical feminists understand that man is the root cause of all oppression. So, they criticize the whole society as male dominated. They call all the cultures that are ruled by men as 'patriarchal'. Their vivid and convincing descriptions of hatred & violence perpetrated against women have significantly contributed in the sphere of feminist theory. Radical feminists have been variously described as 'anti-

male' and 'anti-intellectual'. Prominent among the radical feminists are Mary Daly, Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, Susan Brown-miller and Juliet Mitchell etc.

4) Psycho-Analytical Feminism:

Feminists like Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous belong to the school of feminist thought. Psychoanalytical feminists were inspired by the psychoanalytical theorists like Freud and Lacan who believed that women and their psychological experience are analyzed only in relation to man. These feminists emphasized that women writers should use a language different from the rational and logical language of the male world. Their language may come out of the feelings and experiences of their bodies. It may emerge from the unconscious part of their psyche representing their dreams that have been repressed.

5) Existential Feminism:

Existential feminists urge women to aim for upliftment in their daily behavior and activities rather than being satisfied with her existence just 'the other' sex. They need to claim their autonomy in defining themselves against any men. The ideas presented by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* epitomize existential feminism.

6) Individual Feminism:

The concepts discussed by Germaine Greer in her work *The Female Eunuch* typify the individual feminism which talks about the dissatisfaction of middle-class women. Greer disliked the idea of women being viewed as eternal feminine, a passive woman. She calls such woman as sexless, a eunuch.

7) Cultural Feminism:

Cultural feminism highlights the relationship between social standing, experiences and the knowledge of the world. They believe that the body cannot be considered as a constraint to one's thought process as both body and mind are inseparable. Different people have varied experiences so they cannot have the same opinion on one point. Cultural feminists call it 'stands point epistemology'. Different cultural groups and even different subgroups within the same culture have different knowledge assumptions.

8) Post-modern Feminism:

Post-modern feminists make an effort to posit the body as a place where conflicting experiences shaping identity take place. Julia Kristeva's view that "a third space for feminism to operate - a space which deconstructs all identity, all binary oppositions" (Singh, *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* 60) forms the basis for post modernistic feminist theory. Another example of a post modernist is Nice Jardine who is wary of the term 'feminist' and considers feminism which she defines in her book *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* as a "movement from the point of view of, by and for women" (Jardine 20). Gayatri Spivak and Elizabeth Stanton are prominent among post-modern feminists.

9) Rational feminism or Relative feminism:

While defining feminism, Karen Offen largely classifies the different angles of feminists as 'Relative or relational' and 'Individualist'. The relational feminists focus on a gender-based distinction such as male/female, man/woman but

their classification is considerate. They see man and woman as the basic unit of society. The individualists' views accentuate the individual identity irrespective of sex or gender. Today, modern feministic trends in the West have moved beyond the trivial politics of equal rights and opportunities. The feminism that is present today in India has extended beyond its western counterpart. Indian feminism seems to follow a middle path that stands between the extreme radical feminist stance and the liberal, individual, socialist and cultural feminist stances.

The rise of New Woman in the West was absolutely a historical and cultural occurrence. Towards the end of 19th century, feminism turned out to be a free-ranging revolution. Allen Judith (2009) states that "in American culture, feminism cut-off the woman's movement from Christianity and conservative propriety and became the part of broader 'revolt against formalism'. These new feminists were determined to 'realize personality,' to achieve self-determination through life, growth, and experience, thereby giving birth to new woman" (Allen 7).

In England also, the popular opinion was not in favor of women during the reign of Queen Victoria. The women were ordered to take up the conservative middle-class women's careers of marriage and motherhood. In fact, their role was fixed by the Victorians as they were not allowed to transgress against sex, gender and class distinctions and they "can rarely have been held in lower esteem than they were at the end of the 18th century" (Morgan 339-50). The emergence of 'new woman' was inevitable. So, in the last two decades of Victorian age, one could see the beginning of a change in the attitude of society on the question of gender relations. The concept of patriarchal male domination was punctured and

the modern concept of gender equality gained momentum. Serious discussions started on issues of marriage and divorce laws, right to property, custody rights, educational and employment opportunities for women, female suffrage. Moreover, growing industrialization, urbanization, increasing respectability for post-secondary education, employment for women of privileged upper strata of society particularly in the fields of law, medicine, and journalism paved the way for the emergence of new women.

Thus, socio-cultural forces, new science, new technology, new education and trends towards liberalization brought about the emergence of the new woman in both society and fiction. Ann. L. Ardis (1990) remarks that “her effort to change herself from “a relative creature into a woman of independent means is intimately connected with the stirrings and rumblings, now perceivable in the social and industrial world” (Ardis 1). Very artistically, Charlotte Perkins Gilman described this new woman thus: “Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman” (qtd. in Allen 32).

The phrase ‘new woman’ was invented by Sarah Grand, the most prominent New Women and a social purity feminist of the 1890s in her article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” published in the *North American Review* in March 1894 where she countered the suggestions of Bawling Brothers “That woman should ape-man and desire to change places with him...if women don’t want to be men, what do they want?” (Grand 660). Sarah emphasized thus:

We have our Shrieking Sisterhood, as the counterpart of the Bawling Brotherhood. The latter consists of two sorts of men. First

of all is he who is satisfied with the cow kind of women as being most convenient;...The other sort of Bowling Brothers is he who is under the influence of the scum of our sex, who knows nothing better than women of that class in and out of society, preys upon them or ruins himself for them, takes his whole tone from them, and judges us all by them. Both the cow-woman and the scum woman are well within range of the comprehension of the Bowling Brotherhood, But the new woman is a little above him, and he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home- is the Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy. (Grand 660)

It was Henry James who further developed the phrase 'new woman' (Stevens 27) when he used it to describe American emigrants living in Europe. Sensitive women who possessed material wealth showed a free spirit in their attitude and behavior. They became responsive as a result of various social, political and economic forces and took up the new positions in cultural, social, political and economic life.

So, one can say that the roots of new woman can be found in the organized movement of feminists of the 19th century who challenged the male patriarchy, inspired the thinkers to redefine gender roles considering women's rights, raised the woman's issues in public debates, in print media, and during election rallies. In the introduction of their work entitled *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity*,

Feminism and International Consumer Culture 1880-1930, Heilmann and Beetham state thus:

The 'New Woman' with her short hair cut and practical dress, her demand for access to higher education, the vote and the right to earn a decent living, her challenge to accepted views of femininity and female sexuality, this ambiguous figure was the focus of much media debate and of intense anxiety as well as hope in the decades spanning the end of nineteenth and start of the twentieth century.

(Heilmann and Beetham 1)

The results of the women's struggle were very positive and encouraging. The married women were allowed to keep and manage their earnings by the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870. Furthermore, the women obtained the rights to have the possession and control of their property. For the first time in 1878, the women were conferred upon the degrees of B.A. by the University of London. After two years women colleges were opened at Oxford. The new woman soon became a popular catch-phrase in print media, in social circles and departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman who was docile, domestic, stuck to the kitchen, "an angel of the household". They found advocates among the aestheticians and decadents. In the press and popular fiction, she was ridiculed. Interestingly, new women included social reformers, popular novelists, suffragists, female students and professional women. One could see her riding a bicycle in bloomers and smoking a cigarette in a freestyle. Lyn Pykett (1992) has observed the ambivalent representations of the new woman in the late-Victorian literature.

The New Woman was by turns: “a mannish Amazon” and a Womanly Woman; she was oversexed, undersexed, or same sex identified; she was anti-maternal, or a racial super-mother; she was male-identified, or man-hating and/or man-eating or self-appointed savior of benighted masculinity; she was anti-domestic or she sought to make domestic values prevail; she was radical, socialist or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative; she was the agent of social and/or racial regeneration or symptom and agent of decline. (Pykett 34)

New Woman was “intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting” (Ledger 8). According to Sally, “The New Woman was a very fin-de-siècle phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890” (1).

A famous African American author Frances E.W. Harper in her speech entitled “Woman’s Political Future” (1893) states thus: “while the fifteenth century discovered America to the Old World, the nineteenth century is discovering woman to herself. Calling for “fairer and higher aims than the greed of gold and the lust of power,” she predicted that 19th century will be “the threshold of women’s era” (Harper 16). Jane Austin addressed the woman question rejecting stories in which women their virtue against male sexual advances. Jane Austin understood that writers like “Richardson and Byron have truthfully represented the power struggle between the sexes; however, she does seek a way of telling their story without perpetuating it. In each of her novels, a seduced-and-abandoned plot

is embedded in the form of an interpolated tale told to the heroine as a mirror image of her own problematic story” (Gilbert and Gubar 119). Like other writers, Jane Austen’s perception of women and their rights was ambivalent as we don’t find a clear cut stand on “women question” in her novels. Diana Thomson (1999) is right to a great extent when she observes thus:

All Victorian women novelists, whether we now label them radical or conservative, were fundamentally conflicted in their own beliefs about women’s proper role, and I believe that the critical reception of their novels from Victorian times to the present has been filtered through the ambivalence of the novelists themselves as well as their critics on the complex of issues which constitute the woman question. (Thompson 3)

Jane Austen never attended any University, the critics are confused to know “woman’s place” in the real world in which she set her novels. Social historians contend that women of the period of Jane Austen were the victims of a patriarchal society. Her novels including *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1816) depict her concern for the fate of women in the Victorian society. It is pertinent to note that Jane Austen handles the woman question in her own peculiar manner. The heroines including Elizabeth and Jane present a glimpse of New Woman for the first time in the Victorian history. Their lives are entirely different from the pictures painted of women as suppressed, passive victims of a patriarchal society. Elizabeth and Jane are intelligent, rational and critical and are held in high esteem by men whom they love and marry. Elizabeth must learn so many things in order to fit in society. She has to learn social abilities such as singing, dancing to be a

distinguished woman from the middle class: “All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean? Yes all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this” (Austin 33). The novels of Jane Austin have been characterized as ‘country house novels’, or as ‘comedies of manners’. New Women of Jane Austin are taught to observe the codes of Victorian morality, duty to society and observe religious seriousness. They have to cope up with the economic situation. They live in a fantasy world of bonnets, gossips and carriages, ball gowns and romance. Emma Woodhouse is very intelligent twenty-year girl belonging to the village of Highbury. She deludes herself and imagines herself to be gifted in making love matches. Her adventure to find a match for her friend Harriet Smith shatters all her hopes. Harriet loves Martin who is a village boy; Elton shocks her by proposing to her instead of Harriet. She is deceived by Frank Churchill who is already married. Emma is a New Woman of Jane Austin who suffers because of her fantastic plans of conjuring love matches.

Ann. Heilmann in introduction of her work entitled *The Late- Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Women Texts* (1998) states thus

Although the late Victorian debate on New Woman fiction was a debate on feminism in literature, this central aspect was often confused by other issues: realism, naturalism and decadence; the question whether sexuality should be openly discussed in fiction and whether sexually explicit literature should be available to all; the controversy about the moral purpose (or otherwise) of art. (Heilmann xv)

In the Victorian fiction of the 1880s and 1890s, the image of the new woman was conspicuous, the teachings and philosophical observations of Emily Davies, Frances Power Cobbe, Josephine Butler, Barbara Leigh Smith and Garrett Fawcett compelled the political thinkers to think of the woman question. New Woman became the central character of the Victorian fiction. In the words of W. T. Stead, the Victorian novels are “by a woman about a woman from the standpoint of Woman” (Stead 5). The themes of gender relations which had previously been taboo were taken as major themes in the fiction of this period. The stereotype image of woman as “angel in the house” became outdated as a woman with rebellious tendencies, with guts fight against male domination became popular. In 1855, Tennyson wrote his poem *Merlin and Vivian* and the essay *A Word on the Physiognomical Relation of the Sexes* which describes male and female appearance in a series of binary oppositions of the kind which H  l  ne Cixous sees as characteristic of Western thought about the sexes. There were many women, including feminists, who argued that woman’s highest fulfillment came from motherhood. Even Elizabeth Blackwell (1821–1910), the world’s first trained, registered woman doctor, gave a series of lectures in 1852 with the message that girls must take care of their bodies to make them perfect vessels for motherhood. John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869), presented powerful arguments for improvement to women’s legal situation. He advocated right to vote for women.

The scientists of the Victorian Age had negative views about women and believed that women are inferior creatures created by Nature. Darwin did not touch the subject of gender until he wrote *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). The vulnerability of women was identified at the time by George

Eliot, who describes their predicament in her book *George Eliot Letters* (1955) thus: “we women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gift we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life – some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of sweet women when their affections are disappointed ...” (Eliot107). George Eliot is considered as the greatest Victorian woman who had met all the leading feminists associated with the women’s movement. But her support for reform was ambivalent. In fact, she never took a radical stance on the ‘woman question’. George Eliot was considered as a role model for Victorian women but her new women characters were puppets. Early feminist criticism was largely hostile to Eliot, disliking her conservative portrayal of women. Yet one key effect of having set her novel back in time is that the women she depicts are even more restricted socially and economically than those of her own age. In novels like George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), Percival Pickering's *A Pliable Marriage* (1895), and Arabella Kenealy's *A Semi Detached Marriage* (1899), New Woman is fiery, sexual and passionate. The new woman challenged the old codes of conduct and morality. She was daring, fashionable, educated as she questioned the traditional rusted conventions, had a passion to change everything and to took sexual liberties too. Contemporary Critics attacked the sexual content of the new women novels. Thomas Hardy took an unconventional view of morality and sexuality. Hardy virulently attacked the double standard of Victorian morality in his novel *Tess of the d’Urberville* (1892) and called her heroine Tess as a pure woman. Victorian society was shocked when Hardy depicted Tess as the pure woman. She was the bearer of an illegitimate child; she was a religious skeptic and an adulterer. She had killed Alec and how

could she be called a pure woman? But Hardy took an unconventional view of morality and sexuality.

D.H. Lawrence wrote *Women in Love* (1920) presenting Ursula and Gudrun Brandwejn who are educated, intellectual, conscious of their rights and very critical. Life and works of Lawrence express his quest for truths about love, marriage, and sex. His novels launch an attack on the “goody Victorian morality” and artificiality. The Victorian society was lifeless and false. He was inspired by Thomas Hardy and wrote *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914) and by the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud. Almost all his novels like *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), *Sons and Lovers* (1995) and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (2000) reflect his exploration of sex and the image of a New Woman. Lawrence’s new women struggle to explore the true nature of love, sex, and marriage. The two sisters Ursula and Gudrun have a close relationship with each other, both in a way represent the modern woman, Ursula, the positive character looking for love and hope without wanting to forgo her liberties and with a strong introspective nature. Gudrun is passionate and she is easily taken in by sex with reason. The two sisters take up with Rupert Birkin, a school supervisor, a philosopher who gives freedom of expression to Ursula’s existentialism. The women are considered intellectual equals to their men, and sometimes even above them. About new women, Pykett observed thus: “The New Woman novels [...] were much more directly linked to contemporary controversies surrounding the Woman Question, and to the various discourses within which they were produced and mediated...” (Pykett 7).

There were many women novelists who projected the themes of domestic violence, celibacy, inferior status women in their novels. For instance, Olive Schreiner advocated free love; Gissing advocated celibacy for independent women. Benjamin Disraeli wrote *Sybil* (1845) presenting bold and radical women. Sybil Gerard is the daughter of Walter Gerard who is unionist and struggled to unite all the workers. Sybil is a new woman, bold, educated and unconventional in her approach to life, love, and sex. Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* (1849) also presents a radical new woman who loves independence and revolts against the patriarchal society. The novel is a powerful condemnation of the marginal status of women in the Victorian age. Caroline Helstone has neither dowry nor a respectable means of earning a living. The married women in the novel are abused and ignored while the spinsters are embittered and their plight is like the plight of the mill workers.

In 1920, the movie *The Flapper* was a great box office hit. It created a sensation in the film world presenting for the first time the image of New Woman who became famous as Flapper. The title character was played by Ginger, a wayward modern girl, uncompromising, rebellious, educated and highly fashionable. Ginger became so much popular that she became a role model for many women in America who was feeling suppressed under the patriarchal system. This new woman didn't play the rules, flouted the rules of society and was 'tabloid fodder' for years for her sexual escapades with the biggest movie stars of the time. The rise of the automobile was another major factor in the popularity of flapper culture. Now, women were free to go anywhere. This new woman raised a very controversial question which became very popular in the 20s "Mother! When you were a girl didn't you find it a bore to be a virgin?" New Woman started taking sexual liberties; she spent time in drinking, dancing and dating with her friends

openly. The new woman had a passion for fashion and new ideas. She discarded old clothes, old conventional fashions, customs, and ceremonies. The concept of natural beauty, grace and humility changed, they did what society did not expect from young women. They danced to Jazz music, they openly smoked and they invented their own crisp language to assert themselves in society. Skirts became shorter to make dancing in the clubs easier. Club culture transformed the living style of women. Corsets were discarded in favor of brassieres to attract the lovers. They cut their hair to look more attractive and dashing among people, feminine locks were outdated now. Alice Meynell, a famous Victorian poetess wrote *Pall Mall Gazette* explaining the depressed condition of the Victorian women who in her view were both amazed by and afraid of the contemporary advancements in women's roles. Meynell wrote her famous essay *The Colour of Life* wherein she expresses the excitement and the terror of exposing herself to the urban crowd. The essay posits one transcendent moment of pure self-revelation, but frames it in warnings about the shame, pain, danger, and punishment Meynell associated with such a violation of taboos.

The British and American society after World War 1 witnessed new changes as Woman Question got a new turn. The early decades of the 20th century were a battleground for women, with key gains made in political and legal reform. But women were also testing out another arena of emancipation: their bodies. As fashions grew simpler and skirts rose higher, reaching knee-length by the late 1920s, women found new physical freedoms –sexual freedom deconstructing all cultural hierarchies. Scott Fitzgerald is known as the writer of the Jazz Age creating liberated young women characters who lived and enjoyed the Jazz age. His women characters are flappers, women who are passionate in taking all

liberties scrapping all rules and conventions. Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Josephine in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and the Gloria of *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) are bold and passionate heroines. Scot Fitzgerald was a major force in changing the role of a woman in society. Many writers imitated him and the birth of modern woman became a reality. The other novelist who brought transformation was Katherine Mansfield who dared to live outside the strict code decreed for young women. She lived as a free spirit, loving both men and women, risking everything and paying a heavy price for her liberties. Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley were so much fascinated by her characters that they used as a model for women characters. When Mrs. Virginia Woolf started writing novels, many changes had taken place in the art of novel writing. She had been influenced by the new technique of Stream of Consciousness which James Joyce experimented in his novels. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley's Lovers* greatly influenced Virginia Woolf because these novels explored the inner world of the women. She defended the rights of woman with a feminist insight and considered Bennett, Galsworthy, and G.B.Shaw as inferior writers whose conventions were outdated and tools dead. She dubbed them as tyrannical patriarchs. Her consciousness being a woman inspired her to scrap all old conventions the Victorian patriarchs had built. Elaine Showalter in "Towards a Feministic Poetics" *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology* (1989) states thus:

We are both the daughters of the male tradition, of our teachers, our professors, our dissertation advisers and our publishers- a tradition which asks us to be rational, marginal and grateful; and sisters in new women's movement which engenders another kind of awareness and commitment, which demands that we renounce the

pseudo-success of token womanhood and the ironic masks of academic debates. How much easier, how lonely it is, not to awaken- to continue to be critics and teachers of male literature....

(Showalter 407)

She believes that “the task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision” (407). The Women Modernists like Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, May Sinclair, Mina Loy and D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf display a range of formal novel strategies in dealing with their female subjects. One can say that various social, political and economic factors led to the emergence of New Woman in the 19th century but this image of new woman never remained static rather it kept on assuming various forms and shades over the time. Where the new woman of the 19th century was daring, fashionable, educated, and passionate to change everything and took sexual liberties too, the new woman of the 20th century was a rational, contradictory character, introvert and caught in the web of conflicts and tensions. Talking about the 21st century, one can see that the thoughts and movements of Western feminists and their representations of their female subjects have also some impact on the women of emerging countries like India. The feminism that is present today in India has extended beyond its western counterpart. “Third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of Western Agenda in one clear and simple sense. Indian Feminism is clearly a response to the issues related to Indian women.” (Nayantara 243)

The New Feminism is a category of post-feminism that became prominent in the 1990s and focuses on a younger generation of women who express their desire to fashion new styles of feminism. New feminism provides an optimistic and celebratory picture of a confident and assertive group of young women who are reporting high levels of achievement and success across private and public sectors. It also lays stress on the relevance of feminism in the modern day female existence. As Walter in her book *The New Feminism* writes thus:

Feminism is still here, right at the center of these new lives' where it is needed to address a central paradox of this 'brave new world'. In effect, The New Feminism presents a contradictory picture of unprecedented female freedom and independence coupled with continuing blatant inequalities...The average woman with all her new dreams and beliefs', still faces a number of concrete, economic and social injustices,... and an increased chance of living in poverty. (Walter 67)

New feminism presents itself as 'more popular, more inclusive, more willing to embrace the power and more tolerant in crossing political boundaries. It is a feminism that belongs to men as well as women, conservatives as well as socialists. This research explores the position of woman in Indian society and studies the rise of the feministic wave in Indian Writing in English in its pre and post independence era. It discusses how a concept of 'new woman' has emerged as a by-product of feminism in India. The position of Indian woman was totally different from the West. The Indian woman was subjugated since ages. She was under the authority of man. The status of an Indian woman in the medieval period

(8th to 18th century) had been decided by the patriarchal setup and nobody ever dared to challenge it. This period was believed to be the 'dark age' for them. During the Gupta period, the status of woman was very low as she was denied the property rights and education and her duty was to serve her husband in her life till death and even after death.

The women are denied subsistence separately from her husband even in *The Laws of Manu* which is considered as the major set of commandments for Hindus. In Indian patriarchal society, a husband was considered God, however, cruel and indifferent he may be. Since her childhood, she had been taught to obey her husband and family. Her parents offered her no chance to think about her identity. Different factors were responsible for woman subjugation. They can be categorized as social, cultural, traditional, and so on. Culture and society had imposed many kinds of norms on her and she was supposed to follow them religiously, she did not have the right to cross the 'Laxman Rekha'. Attacks from the distant religions and cultures worsened the women's condition. The Muslim assailants brought with them their own traditions and customs. They used to consider woman as an exclusive possession of her father, brother or husband. So, the women did not have any strength of their own. Moreover, the practice of marrying more than once was a custom with such invaders so keeping the women they wanted in their 'harems' was widely prevalent. To safeguard their women from such assaults, Indian people made their women cover their bodies by using 'Purdah', (a veil). This totally changed the mindset of Indian people and freedom to women was lost. Their movement was not tolerated at all. This resulted in the further decline of women's position in society. Now, families felt unhappy and burdened on the birth of a girl child as they believed, a girl child would require

additional care as she has to be protected from the eyes of intruders. Indian people started craving for a boy child as he would not require overprotection instead will support the family as an earning hand. Thus, an unkind environment developed around woman giving rise to the wicked social & religious practices like 'Child Marriage', 'Sati', 'Jauhar' and constraints on providing education to girls. Rajput families of Rajasthan used to kill a newly born girl by throwing her in a large bowl of milk. Even, today the sex of the fetus is determined with the help of technology and if it happens to be a girl child then pregnancy is terminated. Other religions like Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity when compared to Hinduism, were a bit moderate. Women in these societies enjoyed far more freedom. They enjoyed an easy access to education and were more open-minded in their approach. Gender was not an obstacle in achieving deliverance and getting the grace of God. Emperor Ashoka in his regime allowed the women to participate in spiritual sermons. According to Hiuen Tsang, "Rajyashri, the sister of Harshavardhana was a distinguished scholar of her time. Another such example is the daughter of King Ashoka, Sanghmitra. She along with her brother Mahendra went to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism" (Tsang 25).

The continuing sufferings of women, the harsh struggle for the parity in pay and the ongoing fights for the rights to use birth control measures are main noticeable features of the gender discrimination that has existed in Indian society and that woman had to fight for. The women's movement in India began in the 1920s, building on the 19th-century social reform movement. This movement progressed during the period of high chauvinism and the freedom struggle for freedom, both of which shaped its form. The year 1930 is considered as a transitional point in the history of Indian feminism as women's place in the family

was readily understood and acknowledged. It was evident in the larger involvement of women in the freedom movement. About feminism in India, Chitnis in her article "The Sociology of Women's Education: Two Different Issues" (1986) opines thus:

The most distinctive feature of this movement was that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of those who upheld the cause of women is long –Raja Ram Manohar Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, the custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women. (Chitnis 59-"6)

Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, Annie Besant, and others supported the role of women. Women were allowed voting rights in certain groups. A rise could be seen in the number of schools and colleges for women. In the wake of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's movement against women's subjugation to man and British influence on Indian culture and civilization, Gandhiji supported the cause of woman. In words of Gandhi, "to call a woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man..." (Gandhi 4).

In India, it was during colonial regime when the teaching and learning of English were introduced. This led to the birth of Indian English fiction. In last few years, “it has attracted widespread interest both in India and abroad” (Dhawan *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi* 52). The first Indian novel *Rajmohan's Wife* was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterji. This novel was serialized as *Wife* in the Calcutta Weekly *The Indian Field* in 1864 and was published in the book form only in the 1930s. *Rajmohan's Wife* is about the effects of bad marriage on women. The suffering of a middle-class housewife Matangini caused by her husband Rajmohan forms the subject of the novel. This was the time of social reform and it must be noted that the first Indian novel is not a historical romance but a social novel. The novel uses its compact language as a tool to put forward the sad destiny of its heroine, Matangini who is portrayed thus: “Some sorrow of deep anxiety had dimmed the lustre of her fair complexion. Yet her bloom was a full charm as that of the land lotus half-scorched and half radiant under the noonday sun her long locks were tied up in a careless knot on her shoulder, but some loose tresses had thrown away that bondage and were straying over forehead and cheeks.” (Chattopadhyay, *Rajmohan's Wife* 3)

Rajmohan's Wife proved as a trend-setter. Since its publication, a considerable number of writers have presented the Indian woman as selfless beings performing the roles of a daughter, wife and a mother being muted by the patriarchal set up around:

The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands. The Hindu goddesses, Sita and Savitri continued to

be the powerful cultural ideals for women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi, and Gandhari. (Chattopadhyay 3)

R.K. Narayan, born in an orthodox Hindu society, depicted the predicament of women locked up within the confines of an Orthodox society which has nothing to offer her except material refuge. In this society, a woman has nothing of her own except her body. *The Dark Room* written and published in 1938 is a compassionate depiction of sufferings of women. It demonstrates the fact how significant women's responsibilities are there in the family and in social life. *The Dark Room* revolves around a particular woman's resentment and revolt. Savitri, a housewife observes the much-hyped footsteps of ideal Hindu wives, such as her namesake from the Mahabharata and Sita of the Ramayana. She lives up to the ideals of servitude and loyalty implied in this powerful feminine figure. But she becomes a victim of a patriarchal system which grants her husband the right of infidelity but refuses her right to economic sustenance. She finds herself caught in a marriage that she can neither end up nor alter. But she does rebel though her rebellion is conditioned by her gender defenselessness. The speech exemplifies her rebellion and vulnerability: "What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything that she has is her father's, husband's, or her son's" (Narayan, *Dark Room* 88). This helps us to understand the status of women depicted in his novels. In *The English Teacher*, the portrayal of the character of Krishnan's mother provides us with a glimpse of the traditional Indian domestic setting where a woman has her well-defined place. As Krishna's mother says, "Unless I have

cleaned the house, I can't go and bathe. After bathing, I've to worship and only after that I can go near the cows" (Narayan 29).

The authors like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamla Markandaya, and Manohar Malgaonkar have also projected Indian woman as tolerant, submissive, innocuous and easily satisfied with her lot. Women's movement of the colonial period was different from that of the West as depicted by two Indian novelists Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and R. K. Narayana. Where in the West, the women were guided by the notion of 'self', Indian feminism in the colonial era was inspired by the historical circumstances and values. In India, woman as an individual is considered as an integral part of the larger social structure. Women in India settle their survival through repressive family arrangements, they value cooperation of the parents and husband for the growth and development. Instances of patriarchal attributes are a dowry, reproduction, relationships, class, and society. Narayan belonged to both colonial and post-colonial era. He first shows women as victimized in the tradition-bound patriarchal society of India in *The Dark Room*, a pre-independence novel published in 1938, when women were still docile and subservient and were living with satisfaction under male domination. But in the subsequent novels, the loyalty of women to the age-old customs, which have given them a secondary place, comes into conflict with their awareness of being used as dolls in the male society.

Major changes took place in the post -colonial India; the rise of the middle class in India brought new values. With the growth of software and Information technologies in India, the companies started recruiting women force and this resulted into the refashioning of family ideals.

The famous freedom activists like Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shah Nawaz believed that the Indian feminism was not like that of its Western counterpart. V. Ramakrishna Rao exhibited his dislike towards the “sheer grasping suffragette”, lamenting the loss of ideal images of Sita and Savitri. The Western feminists greatly influenced the women of the East and contributed a lot to the emergence of New Woman in India. The democratic liberal ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill had already brought the concept of “woman empowerment”. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by the leading 20th-century novelist Virginia Woolf laid emphasis on the necessity of releasing the women from the control of patriarchal domination. Woolf discusses how a woman writer seeks within herself “the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber,” inevitably colliding against her own sexuality to confront “something about the body, about the passions” (Woolf 20). The feminists such as Simon de Beauvoir who wrote *The Second Sex* (1949) observed that men fundamentally oppress women and treating them as “Other”. Man occupies the role of the subject and woman is the object to be suppressed by the subject, man. He is absolute and supreme whereas a woman is doomed to degradation. Elaine Showalter continued the liberal tradition and advocated the women's questions and published her *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) which describes three stages in the history of women's literature and became a model for the growth of feminist theory and philosophy of woman empowerment. Her liberal ideas gave a boost to women who organized themselves resisting the patriarchal domination. Western education and liberal political ideas gave power to women to demand rights and equal status in the society.

So, one can say that Post-colonial period or Post independence period witnessed a radical change in the representation of women in Indian writing in

English. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Susan Viswanathan and Arundhati Roy have given us new women protagonists, who are educated, modern and question the traditional customs and traditions. Bishun Kumar (2011) opines thus

In Anand's novels, features of modernity begin with Sohini's resistance against her physical exploitation in *Untouchable* and proceed to Leila's revolt against her sexual harassment in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Maya revolts against the conventional system of arranged marriages and comes back to her lover Lal Singh in *The Village*. Janki does not give any importance to cultural stereotypes and defies the prescribed rules for the widows. She does not hate the widows, her frankness, modernity, and open love for Ananta after the death of her unmatched husband in *The Big Heart* gives birth to a new woman. Gauri's economic independence and education in *The Old Woman and the Cow* and Ganga Dasi's winning back her body and using it as her unfailing weapon to crush even the powerful corrupt men in *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* are other examples of the emergence of a new woman in the post-colonial fiction. (Kumar 64)

Anand has written only one novel "*The Old Woman and the Cow*" with a female as the major character of the novel. "Gauri too appears as the prototype of the modern woman. Her education and self-dependence transform her from a cow to an individual personality. She becomes bold and confident. Her boldness and confidence are obvious when banker Seth Jai Ram Das tries to seduce Gauri. She warns him, "I am guarded by the goddess so do not come near me or you will

burn.” Further, when she comes back to her (husband’s) home, stands on equal footings with her husband. When Pancho hits her, she retorts, “if you strike me again, I will hit you back——” (1960: 283). Her brief experience as a self-reliant nurse gave her the necessary self-confidence and courage.” (73)

Raja Rao’s novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is an excellent study of material and mental transformation brought by the Gandhian movement in the thirties, into the lives of the Indian woman. This Gandhian movement didn’t allow the women to overlook their conventional roles decided by their society. The dual personification of woman as the *devi* and the *dasi* that had ruled the mindset of patriarchy since ages, also led to the emergence of the woman as epitomized by Rangamma and Ratna. The cold images of ubiquitous & supreme goddess Kenchamma and the Pariah Rachanana’s wife, who would spin only if her husband tells her to, metaphorically represent the women who resist conventions and escort the war of independence. With the passage of time, most of the women writers of post-colonial period shifted their emphasis from the away from the long-established picture of enduring, selfless women who were defined only in terms of their sufferings towards the depiction of inconsistent female characters struggling for their identity. Rama Rau’s *Remember for the House* (1956), Jhabvala’s novels *To Whom She Will* (1955) & *Heart and Dust* (1975), Kamla Markandaya’s *Two Virgins* (1994), Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977), and Geeta Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), Mahasweta Devi’s *Rudali* are some of the important examples. These novelists passionately followed the models of the western women writers, set their goals to spread the mission of women empowerment. There were two divergent opinions prevalent at the time when Anita Desai and Mahasweta Devi started writing novels. The traditional thinkers

believed that women cannot be alienated from culture, religion and family responsibilities but there were radicals who believed that women should be liberated and allowed to decide her own fate like men. Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) presented women aping of western culture, fashion, and style of living. Elizabeth Jackson in her *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writings* (2010) observe that "Indian women were forced into an uncompromising situation: either to accept patriarchal structures or be seen as betraying Indian cultural heritage" (Jackson 216).

In the field of critical writings, a number of books and articles were published in the Post-colonial era portraying the concern of the writers about Woman Question in India. These writers include Shirwadkar's "The Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel" (1979), Shantha Krishnaswamy's "The Woman in Indian Fiction in English" (1984), K. Meera Bai's "Women's Voices: The Novels of Indian Women Writers" (1996), Anuradha Roy's "Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers" (1999) and Jyoti Singh's "Indian Women Novelists: A Feminist Psychoanalytic Study" (2007). All of them have focused on the gender, sexuality, caste, and culture on the pattern of western feminism. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's in her work "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1986) studies the depiction of 'Third World Women' in the works of Western feminists. This is perhaps the first ever written analysis of the western feminist discussions on hegemonic power structures. In Mohanty's view,

The attitude of the Western feminists towards third world women is biased. Third World Woman is described as religious, illiterate, weak and powerless. But the white woman is presented as being

sexually liberated, educated, daring and progressive. Mohanty disagrees with the Western “model of power” and the traditional idea of men as oppressors and women as oppressed. (Mohanty 61-88)

Tharu and K. Lalita are the other feminists who made a collection of two volumes of women’s works from thirteen languages. Following the path is shown by Showalter, they have traced the history of the post-colonial feminists who raise a cry against patriarchal oppression and male domination in modern India. In the process, they have come across various deliberations where women had interfered with their roles as wives, mothers, and friends.

Prof. Vrinda Nabar from the Universities of Bombay and Oxford has produced ample work that focuses on women’s problems in post-colonial era. She has been a regular contributor to Indian newspapers and presented and co-edited various programs on radio and television. In her significant discussion in *Caste as Woman* (1995), she lays emphasis on the role played by the convention in our social survival. She has investigated how tradition and patriarchy have affected the collective unconscious of the Indians. She believes that the term “gender” is created by our society. In India, discrimination starts with the birth of a child. The desire for a male child and resultant gender infanticide has been widely prevalent in India.

Madhu Kishwar, a professor from CSDS, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi is an active writer on the issues concerning women. She is the editor of “Manushi”, a well-known journal concerning women and society. Kishwar despises the term “feminists” and claims “I do not call myself a feminist” (Kishwar 33).

No doubt, Jane Austen, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Virginia Woolf supported equality of opportunity for a woman. Simone De Beauvoir brought out a manifesto for a frontal attack on the patriarchal hegemony. Her *The Second Sex* hit hard at the androcentric customs and conventions, art and culture, philosophy and religion which assigned women the slavish position to men. Kishwar opposes the amalgamation of Western and Indian feminism

Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar brought revolution in feministic thinking and they fought against the social evils such as Sati and child marriage. Subsequently, effecting improvement in the plight of women became the primary objective of the Indian social reform movement. Social reformers recognized the substandard position of women, the forced isolation, child marriage, plight of widows and need of education throughout the country. Indian women were not recognized as individuals and they were denied all fundamental rights. So many obstacles were there in their academic journey. No doubt Indian culture was a learned culture but it completely discouraged an intellectual awareness of women. Women had no access to reading and writing like in the case of the narrator of Virginia Woolf's work *A Room of One's Own*. When she is enthused to see some text in the library, she is told, "Ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (Woolf 4). Virginia Woolf viewed the denial to access information for creating thoughts and ideas as another type of subjugation of the woman's mental ability.

In the Post-colonial era, Indian women for the first time realized that activism is an agent of social change. Authors like Mahasweta Devi, Sara Joseph, and Arundhati Roy are committed to serve the society as they wrote fiction to

extend their hands to the poor and the marginalized people. They believed that art is a major weapon to fight with the forces of patriarchy, injustice, and male domination. The word activism is synonymous with protest or passion for bringing social change through art. The writing was for a social purpose. Mahasweta Devi for the first time depicted the plight of the tribal women who had suffered oppression and suppression since ages. Her novels and stories have the heart-rending scenes of patriarchal cruelty. Her activism brought radical change.

Years after the 1960s marked a transitional phase in the history of Indian fiction in English as it like its western equal, shifted its emphasis from communal towards the personal sphere. The use of nuclear armaments in World War-II caused mass devastation. Turbulence and nervousness prevailed all over the world. Such chaotic state of affairs resulted in mental conflicts and decline of ethical values. Consequently, human beings started losing peace and harmony. The psycho-analytical theories of self, devaluation of self, neurosis, sexual repression and nausea given by Dr Karen Horney in *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950) and Sigmund Freud in *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (1953-1957), published in three volumes, impacted greatly on the post-colonial writers such as Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, Kamala Dass, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa etc. as they provide the psychological insight into the subtleties of the human mind and the society. Anita Desai is one among the writers who have made the finest explorations of Indian life and culture. She has produced literature solely in English since she started her literary career in the mid-1960s. Since its independence, a variety of societal and cultural changes have taken place in India and these changes build the fictional settings of almost all her novels and short stories. Her major works deal with the intricacies of contemporary

Indian life from a woman's point of view. She has laid focus on the individual struggles of anglicized, middle-class women of modern India who try to rise above the social restrictions forced by their patriarchal society. She emphasizes the value of domestic relationships and surveys the worries that exist between different generations. Desai wrote under the influence of Emile Bronte, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Henry James. The novels like *Cry, the Peacock* which she wrote in 1963, *Voices in the City* in 1965 & *Bye-Bye-Black Bird* in 1968 marked the beginning and growth of existential and psychological fiction in Indian writing in English. The novels *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *In Custody* (1984) earned her international acclaim as both of these were selected for the Booker Prize. *Cry, the Peacock* is a sad tale of a young housewife Maya from Delhi who falls into insanity and commits suicide as she thinks herself trapped in a loveless, arranged marriage to advocate Gautama, who is much older in age and a woman hater. The novel foretells varied themes of independence and communication, the influences from the West, the stress emerging because of multicultural identities. Anita Desai's novels represent a unique self-gratification and self-fulfillment. Her female protagonists are seen striving for existence. In particular, she voices "the mute miseries and helplessness of married women tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments" (Prasad 1991).

Shashi Deshpande focuses on the working of the psyche of her female character in her novels, the women protagonists struggle under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. The five women protagonists - Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmila, and Sumi find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society. They desperately struggle to assert their individuality. Sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in

their search for freedom. Shashi Deshpande's works can be read as falling within a broadly postcolonial-postmodern feminist framework. She attempts to examine various ideologically encoded binaries such as speech/silence, modernity/ tradition, male/female, oppressor/ victim, central/marginal, majority and minority. Deshpande not only deals with the topic of women as marginalized figures but also implicitly examines fiction written by women. Split subjectivity is the theme of Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors!*. Sarita, the central character, tries to rediscover her true self. The novel begins by going back to the beginning which is already well past, in the middle age life of the protagonist, a life which Sarita constantly describes as a pose or a role she has been playing all these years. She understands the futility of marriage and what happens to a woman who assumes financial power. The economic and social power that Sarita wields as a successful doctor paradoxically causes her marriage to a college lecturer husband to go to pieces. Ramesh Babu & Phaniraja Kumar (2013) opines that

Bharathi Mukherjee is a Third World Feminist writer whose preoccupation is to deal with the problems and issues related to the South Asian Women particularly India. Like her contemporary feminist writers, she upholds the cause of women but she differs from them because her basic concern is to delineate the problems of cross-cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants. (Babu and Kumar 40-2)

The pursuit for defining self and exploration for identity are the main features of the women of Bharti Mukherjee who are seen caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. Neither can they completely detach themselves from their past, nor do they have any certitude in the future. Bharati Mukherjee advocates

many faces of feminism encompassing agitation for equal opportunity, sexual liberty and right of self-determination as exemplified by her heroines Tara Banerjee in *The Tiger's Daughter*, Dimple in *Wife*, Jyothi in *Jasmine* and Devi in *Leave it to me* three sisters-Padma, Parvathi, and Tara in *Desirable Daughters*. Mukherjee has attempted to build a new relationship between male and female which is based on equality and is free from oppression and exploitation so that both can make the most of their original talents. The male, as a symbol of the patriarchal society, has, at last, being pulled off the center of woman's significance. The women are now trying to establish their place and make their importance felt outside patriarchy.

Kamala Das, who is well known for her poems, has also written two novels *The Alphabet of Lust* and *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*. The theme of her novels is again the search for identity in male-dominated society. The suffering women allow themselves to be sexually exploited in their passion for emancipation and search for identity. Her autobiography *My Story* is a harrowing tale of her struggle for emancipation and search for identity.

Namita Gokhale has penned down a total of five novels in English. The first novel of her literary career was *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, which was brought out in the year 1984. This novel was a skit upon the Delhi and Mumbai elites. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer when she was only 35 years old. After a few years, her husband died which shook her completely. This tragic experience of the loss has some reflection in her later novels like *A Himalayan Love Story*, *The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntala*. In her novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* (2005), Gokhale depicts the struggle of Shakuntala against the patriarchal norms that tries to suppress and extinguish her individuality and identity.

The birth of new woman in India is a reality as the concept and position of womanhood has changed in the modern context. Sharad Srivastava (2001) writes that “a new woman is ‘new’ if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her rights as a woman and as an equal being” (Srivastava 97). The attitudinal shift can be seen in the woman who no longer shies away from taking the initiatives. Though this new change in thought has its variables, the results are also relative depending on the individual. This new woman is an assimilation of western influences as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who despite all kinds of upheavals, is able to strike a balance among diverse spheres of her life. No doubt, women in India have always been occupied in one or other form of literary activities for centuries now but the cultural influences of patriarchy have always exerted serious influence on women’s writings. One can say that women’s works have always been underestimated because of the cultural mindset about the better appeal of men’s experiences. One finds a small number of noteworthy names in the domain of women’s writings because any work or discourse which stepped outside the standard norms or tried to challenge the well-established male sovereignty of authority was bound to be labeled as an insignificant work.

But in the post -colonial era, there are a number of women writers who have distinguished themselves steadily in this male-dominated terrain. They have refused to follow street and state censors and succeeded in bringing unheard voices to the forefront. The post-colonial modern Indian novelists depict a new woman in their fiction. The works of Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Rupa Bajwa, Manju Kapur and Shobha De have propagated the cause of women empowerment through their New Women.

After exploring the occurrence of this phenomenon of the new woman in both western and eastern contexts, we can reach the conclusion that new woman is the product of modern mercantile society, one who revolts against the traditional social set up. She is more assertive, more liberated in her views and more active in accepting all the challenges of life like men. Her quest for identity remains the focus of all her actions. She challenges the male superiority and rebels at being subordinated by him. There is a consistent growth in her behavior and attitude. This evolving new image of women has also created a crisis in family and society and has shaken the foundations of age-old institutions like marriage and motherhood. A modern woman is career-oriented because she knows that it is her economic dependence which empowers a male to dominate his wife and subject her to physical and mental torture. In this dissertation, I have discussed the evolution of new woman in India after the Partition through the analysis of selected texts. The work explores the new women presented in the select novels of Mahashweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa and Shobha De. All domains of her growth, social, political and psychological remain the focus of my investigation.

Choice of the authors and Literature Review of the Selected Authors

The choice of the authors has been done on the basis of the time period to which they belong and their works which revolve around women and project different facets of Indian new woman. The underlying purpose is to explore the voyage of development of Indian new women through their female characters. It starts with the subaltern fiction of Mahasweta Devi to urbanized fiction of Shobha Dee and to the contemporary discourses of Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa on the issues of girl education, marriage. The objective is to highlight the fact that if the

social situations, economic scenarios and religious patterns of female characters of each of the chosen authors are diverse, their forms and manifestations of growth are also varied. The new image of Indian women presented by novelists under study is ambitious, power hungry and audacious. The traditional image of ideal Indian woman has become out-dated. A new woman is career-oriented because she knows that it is her economic dependence which empowers a male to dominate his wife and subject her to physical and mental torture.

Literature Review

A host of critics and scholars from both India and abroad have studied the works of Mahasweta Devi, Shobha De, Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa and have presented elaborated comments on them as authors and their works. Few of them worth mentioning are:

Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davies *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* 1992. Print.

In their work, Anthias and Davies discuss the gender politics in India and the contribution of Mahasweta Devi through her vigorous aesthetics. She believes when a woman resorts to creating literature, it is not only an assertion of individuality and authority but also a signal of disobedience, confrontation, and misdemeanor.

Amin Shahid and Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* Vol. IX, 1996. Print.

In this work, the authors discuss and analyze the social activism of Mahasweta Devi who intends to bring drastic changes in society through fiction.

Her creativity ostensibly springs from and targets the tangible and the non-tangible aspects of subaltern reality. This concern comprises, informs and patterns her narrative worldview. Her protagonists, in their everyday demeanor, find themselves pitch-forked into multifarious, contradictory and multiple dynamics at the cross-section of the margins and the mainstream.

Usha Bande “Quest for Wholeness in Anita Desai’s “Where Shall We Go this Summer?” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 2.22 pp. 07-'4, 1987, Web.

Professor Usha Bande, in this research article, talks about the impact of two-fold oppositions on the fiction of post-colonial era. In such binaries, one term powerfully rules over the other. A series of binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, imperialism/ nationalism, man/woman and public/private lays the foundation of most of Mahasweta Devi’s works (stories and novels). Her fiction aims to project the sufferings of the subaltern women. In such order of colonizer and colonized culture, the females are recognized as an abnormal/disturbing group both socially and culturally. Devi’s fiction also focuses on turning upside down such dominion. Using the approach of subversion, it endeavors to bring low what was high. (07-'4)

Sarah Grimke *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Conditions of Woman* p. 10, 1970. Print.

Sarah Grimke in her book rightly appreciates the spirit of disapproval in the novels of Shobha De from her earliest works to the recent one. Grimke has shown feministic approach towards the recognition of prejudices against the ideology and principles structured for women. Feminism is a revolt for the women of the third

world wherein she fights to become the social, economic, moral, intellectual equal with her male counterpart.

Alice Jardine *Gynesics: Configurations of Women and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press p. 25, 1986. Print.

In this book, Alice Jardine has discussed the variety of problems that women have to face because of their being a different sex. “The putting into the 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.”

Meera Bai K. “*Tradition and Modernity: The Portrayal of women by women writers*” *Indian Women Novelists* p. 35, 1991. Print.

In this article, Mirabai observes that Shobha De's women are strugglers who aim to achieve goodness, freedom and aspire towards freedom and “towards goodness and towards a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart, mind, and spirit. It is a kind of untouched innocence and integrity.”

Geeta Barua “*Rise and Fall of a Star: A Study of Starry Nights*” *The Fiction of Shobha De: Critical Studies* pp. 174-79, 2000. Print.

Geeta Barua gives a remarkable analysis of Shobha De's novel *Starry Nights*. Her women protagonists suffer because they flout the traditional morality in their desperate quest for success in life. Her women characters are very good specimens who openly establish that reversal of roles is indeed possible for women

in the present day society. The multiple shades of woman's mind and plight are dealt in this book very effectively.

Sharad Srivastava *The New Woman in Indian English Fiction* pp. 81-100, 1996. Print.

In this work, Sharad Srivastava explores the growth of the new woman through the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale and Shobha De. The 'new woman' is not merely an aggregate of certain personality traits to be studied through the methodology of social sciences. She is a being in her own right who is in the process of becoming. She seeks self-fulfillment through self-expression in a milieu where there is support, kind consideration and tenderness. In this sense, the new woman is different from the modern woman whose prime concerns are dominance and self-assertion.

Sonia. L. Ningthoujam “Aesthetics and Morality: Emergence of the New Woman” *Image of the New Woman in the Novels of Shobha De* pp. 47-77, 2006. Print.

Sonia L. Ningthoujam in this chapter talks about a new class of women created by Shobha De. These women protagonists are unique as they get to realize that “they too have their own individual likes and dislikes. They want their voice to be heard in the society. Whether the voices of these women are received by attentive or deaf ears is not what matters. What indeed matters is that a new class of women has come up which is ready to take on the world to promote the women's perspective” But the writer has not fully explored the various aspects of this new class of women.

Pushpinder Syal “Powder, Puffs and Shobhaa De’s Fiction: The novel as Consumer Product” *Contemporary Indian Women Writers in English: A Feminist Perspective* 1999. Print.

In her article, Pushpinder Syal highlights the important aspects of existence and survival in a high class society of India. The woman protagonists of Shobha De use the tools of powders, puffs, and patches to survive in a harsh materialistic world.

Urbashi Barat “From Victim to Non-Victim: Socialite Evenings as a Version of *Kunstlerroman*” *The Fiction of Shobha De: Critical Studies* pp. 119-28, 2000. Print.

In this article, Urbashi Barat calls Shobha De a trend-setter. She becomes a representative of emphasizing different perceptions about woman's freedom and liberation. She thinks the extra-marital affairs of women as a blow to break the rigidity of traditional and moral values in society. This is one of the most distinguished features of her feminism.

K.A. Kunjakka *Feminism and Indian Realities* 2002. Print.

In this book, Kunjakka mainly talks about feminism in the context of the Indian situation. The position of Indian women throughout the ages and the external influences that transformed their life-style have been discussed at length.

Raghunath Ghosh *Facets of Feminism: Studies on the Concept of Woman in Indian Tradition* 2005. Print.

In this work, Raghunath Ghosh explores Indian tradition starting from the Vedic period to modern times in terms of education, social, political, legal rights of woman. An endeavor has been made to show the status of woman in the eyes of

the contemporary thinkers like Gandhiji, Sri Aurobindo, and Rabindranath. Their interpretations of tradition about woman have also been illumined.

Ashok Kumar *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feministic Study* 2010. Print.

Ashok Kumar in his work entitled *Novels of Manju Kapur* remarks that Manju Kapur shot into fame with her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998). *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2005), and *The Immigrant* (2008), and *Custody* (2011), Kapoor's novels have a feministic approach. The present collection comprises of scholarly research papers and articles presenting an analysis of her novels as a struggle for emancipation from economic political and social bondages. But the present book does not explore the issues concerning the new woman.

Nadia Ahmed “Cracking India: Tradition versus Modernity in Attia Hossain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*” *On the Road to Baghdad, or Travelling Biculturalism: Theorizing a Bicultural Approach to Contemporary World Fiction* 2005. Print.

Nadia Ahmed in this book discusses tradition and modernity in the post-partition fiction of India. She observes that in Atta Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998) women protagonists suffer because of the partition and its aftermath. Binary opposition between tradition and modernity is a major force, two antagonistic poles obliterating the lives of the protagonists.

Alterno, Letizia. *Post liberalization Indian Novels in English: Politics of Global Reception and Awards* 2013. Print.

In this book, Letizia Alterno focuses on those Indian writers writing in the English language, whose concerns are related to India in her immediacy, and who

have come attained literary fame in the post-liberalization period. Although the idea of this study is not to undermine the value of these writers, its aim is to consider the correlation of their novels themes with the workings of the organized, global market processes now present in post-liberalized India. As per Alterno, Manju Kapur has based her novel “*Difficult Daughters*” on issues including the impact of globalization, nationalism, Diaspora, identity crisis, communalism, subaltern representation and modernism.

Suman Bala and Subhash Chandra “Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*: an Absorbing Tale of Fact and Fiction” *50 Years of Indian Writing* pp. 105-'0 1999. Print.

In her essay, Suman Bala argues that argues that Kapur’s fiction allows for the re-imagination of women’s conditions during communal riots and their responses to trauma as a result of those riots. This essay examines women’s negotiations of their religious and national identities within the private and the public and their responses to trauma caused by communal violence through Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* and Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*

Boehmer, Elleke. “First realize your need: Manju Kapur's Erotic Nation.” *Alternative Indias: Cultural Diversity in Contemporary Literature in English* pp. 53-70, 2005. Print.

The learned critic Elleke Boehmer in this essay entitled discusses the themes and motifs of Manju Kapur’s novels. While her first novel *Difficult Daughters* is a family saga against the historical backdrop of partition, her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) is a work of investigative reporting on the most

controversial and political issue of the demolition of Babri Masjid and a woman's obsession with love and lesbianism. The novel is a kind of narrative on a woman's "incompatible marriage and resultant frustration and the contemporary political turmoil in its historical context."

Jaspal Singh et al. "The Idea of False Sisterhood: The Post-Feminist echoes in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*" *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 2.3, pp. 379-81, 2015. Web.

Jaspal Singh, Arvind Khanna and Parveen Khanna (2015) in this article have made an effort to bring out the fact that the wave of feminism has not pervaded among all the sections of women in society. The paper reveals how the two worlds of glaring inequalities do exist in Indian society where the women of upper-class society take the lower class women as "resident aliens" (*Feminism without Borders*: 129). Through the subaltern character of Ramchand, Bajwa has tried to support her own take on postfeminism where she points out that the women are not only the victims of male patriarchy rather face oppression at the hands of their own sisters.

Sebastian, Subhi Treasa. "The Yarns of Urban India: Women in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*" *IRWLE* 9.1, pp. 1-7, 2013. Web.

In this article, Subhi Tresa Sebastian states that the novel *The Sari Shop* is a study on the women and it highlights the shocking inequality that exists within the Indian society and ridicules the very foundation of contemporary urban India. It also touches on the theme of New Feminism and tries to find how 'liberated' are the women in the 21st century India.

Objectives

The present study seeks to investigate the various socio-political and cultural causes which led to the emergence of a new woman in post independent India. So, precisely it shall have the following objectives:

- To study the etymology of phrase ‘new woman’ & its usage in western context and outline the position of an Indian woman from a historical perspective.
- To critically investigate the psychoanalytical theories of Dr. Karen Horney and Sigmund Freud and study their impact on postcolonial writers as well as writers under study.
- To make a comparative interpretation of new woman presented in the novels of Mahasweta Devi, Rupa Bajwa and Manju Kapoor and Shobha De, in the light of theories propounded by western feminists like Kate Millet, Elaine Showalter, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir.
- To reconsider the emancipation of woman in India and arrive at the socio-political and socio-economic forces that emphasized the growth of this new urban woman.

Chapterization

The dissertation is divided into following parts:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Growth of Subaltern Women with Mahasweta Devi’s Aesthetics of Activism: An Analysis of *Rudali*

Chapter 3 – Emergence of Shobha De’s New Urban Women: An Analysis of *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights*

Chapter 4 – A Study of Manju Kapur’s New Women through Her Discussion on Marriage, Education, and Polygamy in *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*

Chapter 5 – Diverse Facades of Bajwa's New Women Amidst Glaring Inequalities of Urban India: An Analysis of *The Sari Shop*

Conclusion

Bibliography

Chapter – 2

Growth of Subaltern Women with Mahasweta Devi's Aesthetics of Activism: An analysis of *Rudali*

Mahasweta Devi, a social activist was one of the most distinguished Bengali writers of this century. She occupies a unique position among the important signatures of Indian literature of post-colonial era. Born in 1927 in Dhaka British India in a rich Bengali family, Devi inherited artistic immensity from her artist father Manish Chandra Ghatak and social worker cum activist mother Dharitri Devi. Her whole family and relatives included prominent journalists, actors, filmmakers, and artists. Among them is the journalist Sachin Chowdhury, the sculptor Sankho Chowdhury, pioneering British trained cinematographer Sudish Ghatak and actor cum film director Ritwick Ghatak (younger brother). Her rearing up had been in such an ambiance that she developed an interest in various forms of arts like literature, music, theater and films.

In her adolescence, Devi saw her steady involvement with the social and political theater of colonial India. During this period, the theater groups like Gananatya intended to take current theater and street plays into rural Bengal. Devi finished up studies with a Masters in English and pursued several careers like jobs in the central government, teaching, lectureship in a college and was a reporter for a Bengali daily newspaper from 1983-1984. Mahasweta Devi was honored with various prestigious literary awards like Jana Pith, India's highest literary award in 1996, Magsaysay Award, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize in 1997, *Officer des Arts ez des Lettre*a (Officer of Arts and Literature), France's second highest civilian award and in 2006, the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian

award in India. She, along with Habib Tanvir, was also chosen as a National Research Professor, in appreciation of their distinctive contributions towards literature but this dynamic personality left for her heavenly abode on July 28, 2016.

Mahasweta Devi was a prolific writer with almost twenty collections of short stories and close to a hundred novels to her credit. Most of her works have been in her native language i.e. Bengali. Recipient of the various prestigious literary honors, Devi is recognized for starting a new buzz in Bengali literature that combines together history, fiction, and myth with a stroke of reality. Devi's fiction has attracted extensive readers and serious deliberations because of the fact that one finds a powerful representation of third world marginalization and a serious discussion and rethinking on the issues of caste, gender, and class. Tony Beck and Tirthankar Bose in "Dis-possession, Degradation and Empowerment of Peasantry and the Poor in Bengali Fiction" (1995) states that "in the 1970s itself, Devi achieved a new construction of the poor in Bengali fiction and her view of society is subaltern and prompts change as she relocates power and redefines human worth" (Beck and Bose 441-8).

If we talk about contemporary India, two images immediately come into our mind. The first one is the dazzling clean India making consistent growth in every domain be it industries, service sector, technology, healthcare etc. This image represents India as a country constantly moving ahead towards progress. While another image of contemporary India is dismal representing poverty, hunger, unemployment, unequal distribution of resources. This picture puts forth a question is India really heading on the path of progress. In the same country, where we boast of overall progress of the country, we have also the large number of

landless farmers stumbling under the burden of poverty and liabilities, the tribal who are losing their lands because of their debts are forced to become farm workers or bonded laborers in many cases and common people who are making die-hard efforts for their survival. But the sorry thing is that their lives remain unnoticed and unattended by the progressive nation. Mahasweta Devi one of the foremost writers of the modern time, is more worried about the second picture rather than the first one.

Writing on the responsibility of a writer, she states that “I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty towards society. Yet I don't really know why I do these things. The sense of duty is an obsession. I must remain accountable to myself” (Devi ix). Ajay Sekhar (2006) in his article entitled “In Gender, Caste and Fiction: A Bahujan Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Rudali ” opines that “in most of her works, Mahasweta Devi has tried to tackle and address the turbulence of caste/class/gender in the historic context of the Brahmanic caste patriarchy ” (Sekhar 4422). This is what Jyoti Yadav (2014) endorses in “Women Writers on Our Time: An Introduction to Mahasweta Devi with Major Thematic Concerns”

Mahasweta Devi, veteran Bengali author is one among the appealing voices who questions the so-called developing, democratic and civilized nation called India. Marginals are still deprived of their fundamental rights even after so many years of freedom. Devi has tried to expose the feudal system which is anti-tribal, anti-women, anti-poor, and anti-tiller. (Yadav 158)

Mahasweta Devi believes that art is not a profession to earn money and recognition rather it has a constructive purpose to serve. For her, art or literature can act as an active tool to bring radical transformation in society. Very clearly, She has expressed her passion for active aesthetic art thus in her *Five Plays*:

I have never had the capacity nor the urge to create art for art's sake. Since I haven't ever learned to do anything more useful, I have gone on writing. I have found authentic documentation to be the best medium for protest against injustices and exploitation . . . I have a reverence for materials collected from folklore, for they reveal how the common people have looked at an experience in the past and look at it now. (Devi, *Five Plays* 12)

Jaspal Singh in "Rudali' as an Epitome of Caste, Class and Gender Subalternity: An Analysis of Mahasweta's Devi's Rudali" opines that it has often been argued and contested that only a Dalit writer can well realize the sufferings of the Dalit community in which he or she is living and uses his ink and space to depict these suffering to the society. But Mahasweta Devi stands distinctly on this point. Being a non-dalit, she has tactfully captured the spirit of Dalit experience. "This writer with a humane approach has proved the aforesaid notion wrong. All her short stories and novels bear the testimony to the fact that she is the true representative of the voice of the subalterns. (Singh, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 282).

In the post-colonial literature, writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, James Baldwin, Ken Saro-Wiwa are well-known for their political activism. Activism consists of efforts to encourage, obstruct, or direct social, political, economic, or

environmental change. Various forms of activism are political activism, economic activism or aesthetic activism. Mahasweta Devi continued the tradition of these writers through her art that has been appreciated as her aesthetics of activism. Aesthetic activism means creating art or literature with an effort to bring social, political, economic, or environmental change. The year 1965 gave a real shape to Devi's spirit of activism when she visited Palamau, a secluded and poor district in Bihar. She identified it as "a mirror of tribal India". Here she had the first-hand experience of harsh living realities of indigenous masses that were largely expelled from the representative majority. She met the people moving from one place to other place and observed that the whole district was in the state of total neglect, a debased environment affected by the evils of landlordism prevailing in a local milieu like debt bondage etc. It was devoid of revenue sources, access to health facilities, education and even the road connectivity. Later on, she noticed that other districts were also facing the same gloomy conditions. She directed a number of proletariat organizations to struggle against for justice. Raymond Williams gives a reliable critique of the historical process in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977) thus: "the traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its contemporary system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation" (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 9). The political leaders with their predefined motives lay down the rules of "selection" and "interpretation", manipulate the things as per their convenience, distort history and corrupt myth and legends. Her first novel *Hajar Churashir Ma* (*Mother of 1084*) written in 1970 gave stirrings to her social and aesthetic activism. An internationally applauded film was also made based on this novel. India's tribal people became Devi's primary concern. In the following years, Mahasweta

produced literature in form of novels and stories energetically satiating her appetite for demonstrating the social realities and sensitizing the nation about the same. The famous among them were *Agnigarbha*, *Bashai Tudu*, *Breast stories* etc. She states in *Bitter Soil*

[T]he sole purpose of my writing is to expose the many faces of the exploiting agencies . . . My experience keeps me perpetually angry and makes me ruthlessly unforgiving towards the exploiters, or the exploiting system. That the mainstream remains totally oblivious of the tribal situation furthers that burning anger . . . believe in anger, in justified violence, and so peel the mask off the face of the India which is projected by the Government, to expose its naked brutality, savagery, and caste and class exploitation; and place this India, a hydra-headed monster, before a people's court, the people being the oppressed millions. (Devi, *Bitter Soil* ix-x)

Thus, she becomes one of the boldest female writers who initiated a battle against the forces of oppression and suppression. She uses her pen to uphold the cause of millions of tribal Indian people against social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. Her writing reflects the spitefulness, filth, and gloom in the lives of the tribal people and accuses Indian society of the shame it heaps on its most oppressed citizens. Almost all her works (stories and novels) depict social and political realities of the backward and deserted tribal people. She is a social protester and an ingenious writer who is a crusader for the cause of tribal people. She tries to create awareness about the inexpressible sufferings of the tribal people in India. Her works often hold what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a prominent post-

colonial literary theorist states in *In Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) a “problematic representations of decolonization” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 77). Devi is involved in the study of sociological problems around with an objective of initiating reforms in society. She “lingers in post- coloniality and even there in the space of difference on decolonized terrain in the space of difference” (Spivak 77). Spivak elaborates the space of difference as

Whatever the fate of this supposition, it must be admitted that there is always a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this reversal. This space had no established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism. Paradoxically, this space is also outside of organized labor, below the attempted reversals of capital logic. Conventionally, this space is described as the habitat of the sub-proletariat or the subaltern. Mahasweta's fiction focuses on it as the space of the displacement of the colonization- decolonization reversal. (77-8)

Her aesthetic activism effortlessly endorses what Radha Chakravarty writes in her article entitled “Mahasweta Devi: A Luminous Anger” that “Mahasweta’s current reputation as a writer rests largely on her own self-projection as champion of the tribal cause and decrier of class prejudice” (Chakravarty, *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers: Rethinking Subjectivity* 94). M.N. Chatterjee (2008) in a review titled “Re-reading Mahasweta” states thus:

Her major concerns include neglect of the tribals, the ruthless exploitation of the Adivasis by vested interests and an insensitive government machinery, bonded labor, plight of women, women at

the receiving end who become victims of the flesh trade and ignorance and illiteracy of the deprived classes whether in villages or in towns. (Chatterjee 240)

The various features of her challenging artistic enterprise are expressed in her voluminous fiction i.e. various stories and novels. Her aesthetic enterprise is obviously political having a self-declared plan of accomplishing certain activist aims. She is a practical writer who has deep grass root knowledge about the people living in remote tribal areas of India. She herself admits thus: “I travel extensively in the villages and collect information about people sufferings, complaints, political exploitation, their protests and write about these in the press . . . As an editor, journalist, and writer I experience no conflict between the three roles”. Radha Chakravorty in her essay, “Visionary Cartography”, refers to her discussion with Mahasweta Devi in Kolkata where she later asserted that “it is impossible for her to compartmentalize her different roles as journalist, social activist and creative writer because they all reflect the same fighting spirit. If writing itself is a kind of activism the work of the writer and the activist can obviously be expected to overlap” (Chatterjee, *Signifying the Self: Women and Literature* 75-’8).

Journalistic Contributions of Mahasweta Devi are not merely an addition to her artistic excellence rather these are also a path for expressing her social concerns for the marginalized people. She writes journalistic reports on exploitation and expropriation, deprivation and degradation of tribal people. Devi defines literature as a ‘responsible’ act that arising from the historical obligation of the writer. These historical commitments require literature to be written from a particular political standpoint so as to struggle for attaining its objective of

transforming the unjust social system. In her view, literature is a strong politically faithful statement in favor of the subaltern. She firmly believes that an author should document his/her own contemporary time and history. By making the tribal, the subject of most of her works, she challenges the absence of their stories in the recorded literary history. Activist struggles have always called for her presence all over the country and her undaunted support and dedicated efforts for the liberation of tribal from subjugation makes her an important spokesperson for tribal rights in India. Gayatri Spivak in *Breast Stories* characterizes Mahasweta's fiction as "history imagined into fiction" as legitimized by the writer's 'repeated claim... that she researches thoroughly everything she represents in fiction" (Spivak, *Breast Stories* 77).

Mahasweta Devi stands apart from Bengali writers of her times. The politics of women's oppression and subjugation is totally absent from the works of her contemporaries and seniors. They present a different female world altogether. The themes she deals with in her works, her narrative techniques and her diction rise above the boundaries of patriarchal labels, and debates on gender. Maitrayee Chattopadhyay writes:

In *Pratham Pratisruti* and *Suvarnalata*, Ashapurna Devi has highlighted the woman's fight for emancipation. But her defensive outlook could not accept the new, modern woman. Thus, the sad consequence of women's empowerment is seen in *Bokul Kothai*. Pratibha Basu and Lila Majumdar have written love stories to highlight the barrenness of the woman's life. Although Bani Roy's writings were different. The problems of women highlighted by her

were not issues that the women of the period were too concerned about, and thus she has largely remained neglected. (Chattopadhyay 2)

Talking about the emergence of new women in Mahasweta Devi's fiction one can say that her description of suppression of women particularly tribal women and their rebellion adds a feminist aspect to her works. Many of her stories have strong women characters as the central point, as in *Draupadi*, *Hajar Churashir Maa*, *Rudali*, *Stanadayini*, *The Hint*, *Doulati the Bountiful*, and *Dhouli*. In her dialogue with Gabrielle Collu, Mahasweta Devi states what she thinks about women. In her opinion,

Women are much stronger than men. But, in the poorer class, their sufferings multiply not only because of their belonging to this class but also because of their bodies. They thus suffer double oppression. No wonder, the most common stories of victimization revolve around their falling a prey to the male lust". (Chatterjee 240)

Though Devi wants that the agonies of the troubled souls of women be heard through her words yet she does not want to be labeled as a feminist who upholds the cause of women only. She endorses this with her claim that she has written both about men and women. In her novella, *Pterodactyl* in *Imaginary Maps*, men and women are not cut off at all. It is pertinent to note that her women are stronger than men, her men protagonists lack insights into what is happening to them. Talking about the predicament and decadence of the tribal in an interview with Gayatri Spivak, Mahasweta Devi writes in *Imaginary Maps* that "India makes

progress, produces steel, the tribals give up their land, and receive nothing. They are suffering spectators of the India that is traveling towards the twenty-first century... Although they fought bravely against the British, they have not been treated as part of India's freedom struggle." (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* iii)

Mahasweta Devi is prominently known as Maha Devi because of her dedication to the cause of the tribal people of India who were the original inhabitants of India even before the advent of the Aryans but they have been deprived of their land and rights. In story after story Devi unfolds subaltern anxieties, especially that of the subaltern women tortured and exploited in India. In her view, the tribal life in India is an "uncovered Continent" ignored by the corrupt politicians and existing on the brink of disappearance. She gives a real picture of tribal India, caste and class struggle, and giving voice to those marginalized women whose cries of anguish go unheard in post-colonial independent India. Her stories and novels speak for the muted and the silenced, articulating the cruelties and oppressions of the feudal lords and Mahajans. In *Rudali* and in many other stories, Devi speaks for the poor, neglected and oppressed women. "It is the women who are ruined by the Malik Mahajan who turn into whores. Nonsense they are a separate caste" (Devi, *Rudali* 80).

Mahasweta Devi has taken up the cause of women's empowerment and the main focus is on radical feminist realism. The stories *Statue* and *The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur* which were originally written in Bengali are about the oppressed women living in rural India. While translating these two stories, Gayatri Spivak contends that the tribal men and women in the stories and novels of Mahasweta Devi are subaltern. "The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global

laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish." (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 104)

The space of the subaltern, she suggests "did not share in the energy of 'colonization-decolonization reversal' and had 'no firmly established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism'. Spivak sees this space as a dystopic 'representation of colonization as such'" (Spivak 78). The story *Statue* describes the heart-rending tale of the sufferings of Dulati who remembers her unlucky lover when his statue is being built in the village. Devi has accused maltreatment of rural women because of the double standards of morality existing in their society which believes that a man's sin can be forgiven but women's cannot' be. In *The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur* too, Devi describes the oppression of women by society. Blind Andi suffers due to the callous negligence of a district doctor. Sumitra Chakravorty in *The Image of Woman in Mahasweta Devi's Novels* (1993) writes thus:

Mahasweta Devi's women are black, barbaric and beautiful-monolithic, with the primeval purity of the black stone and red soil, they spring out. There is a naked exteriority in this feminine struggle in so far as there is no separation between class consciousness and gender consciousness. These women symbolize power, abundance, and motherhood. They are Durga, the divine avenger, and Annapurna, the fertile mother-goddess at one Mahasweta Devi's women emerge as sources of simple strength and indomitable rural courage to their men. (Chakravorty 17)

Giving a dismal picture of poverty prevailing in rural India, Mahasweta Devi refers to a special area in Hyderabad where in the name of married women are traded among the customers from the Middle East. Parents who are unable to provide their daughters with the basic necessities of food and clothing gather there. Thus, the paucity of basic necessities has reduced females to commodities.

Mahasweta Devi has never described herself as a feminist. This is because in her perception sexual exploitation always forms part of a much larger pattern of exploitation. She considers herself to be an activist who will make the best of her efforts to sensitize the nation as a whole about the status women should be given in the society and holding a mirror to the condition in which they are actually placed. The excellence of her aesthetic activism lies in the persuasive quality of her narratives where on one hand, the vivid & realistic descriptions of women's manifold exploitations are rendered and on the other hand, an appeal is made to the female characters to struggle against such exploitation and to establish their place in the society.

Anjum Katyal (1997) in her introductory essay "The Metamorphosis of Rudali" in *Rudali: From fiction to Performance* states thus:

In this country, the term feminism is an overloaded, problematic term. Widely seen as an imported western concept strongly identified with white bourgeois concerns and frequently seen as reductive or limiting. Ironically, this causes many liberated, activist and progressive women dealing with women's issues and rights in this country to shy away from the label of 'feminism' while practicing it in their lives and work. (Katyal 2)

In an interview with Anjum Katyal on 20 April 1993 Usha Ganguli (the famous Bengali producer who produced Hindi play *Rudali*) in 1992 expressed this contradiction: “I feel that I differ from the way people tend to use the term feminism. This term has nowadays become a fashionable one, and I don't believe in a particular brand of feminism. Therefore, I don't want the play [Rudali] to be labeled as feminist. on the other hand, I believe in the liberation of women and their freedom, and I'm trying my best as a person, as a teacher, and as a theater worker to work towards that” (2).

Thus, Devi's literary greatness and spirit of activism have contributed towards the emergence and growth of new women in India, more particularly in the rural India. Her stories are women-centered with the gender-issue forming the core of the stories and novels. Devi is seriously concerned to deal with the issue of woman empowerment. In the beginning, her females appear weak victims but they emerge very powerfully as there is a great transformation in them. They fall in the category of New Women who exhibit their exceptional courage to fight against the oppression and injustice of the patriarchal and tribal society. “Devi's fiction has been widely read and critically theorized as a powerful representational attempt from the point of view of the third world marginalia. Questions of caste/gender/class are discussed and rethought in the textual and contextual premises of her radical and interventionist narrative praxis” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 2). Mahashweta uses the tools of ‘body’ and ‘loan’ to portray the unspeakable sufferings of her women. In post-colonial India, the tradition of bonded labor is prevalent since ancient times. The only means of repaying the loan in a tribal society is bond-slavery. Her short story *Douloti the Bountiful* speaks the

plight of all the subaltern women who are sexually and economically exploited. “Doulati is all over India” (Devi, *Douloti the Bountiful* 160).

Douloti is the daughter of a tribal bonded worker. India has an aboriginal tribal population of nearly seventy million. A bonded worker offers free work as "repayment" of a small loan, at a high rate of interest, often over more than one generation. Douloti is abducted by an upper-caste (nontribal) Indian from her home with a false promise of marriage. She is sold into bonded prostitution, to repay her father's loan. Being the victim of the venereal disease, she accomplishes a journey to a hospital, only to be directed to another hospital, much farther away. She decides to walk home instead and dies on the way. In this small story again Mahasweta Devi depicts the endless sufferings of tribal women who are insecure and unprotected. Law enforcement agencies and the administration are powerless to check the atrocities of the patriarchal society dominated by males. Mahasweta Devi reconstructs the myth of subaltern woman as her protagonist breaks away from the shackles of false notions of shame. Radha Chakravarty (2011) admires Devi's skill of visualizing myth in “Reading Mahasweta: Shifting Frames.” She states that “One of the most notable features of Mahasweta's writing is the visionary, utopian or myth-making impulse that acts as a counterbalance to her dystopian, ‘forensic, critical perspective on the contemporary world’” (Chakravarty, *Mahasweta Devi: Critical Perspectives* 108).

In Mahasweta's short story *Draupadi* the title character Draupadi Mejhén or Dopdi, an active worker of the Naxalbari movement is hunted down and raped in a bid to suppress rebellious groups. Mahasweta Devi is at her best as she uses the technique of “subversion” and “transgression” to depict the resistance of Dopdi. She is involved in Naxalite Movement without knowledge of its

philosophy. Dopdi is living in the Jharkhand forest with a group of Naxalite rebels referred to as the “young gentlemen”. Her unorthodox and revolutionary behavior is intolerable to the Santhal tribe to which she belongs. She proudly recollects: “Dopdi felt proud of her forefathers. They stood guard over their women’s blood in black armor” (Devi, *Draupadi* 193). Her living with the strange and unknown strangers in the forest bereft of the protection of her husband Dulna is her disobedience. She acts as a trustworthy courier of the militants. Dopdi goes into the village in search of food (191) and to “spy” on the activities of the police. For instance, “Dopdi has seen the new camp, she has sat in the bus station and passed the time of day, smoked a ‘bidi’ and found out how many police convoys had arrived, how many radio vans [...]” (194). Dulna and Dopdi had “worked at the house of virtually every landowner, they can efficiently inform the killers about their targets [...]” (189). Soon Dopdi becomes a strong woman, Senanayak considers her a serious threat as he says:

[...] the most despicable and repulsive style of fighting is guerrilla warfare with primitive weapons. [...] Dopdi and Dulna belong to the category of such fighters, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow [...] their fighting power is greater than the gentlemen’s. Not all gentlemen become experts in the explosion of ‘chambers’; they think the power will come out of its own if the gun is held. But since Dulna and Dopdi are illiterate, their kind has practiced the use of weapons generation after generation (188). Dopdi is daring, Senanayak gives full regard to Dopdi’s striking power since she destroys Dukhiram who, she believes had killed her husband Dulana. (190)

Her actions are guided by the directions of Aijit. “If anyone is caught, the others must catch the timing and change their hideout. If comrade Dopdi arrives late, we will not remain. There will be a sign of where we are gone. No comrade will let the others be destroyed for her own sake” (194). Dopdi follows these instructions seriously, she leads the policeman away from the forest and the hideout places to the “burning ghat”. Dopdi’s source of strength is her loyalty to the organization and the ideals of her husband Dulna as she says: “Dulna died, but, let me tell you, he didn’t lose anyone else’s life. Because this was not in our heads, to begin with” (194). She is committed to the traditions of Santhal tribe and expresses great reverence to the ideals of the forefathers for, “crow would eat crows flesh before Santal would betray Santal” (193). Thus, Dopdi emerges as a strong resilient new woman protagonist of Mahasweta Devi. She is extraordinarily audacious to disobey the gender and cultural norms with the aim to win her rights and justice.

As the story advances, Dopdi comes out as an authoritative agent and a representative of women who is tortured, raped and killed in a patriarchal society. The scene of molestation is depicted to convey an idea about the power of New Woman and not as a source of low rated entertainment. Senanayak leaves Dopdi after his tormenting question session with instructions “Make her. Do the needful.” (195). Dopdi loses her consciousness for some time, her condition is miserable after the first rape: “Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she had been made upright” (195).

Mahasweta Devi presents the brutality of the rape in a poetic language. After Draupadi recovers consciousness; she shocks everyone with her female power. She becomes a symbol of 'Kali', the goddess. In the last scene, she is described exactly the way goddess 'Kali' has been traditionally portrayed in *The Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*: "Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes her blood on her palm" and issues a challenge to Senanayak and his armed force "I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on counter me" (196). Senanayak is scared and baffled as Draupadi emerges as a New Woman with the power of goddess as Mahasweta Devi comments: "For the first time, Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target terribly afraid" (196). Draupadi emerges as a powerful New Woman at the end of the story.

Rudali a piece of short fiction taken up for the present study is a persuasive literary work written by Mahasweta Devi. It is a novella printed with other stories in *Nairetey Megh* in 1979. Mahasweta Devi originally wrote this work in the Bengali language later on it was translated into English. It was also modified and created as a play in Hindi by Usha Ganguly who belonged to famous theater group of Calcutta in 1992. Since then it has had well a good number of shows, playing to packed houses, and has drawn the attention of both critical and theater world. Anjum Katyal in her introductory essay entitled "The Metamorphosis of Rudali" in *Rudali: From fiction to Performance* (1997) states that in both manifestations of 'Rudali', it has been a woman author who has shaped and reshaped this text which revolves around the life of a woman- the poor, low caste Sanichari. Each author has her own agenda and purpose which make their text conspicuously different

“yet underlying commonality is that they are perceived as women intensive projects and received as feminist texts” (Katyaj 1). The work may be small in size but voluminous as a literary and social document. “The multiple strands of Mahasweta Devi's agenda are all interwoven, logically implicated in each other” (2). Its powerful story covers a number of significant themes ranging from miserable poverty to evils of the caste system, from Indian funeral practices to role of women in dominant patriarchal society and emergence of a new woman through the personification of the central character.

The plot of the novel is set in Tahad village of Rajasthan where central character ‘Sanichari’ suffers for generations together because of desperate poverty and stigma of low caste. Sanichari is born immediately after father’s death. She is abandoned by her mother Peewli who elopes with her wealthy lover. On growing up, she is married to a man named Ganju who lived with his ill mother. Sanichari gives birth to a boy and names him Budhua. She goes by her ethics and commitments towards her husband and mother-in-law. Her ailing mother-in-law passes away. Sanichari is unable to cry as she needs to make necessary arrangements for the cremation of an old woman. “When her mother-in-law died, Sanichari didn't cry..... Dragging the neighbors home with her, and handling all the arrangements for the cremation, she was so busy that there was no time to cry” (Devi, *Rudali* 54-5). The deaths of her brother-in-law and sister-in-law do not move her. “Terrified of being driven out, Sanichari was on tenterhooks. There was no crying over those deaths either. Was one to weep or to worry about how to burn the corpses and feed the neighbors cheaply at the shradh” (55).

Years pass, her husband Ganju dies due to food poisoning - Sanichari is again unable to spare time and tears to bewail. “The government officers didn't

give her any time to shed tears. they burned the corpses quickly. They dragged Sanichari is.and Budhua off for a vaccination against the disease” (56). When her son Budhua dies because of disease of consumption and her daughter in law abandons her leaving a baby in her arms, she is again unable to lament. “Her bahu never returned. With the child in her arms, she busied herself creating Budhua and fending off queries about her bahu. In all this, she didn't cry for her son either. Nor could she cry. She would sit, like one stunned; then fall into exhausted slumber” (61).

Year after year, the deaths in the family have turned Sanichari numb and insensitive towards miseries. Her mind is all the time preoccupied with the tensions emerging out of abject poverty, the issue of survival and responsibility of looking after her son Budhua and her grandson Haroa after Budhua dies away, she feels as if she cannot shed tears.

Oppression caused by Malik-Mahajan's social class is a constant presence in the story. Ram avatar is an embodiment of a system which dehumanizes, brutalizes, invading the most private space of an individual, the emotions so that even grief is distorted in the desperate struggle for survival. (Katyul 4)

Every loss Sanichari suffers is because of the terrible poverty, the life and the lack of hope of any change or improvement. Her daughter-in-law Pratibha and her grandson Haroa both leave because they refuse to submit to the harsh conditions, even though their options are prostitution and insecurities of a wandering life. Devi has used the technique of historicization to realize her plan of making *Rudali* a powerful analysis of malicious power structures that are prevalent

in the villages in name of development. It offers the readers a glimpse into the faults of dominant social groups, existing religious system, and economic arrangements. The agonies of the women from the social margins of rural India are depicted. The author has purposively intensified the sufferings of the women belonging to insignificant castes to make it a sad commentary on class differences in the region and the insincerity of prevailing cultural norms for people of different castes.

The opening paragraph of the story places Sanichari in her socio-economic milieu and makes it obvious that Sanichari is one of her social and religious community members with whom she shares the condition of poverty and miseries of untouchability.

In Tahad village, gangus and dushads were in the majority. Sanichari was a ganju by caste. Like the other villagers, her life too was lived in desperate poverty. Her mother-in-law used to say it was because Sanichari was born on inauspicious Saturday that her destiny was full of suffering... Sometimes the old woman's words came back to Sanichari. To herself, she would say-Huh! Because I was born on and named after a Saturday, that made me an unlucky daughter-in-law! You were born on a Monday-was your life any happier? Some, Budhua, Moongri, Bishri-do any of them have happier lives?" (Devi, *Rudali* 54).

Sanichari is named so because she was born on the unlucky day of the week i.e. Saturday or Sanichar. Her presence in the family is considered to be ominous portending some danger or misfortune. She is cursed, pestered and is

doomed to suffer. But she herself is a different viewpoint. She believes that those so called lucky women born on 'fortunate' days of the week are in no better position than she herself is in. It is not a matter of a day of one's birth rather one's economic condition rather he/she is living in.

Sanichari is not individualized in the story rather the author has deliberately placed 'Sanichari' in her social, economic and religious context to underline the fact that her problems are not individual rather these are common to her caste and gender. Devi is not interested in using her ink and space on drawing the multifaceted portrait of Sanichari with elaborated details of her physical form, her looks, her attire, her behaviour and her usage of language. The speech Sanichari uses, the dresses she wears and her manners seem like any of the other villagers of her social group. It is only when she meets her childhood friend Bikhni, Devi describes her in detail. Again the purpose of this description is to emphasize that she is similar in appearance to her friend and other women of her community. "They eyed each other closely before each relaxed in the realization that the other was no better off than her. Like Sanichari, Bikhni's wrists, throat and forehead sport no jewelry other than blue tattoo mark. Both wear pieces of cork in their ears instead of earrings, their hair is rough and ungroomed" (Devi 65).

Rudali becomes a sharply mocking tale of abuse and struggle, and above all, of endurance. Also, the characters become the powerful and realistic representatives of their particular castes and social groups. It seems derisive that in a country like India on one hand, women are considered as the incarnation of Goddess and on the other hand they become the victims of manifold violence perpetrated by the dominant groups. The heartrending scenes of oppression and

material violence have been depicted in the novel with a motif to underline the inhuman attitude of religious and social structures in power. The use of metaphors throughout the novel is quite relevant to emphasize the symbolic violence. The tranquil setting of the village is besieged with caste curses and various other examples of aggression. The way torturous and horrifying death of a low caste woman is explained is quite touching.

Her mother-in-law died in great pain, of dropsy, lying in her own excrement, crying out, over and over, 'food, give me food!' It was pouring that night. Sanichari and her sister-in-law lowered the old woman on to the ground. If the rites weren't carried out before the night was over they would have to bear the cost of the repentance rites for keeping the corpse in the house overnight. And there wasn't even a cupful of grain in the house! (55).

Tony Beck and Tirthankar Bose (1995) in “Dispossession, Degradation and Empowerment of Peasantry and the Poor in Bengali Fiction” are of view that “the plight of the muted and the silenced, the cause of the gendered subaltern, women's empowerment and radical feminist realism - these are some of the positions attributed to her fiction” (Beck and Bose 441-48).

The narrative technique employed in the novella offers us an instance of “anti-fiction”. No doubt, the author has used some important elements of fictional narrative yet she ignores the conventions of a story’ writing. The major part of work is written in form of journalistic writing with the purpose to report on the prevailing power structures in the isolated villages of North India in post-independence era. Devi has exposed the nexus of caste, phallogentrism, and

feudalism in a simple and touching lyrical style. Chowdhary (1997) in an article entitled “Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India” opines that “the nexus of caste, phallogentrism, and feudalism in this village, breaks the stereotypes of nationalist conceptions like Gandhian gram swaraj” (Chowdhary 1019-”8). The synthesis of caste, feudalism, and belief in male superiority shatter the myths about the patriotism and Gandhi's concept of village development, gram swaraj vanished away. These villages were ruled by despotic forces of caste, religion, ignorance, and patriarchy. Devi seems to be aware of her possible audience- a literate, urban readership- in making the narrative highly de-sentimentalized. The general perception of urban people about a village life as peaceful, prosperous, unchanging and rich in tradition is replaced with the author’s deep knowledge and experiences of corrupt ways of social and economic classes and “subaltern sized perception of power structures” (Katyal 3). Sekhar (2006) in “In Gender, Caste and Fiction: A Bahujan Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Rudali” states thus:

The tale told in the story is isolated and devoid of feelings and hopes. The time period shown is the post-independence era i.e. the second half of 20th century. At that time, in the remote villages of northern India, affiliations in social order and gender were the substantial realities and also were the significant factors in determining the human position and identity. The Tahad village is a perfect image of such a social system. Devi presents the miserable condition of Sanichari and other low caste women of this village where Brahmanic patriarchy and their superstitious thoughts are the governing authority over the lives and minds of people. (Sekhar 4422)

The Tahad village is governed by tyrannical and avaricious feudal lords; her village is a characteristic depiction of a group which does not allow women to mix with the upper classes. Upholding the cause of tribal in India, Mahasweta Devi has always been devoted to winning them the political, financial and social security. She is very much vocal about the fact that the tribal are being pushed out of the forests which are their natural habitat and source of livelihood. Uma Chakravarty (1993) in “Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State” states thus:

Devi explains the Brahmanic Hindu world in which a severe type of social categorization is put into practice due to which people of low castes especially women are subjected to the mortifying situation of existence. “Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of this social order. In this, even upper caste women are enslaved to maintain not only patrilineal succession but also caste purity. (Chakravarty 579-"5)

In her view, Devi in *Rudali* “portrays the low caste woman both as victim and as a potentially subversive agent in the phallogocentric order of Brahmanical patriarchy” (579-"5). B.R. Ambedkar states that “the Occidental autocracy of the village communities was the self-rule of caste, which was the ditch of regionalism and the den of ignorance and parochialism” (Ambedkar 34). One finds two reasons for Sanichari’s marginalization; one is that she is a female and other is that she is untouchable. Her life story is a distressing tale of exploitation and struggle for survival. Her mother-in-law was harsh to her when she was alive. When she died, Sanichari's husband and her brother were put into jail by Mahajan Ramavtar Singh,

a moneylender in the village. Sanichari was the only one to hurriedly make the arrangement for her cremation.

The text of the story witnesses growth and development in the central character 'Sanichari' who exhibits traits of new woman; better prepared to acclimatize, survive and use the prevailing cultural, social and religious system in power. Gradually, she becomes more empowered than she is at the beginning. Sanichari's friend 'Bihkni' is also an embodiment of new woman. She is empowered, self-sustained and vivacious. The continuous sufferings and the experience of injustice insensate and dehumanize a person. This reality is very well described and proved in almost all the scriptures. Sanichari too is presented as a protagonist who becomes inexpressive, devoid of her emotions and tears. When her husband dies of cholera after drinking the contaminated milk in the Baisakhi fair at Tohri, she has no time to mourn over his death. With the realization that she has to shoulder the duty of nurturing her six years old son Budhua, one finds the emergence of the new woman in her. Under the necessity of circumstances, she chooses to work rather than going by the unkind traditional norms of patriarchy. She doesn't weep because she has to make arrangement for his Saradh, a typical ceremony to feed the Brahmins after death. For this, she is compelled to raise a loan of twenty rupees. Ramavtar, the local moneylender pitilessly lends her twenty rupees and forces her to enter into a contract of bonded labor for five years. So, abject poverty and repeated disasters in her life have turned her insensitive and numb to the miseries. She has become so much used to the calamities that her husband Ganju's death, her son's running away from home and even her daughter in law leaving her to become a prostitute cannot arouse tears in her eyes. She is left with the very little hope of life.

To present her new women, Mahasweta Devi has used a significant means of narration i.e. the character of Dulan who belongs to the grassroots level. He is also poor and dejected but he has learned the ability to survive with the spiteful social and religious system. Dulan personifies the sharp acumen, the disrespect, doubt and resistance for the cunning power system. He is a given the role of motivator. Dulan is the key person who brings total transformation in the lives of Sanichari and Bikhni. It is he who at every step, helps in the growing development of Sanichari and teaches her how to adapt and cope. The first real conversation between Sanichari and Dulan exemplifies this. Dulan makes it a point to divert Sanichari's mind from helpless bereavement towards a consciousness that in reality she's annoyed with the wrongness of the system. Furthermore, he also presents her with the plan of turning the situation around so that she is able to use the system instead of just being exploited by it.

She told her fellow labourers, today I'm going to cry my heart out for Budhua's father. I am going to cry good and hard. Why are you going to cry today? Dulan ganju asks...You'll all go home with wages to show for your labour. I'm slaving to repay a debt. I'll go home with a handful of sattu-that's why I'll cry. Haven't I reason enough? So that's the real reason for your crying. Why drag your husband into it?And if you did, what would happen to your son Budhua? Don't talk nonsense. Now see here-so what if you've signed yourself into debt? Look at me. I do my work slowly, slowly. The longer I take, the longer I earn a daily wage. Why are you killing yourself over that bastard's fields? Take it easy. As long as there's work, there's something for the stomach. That day, too, Sanichari didn't cry. (Devi, *Rudali* 57-8)

In every tense moment of her life, Dulan mediates to counsel, assist, instruct and inform. The author refuses to bring to the forefront various gender-based issues. "That Dulan might be perceived as a male playing mentor and guide to helpless females is not a concern of author's and as a Dulan and Sanichari interact as peers, unselfconsciously free from any hint of asymmetry" (Katyal 10).

When Budhua dies and Sanichari is isolated by her daughter-in-law, with an infant grandson to bring up, it is Dulan who gets her a repairing job on the railway line. When her grandson Haroa turns fourteen, Sanichari gets him a job with Malik-Mahajan Lachman Singh. Haroa does the job seriously and efficiently just for a few months but with the passage of time, he gets fed up and restless with the kind of job. Because of his wistful and daring nature, one day he runs away from the job with a magic show group. Sanichari is astounded. She experiences the pain of the cruel blow of destiny and strives hard to find Haroa. She goes from market to market in search of him but in vain. Miseries of life had made her a hardened woman so she doesn't cry for Haroa too.

Then enters Bikhni in her life. She is an old classmate and a childhood friend. Everyone calls her Kalikambli because she always wears a ghagra made out of the black quilt. Both mates rediscover each other. Though Bikhni and Sanichari are not relatives to each other yet their elderly looks, isolation, anxiety, torments of fate and cruel feudal system connect them together. Both have been deserted by their family members. Both are simple, accommodating and helpful. A new dawn comes in the life of Sanichari who needs the moral support very badly. Their reunion is of immense value in the novel as the story takes a U- turn by the appearance of Bikhni in the isolated world of Sanichari. They provide each other

much-needed company and pool their resources to struggle with poverty and desolation. Sanichari invites her to share her little cottage and in return, Bikhni gave her nest egg: twenty rupees. Both the old and dejected tell the tales of their woes, shares their experiences in a touching simple dialect. Sanichari told her about Haroa, about herself about everything. Bikhni listened to her patiently and said: "Is there no caring left in this world? Or is it just our fate, yours and mine?" (65). Sanichari simply laughed as a helpless woman bitterly summing up her sufferings: "No husband, no son, wherever my grandson is, may he be safe" (65). Bikhni is contented in Sanichari's house. She loves housework. For some days both of them ate Bikhni's money. When Bikhni's resources run out, Sanichari feels as if the sky has fallen on her head. She comes up with an idea and tells Bikhni "Come, let's go to see Dulan. He is a crafty old rogue, but he has a sharp mind. He's sure to show us a way" (68). They go to Dulan for guidance. "Dulan spoke in a cold, expressionless tone. Budhua's ma, I'm not asking you to shed the tears you couldn't shed for Budhua. These tears are your livelihood-you'll see, just as you cut wheat and plough land, you'll be able to shed these tears. He suggests that they should hire themselves out as rudalis" (70). Dulan persuades Sanichari and Bikhni to take up professional mourning as their livelihood. He teaches them to turn grief into a salable commodity. Initially, Sanichari expresses her uneasiness about this profession. She instantly reacts "Cry? Don't you know? Can't I shed tears? These two eyes of mine are scorched?" (70) Dulan listens to her tolerantly and explains the things in a sensible way: "Budhua's ma; I am not asking you to shed the tears you couldn't shed for Budhua. These are your livelihood you'll see; just as you cut wheat and plough land, you'll be able to shed tears" (70).

Sanichari becomes thoughtful and got convinced by the practical arguments of Dulan. She thinks that perhaps her tears have been set aside for the time when she would have to feed herself by selling them. She has a great pool of tears and they can be sold in the open market. This was a new radical idea given by Dulan. He clears all her doubts and makes her realize that no work can be labeled as good or bad it comes to the question of satiating one's appetite. "If your mind is pure, the Ganga flows even through the wood. Look here, Budhua's ma, there is no bigger God than one's belly. For the belly's sake, everything is permissible. Ramji Maharaj said so... Amongst us, when someone dies, we all mourn. Amongst the rich, family members are too busy trying to find the keys to the safe. They forget all about tears... They have got hold of two whores. In the household of the masters, whores weep for the dead. These two were Bhairab Singh's whores at one time. Now they are wizened crows. They will be no good the two of you go, wail, cry, and accompany the corpse. You will get money, rice. On the day of the Kriya ceremony, you will get clothes and food" (69-0).

Like a great teller of history, Dulan thinks that "there is no revolution without memory." He narrated the old historical stories to put heroism and courage in Bikhni and Sanichari. He tries to put in great courage and audacity in Bikhni and Sanichari through telling various historical tales. He discussed with them the heroism of tribal leaders Harda and Donka Munda who laid down their lives for the tribal cause. He condemned the Malik-Mahajan who are bloodthirsty, avaricious and oppressive:

They have elephants, horses, livestock, illegitimate children, kept women, venereal diseases and a philosophy that who owns the gun owns the land... The tale Dulan told them was very significant; it explained clearly how the ruthless Rajputs infiltrated this remote area of tribals and from zamindars gradually built themselves up to the status of moneylenders and established themselves as the masters of the area” (73).

Through this, he succeeds in diverting their mind and makes them powerful women as they learn the tactic of survival by fighting with the despairing situation. In the first instance, the two women do their job well as rudalis. Dulan instructs them how to continue successfully in the profession of mourning. He exhorts them to organize a group of professional mourners by hiring rudalis from the market of prostitutes so that they are able to exploit the corrupt malik Mahajan who are pretentious and can do anything for the sake of fake morality. They are advised to remain alert and informed about the rich persons who are either ill or on death bed.

Devi has highlighted the courage and strength of Sanichari and Bikhni in turning the professional mourning into a regular business. What is of interest in the story is the way Sanichari and Bikhni cash the chance to exploit their masters by turning a social ritual into a profession. In the feudal society, the death of a family member is the juncture for establishing caste superiority and honour. The loss of dear ones is simply an opportunity for the family members to calculate the amount of wealth they will be inheriting in legacy so they will have no time and real concern to express their grief. They lament not for the dead but in fear of losing their caste peculiarity and social advantages attached to it: “Hai, Chacha! As long

as you were alive, the lower castes never dared raise their heads. For fear of you the sons of dushads and ganjus never dared attend government schools! Now, who will take care of all these things?" (68). The loud wailing shall raise their social prestige so the professional mourners will have to be hired from the market at any cost. The funeral of the dead becomes a formal occasion for the false show of the caste affiliation, superiority and wealth of the dead person: "We must perform the ceremonies and burial with pomp and splendor. Dress up the body, place him on a big bed and inform our entire Rajput clan" (68). So, the feudal lords spend huge sums of money on death ceremonies just to increase their social stature. Though the price for this is indirectly paid by the low caste people like dushads, dhobis, ganjus and kols in form of monetary interest, slavery and bonded labor. Feudal lords believe that just as they can have all goods and services traded in the market they can also have their grief traded through rudalis.

The outcasts and marginalized can easily supply their skilled labor for this. Sanichari and Bikhni become a professional team and perform their role with zeal and commitment. They learn the strategy of survival and have mastered the art of rudali.

The gomastha would agree to everything himself. What option did they have? Everyone wanted them after seeing their performance at Bhairab Singh's funeral. They were professional. The world belongs to the professional now, not to the amateur. In big cities, the prosperous prostitutes competed for such jobs. In this region, it is Sanichari who has taken up this business. After all, this is not the big city. There are no prosperous prostitutes thronging Tohri. So, he has to agree to Sanichari's demands. (74)

If Malik-Mahajan's have turned the grief into commodity and mourning into labour, Sanichari has also determined the rates of her business services. This exemplifies her empowerment and her potential in exploiting the system rather than getting exploited by it.

Just for wailing, one kind of rate. Wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees one sikka. Wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees one sikka, five rupees two sikkas. Wailing and rolling on the ground, five rupees one sikka. Wailing and rolling on the ground, accompanying the corpse to the cremation ground, rolling around on the ground there-for that the charge is six rupees. At the kriya ceremony, we want cloth, preferably a length of plain black cloth.

(75)

Slowly their professional group becomes famous and they have limited time for so many arrangements. There develops a trend among the rich classes to spend massive money in the funeral procession and other death related ceremonies because it has become a symbol of social esteem and no one was ready to look meager in the eyes of the relatives. Rudalis are not low-priced but their services are valued by all rich people as their presence is the symbol of status and prestige. The rudalis would weep and wail and hit their head in the dust, would beat their breasts to create the mourning atmosphere. Their realistic cries, tears, and screams added new seriousness during the funeral procession. There was a time when bangles or combs were a luxury for Sanichari but now with the growing business of professional mourning life became very comfortable. "Business prospered. There was such a demand for the pair who wailed at Bhairab Singh's funeral, that it was

almost like a war of prestige. Soon not just the landlords and moneylenders, but lalas and sahus began to ask for Sanichari” (75).

The title ‘Rudali’ means ‘the crier’. It reminds the readers of keeners or carpideiras, the professional women mourners who moan at cremation for money. It arouses in the mind of readers a question whether this culture of professional mourning ever existed in history. After reading the story, the reader is convinced that this culture was very much existent in Rajasthan. In the state of Rajasthan, Rudali is the name used to tag the group of those low-caste women who perform mourning dances and songs at the death and memorial service of men from influential families of a higher caste. This forced misery is called the ‘Rudali’ work. Upper castes need rudalis to wail over the dead body. Slight information exists on these rudali women, particularly in terms of academic research that involves close scrutiny of the lives of these women and the mourning songs and dances they perform. Mahasweta Devi has described the lives of her characters with such vivacity that it comes out almost as ethnography of the women. She very artistically describes the mourning performance of rudali women. Sanichari is conscious about the fact that the everyday’s struggle for survival, the realism of injustice and double standards that disgrace and dehumanize women when she says, “Their grief must have hardened into stone within them. To herself, Sanichari had sighed with relief. Is it possible to feed so many mouths on the meager scrapings they bring home after laboring on the malik's field? Two dead, just as well. At least their own stomachs would be full” (55).

Sanichari is not destined to enjoy peace and bliss of life as Nature is always against her. She is like Tess of Hardy fighting a lost battle as dice is loaded against

her. Budhua falls seriously ill and there is no hope of his survival. She valued her son so much that she is desperate and restless when it came to the experience of losing him:

The day-not just that day, for several days before that Budhua's condition, had worsened. The Vaid's medicine was not working, Sanichari asked her to stay with Budhua. She herself went, running all the way she went to ask the Vaid for some other medicine. She went even though she knew that no medicine could help him now.

(61)

Sanichari is totally traumatized with her son Budhua's death. Her daughter-in-law abandons her leaving her baby crying on the floor. This touching scene of death and alienation could move anyone but it didn't move the heart of Sanichari. She didn't mourn at all rather she busied herself cremating Budhua with the small baby in her arms. The loss of Budhua was the loss of a sympathetic, supportive and caring companion without whom she could not imagine a life: "She could not remember a time when he wasn't there with her. While she slaved in the Malik-mahajan's fields, he would clean the house and fetch water from the river. He would take the grains of wheat and corn scavenged from the dusty fields and washes them clean in the river. Gentle, quiet, understanding- the son of a suffering mother" (61).

Sanichari knows well how to grab a situation to meet her own objective. When Ramavtar's uncle is in her death bed, she thinks it as a fair chance for her to get her loan waived off. She makes an appealing request to Ramavtar to waive off

her debt, and it is granted. Ramavtar gets fifty bighas of land with the death of his uncle, so the petty amount of twenty rupees is insignificant for him.

Mahasweta Devi has also emphasized the significance of community in the empowerment of Sanichari. In spite of her growing business, Sanichari have always considered the values like community bonding, support, partnership and fraternity as the essential tools of survival. When Dulan advises her to become a rudali, she immediately reacts as one worry always remains in her mind. “Won’t the village speak ill of me? Dulan laughs bitterly, ‘What one is forced to do to feed oneself is never considered wrong.’ She has always put a premium on community support and approval; Dulan’s encouragement reassures her, and thereafter the Shanichari we see is confident, uninhibited and canny” (Katyul 11). Sanichari understands the support of her people in her tough times when she found herself alienated. She points out: “There are some debts that can never be repaid...if her fellow-villagers had not rallied around in their manner, would Sanichari have survived?” (Devi, *Rudali* 62) Sainchari was fully aware of the need of the help of her community in crisis. “Without cooperation and mutual support, it was difficult to survive in the village even on milk and ghee provided by the Malik-mahajans” (62). In due course of time, Sanichari felt normal again. She brought up Haroa as best as she could. The community elders often tell *Haroa*: “Your grandmother has suffered a lot. Don’t you give her trouble now?” (63). One day Dulhan’s wife Dhatua and Latua’s mother visited her cottage. Dhatua’s wife had kept Haroa alive. Prabhu ganju also helped her by saying: “You are completely alone now. You are like an aunt to me, why don’t you shift your hut into my yard?” (62). Natua dushad sold his vegetables for her in the market since Budhua was no more. Undoubtedly, the work *Rudali* lays thrust on the issues of class and community

than women's issues in isolation still it carries a special place in any discourse on feminism. It traces the growing empowerment of Sanichari helped by Bikhni's more audacious and supple approach towards new ideas and avenues.

One day Bikhni announces that she wishes to go to Ranchi to meet her son. Sanichari feels lonely after Bikhni's going away. "At home, Sanichari felt restless. Out of habit she went into the forest to collect firewood and returned with a bundle of dried twigs. Bikhni would never return empty handed" (85). Then comes the news of Bikhni's death. Sanichari experiences a landslide within her heart and mind. Once again her hopes once again have been shattered. But many demises, deceptions, and wrongs have hardened her and raised her fortitude and strength of mind: "What did she feel; Grief? Fear. Her husband had died, her son had died, her grandson had left, her daughter-in-law had run away there had always been grief in her life. But she never felt this devouring fear before. Bikhni's death affected her livelihood, her profession, that's why she's experiencing this fear. And why, after all? Because she's old" (88).

If Sanichari had survived so much grief, she will survive the loss of Bikhni also. She is totally broken but she won't cry: "Money, rice new clothes without getting these in return, tears are a useless luxury" (89). She went to see Dulan who kept quiet and said: "Budhua's ma. It's wrong to give up one's land, and our profession wailing is like your land, you must not give it up" (89). Dulan again plays a key role in putting courage in Sanichari. He advises her to work hard and mobilize resources for the growth of her profession. Just as when her husband died she took over his work in the malik-mahajans fields to survive. Now after the death of Bikhni her group must go on, she must take up the work of Bikhni which

means engaging prostitutes of Tohri. He advises her to go to Runddipati and employ some whores in her team. Dulan insists her to involve her daughter-in-law Pratibha also in the profession. She is young and full of energy; she would be very useful for the growth of rudali profession. Dulan tells her that all prostitutes are very poor and wretched; they need money very badly and are the victims of the feudal lords. They would find a new avenue of life by joining her. She must argue with them and with the help of her daughter-in-law. It would not be a difficult task for her to win their support. They would find a new avenue of life.

Thus, Dulan's ideas encourage her and she becomes more confident and resolute in her business enterprise. All her inhibitions are removed and she becomes self assured. She invites two girls, Pratibha and Gulbadand, encourages them to join the team, and narrate all the future plans in open manner. She convinces them saying that the marketable system of wailing is a cunning way to settle scores with feudal lords who had subjugated and tortured them sexually since ages. Her approach is socialistic as she convinces them that this profession would safeguard them in calamity. It is a lifelong profession in which they would gain popularity and social status since they would work in the houses of the rich people. They would no longer be the victims of hatred. They could manipulate the situation and exploit the sentiments of the rich lords who had exploited them; they could trap them in their own hypocrisy. It will be a profitable business and there will be no competition in it. In old age too, they would earn their honourable living as it would empower them. She explains to them the truth how Bikhni had helped her and made a comfortable living. Through the serious efforts of Sanichari and Bikhni, the custom of the rudali got politicized.

It is just not an instrument of empowerment but a subaltern tool of revenge. At Gambhir Singh's funeral, gomashta commented thus: "Have you brought the entire red-light district with you? At least a hundred whore! Sanichari said Why not? Malik said, make a great noise, a big fuss, something people will talk about. Is that possible with mere ten whores?" (98).

Chapter – 3**The Emergence of Shobha De's New Urban women:
An analysis of *Socialite Evenings* and
*Starry Nights***

Indian literature in English has been developed by a number of brilliant women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahyagal, Attain Hossain, Santharamarau, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De. All these writers have a women standpoint on the world and their writings revolve around the Indian women, their struggle, their sufferings and their strange position, keeping in view their image and role which the society has created. The major contribution of these writers has been their investigation of the moral strength of their female characters and their struggle with challenges and hurdles in establishing their own existence. Shobha De has been one among them. Shobha De has been a vibrant star of nearly three decades. She has been the ruling deity of the written world for so many years. Phyllis Chubb remarks that “her fiery ascendant Sagittarius, as an odd numbered sign, sets the stage for an independent, open-minded, frank, generous, sympathetic, and truthful and just one individual” (Chubb: 2002).

Shobha Rajadhyaksha is well celebrated by the name Shobha De in the field of Indian English fiction. De has been a vibrant star for nearly three decades and the ruling deity of the written world. For years she has defined what society has been about and focused on the world of man and matters. Gifted with a versatile personality, she has excelled in the different roles: a prolific writer, celebrity journalist, contemporary satirist, super-model, magazine editor,

columnist, social commentator, TV scriptwriter, wife, and mother. Born in 1948 in Maharashtrian Brahmin Family, Shobha did her studies in Delhi and Mumbai with graduation in Psychology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.

A selling novelist, she is undoubtedly, one among them most read Indian writers, who take up a unique position in literary circles. An extraordinarily talented writer, she has a knack to talk about sensitive issues of human life considerately. It is only because of her outstanding dialogues, realistic representations and convincing mode of narration on each and every aspect of the human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular, De has reached the stature of best-selling writers in India. Almost all her novels won her worldwide recognition and made new records. On the basis of themes dealt, her novels can be classified into three categories: firstly, *Socialite Evenings* (1989) and *Second Thoughts* (1996) are built on the themes of patriarchy, marriage and family, search for identity & survival and marginality. The novels *Starry Nights* (1992), *Sisters* (1992) and *Strange Obsession* (1992) revolve around the life in Bollywood and focus mainly on lust and sex. Finally, the novels *Sultry Days* (1994) and *Snapshots* (1995) highlight the liberation of women and project the ultra-modern lifestyle of neo-rich people. DeepaTyagi (2014) rightly states thus:

She has thrived on a well as survive the Polaris responses – the highest praise and the vilest criticism. Given to controversies, her literary status as a serious writer with social consciousness has been subjected to endless debates, ranging from heat to the most-heated arguments between her passionate adulators and merciless detractors. With three of her novels *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry*

Nights and Sisters, taken up as course materials by The School of Oriental African Studies and a few Indian Universities, Shobha De is viewed seriously as a writer of literary and social worth. (Tyagi 234)

During her lifetime, Shobha De has been an eyewitness to various social evils which have plagued the Indian society for last many centuries. In India, the birth of a son is always appreciated and celebrated with huge pomp and glory. It is believed that a son will be a breadwinner to the family whereas on the contrary, the birth of a girl child is thought to be a burden on the family. Here, a girl child since her birth was taught to comply with the orders of male members of the family. In certain states, after the death of her husband, the wife was supposed to go to the funeral pyre as satis. It was a cruel custom given the form of *Pativrata Dharma*. The orthodox society always used to justify it by giving the reasons that were for very weird to appreciate. A widow in young age was thought to be a burden to the family as she might bring a bad name to the family and society by her happens to be young she might be a slur on the family by her objectionable behavior. Even in 20th century, a sati case in Rajasthan shook the entire country. The burning of Roop Kunwar, a young wife, on the funeral pyre of her husband, only proves how rigid and cruel our society is even when science has pronounced such age-old thinking to be futile and damaging to the society. Shobha De is distressed to see that traditions exercise a huge control over the Indian society, especially on its women folk. Furthermore, our society is fundamentally a Hindu society where females are considered to be the preserver of the family and are expected to abide by the customs and traditions every minute in every domain of life. They are supposed to make any kind of sacrifice for the sake of their family yet they are

given a position inferior to men. Even in 20th century, a sati case in Rajasthan shook the entire country.

A number of social reformists have done tremendous work a lot in the direction of changing this attitude of hatred and neglect towards the woman. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekananda, Raja Rammohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Keshav Chandra Sen and others tried to eradicate *Sati Pratha*, *Child marriage*, *dowry system* and other social evils thereby, bringing the liberation of women. The accessibility of education was not only restricted to men but also to women's too. Swami Vivekananda used to give great Importance to women. In his view, "all nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which did not respect women has never become great, nor will ever in future. The principal reason why your race is so much degraded is that you had no respect for these living images of Shakti" (Vivekananda 57).

The different mindset and stance of some of the notable women reformists including Anandibai Joshi, Mrs. Annie Besant, so on and so forth also brought a change in the literary style of thought and expression. Right from the start of the genre, Indian English novelists have projected the females and female experiences from behind the cover of a patriarchal society with deep and compassionate consideration. The social reformer cum author Raja Rao offered an early model of the 'Vedic woman' who was the maker of the home and guardian of her culture. Though this image has been ruling our much-admired perception yet the appalling social truth exists. Women here do endure, resist, and bleed. Narayan through his women characters 'Rosy', 'Daisy' and 'Savitri', Nayantara Shegal's 'Rashmi' and

'Smriti' has shown in some ways their non-acceptance of the system. The female protagonists of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Namita Gokhale also have expressed the continuing psychic predicament of the women that becomes the reason for their unusual behavior. However, the writers like Manju Kapur and Shobha De have effectively brought in the emergence of the New Indian Women. They often try to highlight the dreams, challenges, values, lifestyles, struggles, and predicament of contemporary urban women from within the multifaceted structures of feminine consciousness. Meera K. Bai (1991) rightly observes:

Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and code and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men and reactions to familial frictions, are certainly traditionalists. Those who defy traditions and opt for modernity are non-conformists. Conformity to a pattern does not mean dumb acceptance of all that is thrust on them. It takes for granted a certain degree of willingness and whole-hearted acceptance. Conformists hold on to the set of traditional values! Sometimes, even at the cost of individual happiness. A tradition-abiding woman even sacrifices her happiness for the well-being of the family, but at the same time retains her individuality. (Bai 35)

Shobha De has introduced the new development in her feminist standpoint. Through her novels, she tries to smash the insensitive, vulgar and heartless attitude of men towards women. De, in particular, has revealed female miseries, their confused state of mind and conjugal conflicts. She has departed away from presenting a conventional picture of Indian women being submissive, enduring and

self-sacrificing to a more complex, split among various opposite forces struggling to give identity and meaning to her life. She genuinely understands the concerns of women and expresses an urge to remove all forms of suppression so that they could breathe in an environment of liberty, self-esteem, and parity with their male counterpart. She writes in a realistic manner and never cares for prosaic or ornamental descriptions. De presents the woman's revolt against the patriarchal structures and claims that women are no longer doormats to be walked upon and contaminated. Her female protagonists are the trendsetters who no longer, surrender before the age-old traditional values and social rituals. The coming generations of women will consider them as pioneers and will walk on their steps.

Among the contemporary novelists, Shobha De has become the first one to search the world of urban women of higher social segments and analyze the possibility of absolute freedom for women beyond the constraints of a patriarchal society and the conditions imposed by her own biological nature. Her significant interpretations on the new rising woman of contemporary global India imply that she focuses more on the reflection of the woman. She presents a wide variety of women from the conventional, dominated and marginalized to awfully modern and free. She explored the lives of bored housewives, their loveless rich husbands, and their families. The well grown upper class in Urban Indian society forms the fictional corpus of most of her novels. She is assiduous and unimpeded in the presentation of the lifestyles of the affluent nobility in general and the women in particular. De's elite and educated women of the upper-class family are caught in the social institution of the marriage for the sake of money and honor. The simple mockery with which De demolishes all traditional restraints to create healthy and

appalling physical scenes to sell her novels stimulates a deeper feeling of fear and suspicion. It indeed calls for a lot of guts in a conventional society like India to confidently write anything on erotic extra-marital affairs as she does time and again. Her books throw a balanced look on upper middle class India from a woman's perspective and amazingly no one has ever done this before. And in the course, she exposes those intimidating facets of India's age-old culture that makes the most expected part of a marketable work. In fact, her standing goes before her as she has been the most over-hyped or under-estimated Indian English woman writer today. Sarala Devi (2013) rightly states thus:

Shobha De has become the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of woman's freedom and liberation. She conceives the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the traditional and moral values in society. This is one of the most important aspects of her feminism. Her women are daring and courageous in establishing extra-marital affairs to satisfy their natural urge. These women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to get the social and financial benefit. Marriage for them is an insurance against social values. (Devi 253)

What makes Shobha De's writings different from other Indian women novelists is her absolutely frank manner of narration and open-heartedness. Vats in "Purification: Starry Nights" (2009) rightly opines thus:

Provocative yet prim Shobha De has given a new, even if controversial, idiom to Indian writing in English. She has in fact wedded the conventional literary realism to the market pragmatism,

and has, in the process fudged the boundaries between the highbrow and the popular to create an inclusive readership. Yet she is a very serious writer. (Vats 162)

She is a forthright and honest writer who has completely changed the meaning of literature by raising the interest of readers in English pulp fiction. She believes women equal to their counterpart physically, politically, economically and socially. Her works have generally been branded as vulgar and pornographic. Such disparaging comments on her novels never hindered her persistent writing. But a large number of urban educated populations appreciated her for her audacity in dealing with the man-woman proposition in an open manner. In De's fiction, one doesn't find any reservation and panic of condemnation from typical conservative readers for using sexually overt words. Her works are captivating because they carry a discourse on a day to day moral values and knock the human sensitivity and mentality directly.

Any discourse on the growth and development of 'new women' immediately brings to the mind the fiction of Shobha De. The way of life of new women is fascinating and enticing to any middle class educated an urban woman. De in her novels has an image of woman highlighted with special significance. She has created quite unusual characters and values of a new woman whom she incessantly depicts in almost all her novels.

A woman in her novels has been termed as 'New Woman' as she is sexually liberal, peculiar, self-centered free individual. She is garlanded in a different way with ideas and values. She is a strong contender and equivalent associate in any enterprise. The new woman is not husband worshipper rather she

regards him as her companion in ups and downs of life. She enjoys excessive freedom and carelessness. She wants to be listened to by the society, hardly matters their voices are received by attentive or deaf ears. Shobha De (1996) herself states thus:

Eventually, every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level ... Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women's destinies have been determined largely in that context alone... It is the time they were made aware of their own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of overall human development. The very concept of sexes locked in eternal battle is negative and destructive. When one talks of Shakti unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of Shakti ... The destructive avatar is as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that leads to creative and dynamic harmony... Men will have to come to terms with women power. (Shobha De 111)

These so called new women are far more physically active and supplely stronger than their mothers. Feminist New Style, a journal (1927) declared that "The new woman is a blend of physical freedom, sexuality, and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can combine pleasure, career and marriage. They are eager to participate in pleasure as they would do in play, work etc" (Shukla 116). De's female protagonists defy the conventional social laws. Both in their actions and looks, they differ from sexually

unaware traditional Indian women who believe sex to be an objectionable weakness to man's longing essential to have progeny. De's women are far more confident, overbearing and daring in comparison to men. They are not passive and culpable of their affairs. They re-create their destiny; put in their best on maintaining their physical beauty by losing weight and spending a lot on their beauty parlors and cosmetics. They try to look and act differently from the conventional and traditional women. They feel at the top of the world to find men falling madly in love with them and they are least bothered about it. De has in fact articulated her own feminist mindset while creating her female characters. She does not like showing her women characters as ones who are so docile and sacrificing in their amorous love affairs or sheer domestic work assistants at home. An extensive evaluation of her novels speaks about her protest against the good old image of a woman who can't live the way she wants to and do things the way she wants to.

Since ages, it is the women's economic dependence on men that resulted in her dismal condition. In today's world, it is firmly believed that a woman should settle herself economically in order to get rid of dependence on a man and to create a space for herself. So, successful working women are no more utopian ideas. Financial autonomy is the most important constituent and the most authoritative means for women in their continual resistance against patriarchy and their journey towards self-actualization. Economic independence refers to a state where both men and women have equal and own right of entry to the total variety of economic prospects and assets, including employment, services, and adequate non-refundable income so that they become able to form their lives and can meet their own requirements and needs of their dependants. The feminists have attached huge

significance to women's economic independence as it works as a persuasive instrument of empowering women. Simone de' Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), breaks away the slight layer of the ubiquitous social arrangement and infuses wisdom and firmness in women to rebel and reject the male authority. The critic emphasizes on the identical distribution of power among men and women. She insists women develop their own figurative order when she says that females can only free themselves by "thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men" (Beauvoir 727). Obviously, the feminist thinkers have attached great significance to economic independence as it acts as a potent tool for empowering women.

Shobha De has also tried to add an additional feature to the personality of her new women by bringing in the economic factor as an indispensable part of their power struggle in society. She firmly believes that the equal allocation of power between men and women is indispensable for a healthy society and women cannot attain existence until or unless they are economically reliant. Her works may be considered as the beginning of a new realization among women about their economic standing and their anxiousness about redefining their identities. This newly realized sensibility garbs the women in the immaculate armour of self-assurance and sharpens their ability of psychoanalysis and assessment with an open perspective. De questions the subjugation of a woman in a male-dominated society and inspires women to come out of their protection shield and face the real world. Women must develop in themselves qualities such as command, capability, confidence, and boldness as these traits have always been considered as the special inheritance and safeguard of men. Eventually, in her work *Selective Memory*:

Stories From My Life (1998), De states thus: “everything boils down to money—that great leveler. There can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self-sufficiency. An independent mind or free spirit is meaningless so long as the body and soul are being kept together by somebody else” (Shobha De 110).

Shobha De has realistically presented in her fiction the models of different types of new women. She has formed her new women in a frame the way an article entitled *Feminist-New Style* in Harper Magazine describes her:

The newly-evolved modern be a composite figure, a boyish girl who combines the flapper’s physical freedom, sexuality and stamina with feminist-self assertiveness, and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can happily combine pleasure, career, and marriage. To the advanced young man of the time, this new woman seems the perfect companion fearless, bright and eager to participate in work, in play, in marital sex. We know this image might be admired but easily accepted by Indian male. (qtd. in Shukla 116)

These women are tough in character and are courageous enough to take a life to change decisions to endure in society. Her female characters are intensely career-oriented. Almost every woman character in her novels has a craving for authority to govern money-matters, enjoys that authority and even fights to acquire and retain such authority. It is in this pursuit, she opts for the sensational and demanding careers of modeling, acting, journalism, designing, advertising, direction and even big business ventures. These career options require these new women to show an inclination towards flamboyancy, western & sophisticated ways

of life where there is hardly any room for traditions and rituals. To the conventional middle-class Indian society, this subverted kind of lifestyle is very unwanted. That's why, they have been labeled with the adjectives like 'modern', 'westernized' and even 'characterless'. Despite these labels, De's new women remain focused and do not allow any such question of morality and ethics intrude in their way and move successfully on the difficult lane of their tough careers. They work harder to establish themselves as economically independent. They are generally well-established women with high profile careers. Her new women are none other than the ones represented in the day-to-day wall-posters in public streets.

The present research work makes a thorough study of new women presented by Shobha De in the novels *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights*. The work seeks to explore various circumstances that call upon De's new women act the way they do and also tries to observe through the keyhole the author's ideological cohabitation with the challenging and the propagandist. *Socialite Evenings* is De's very first novel published in 1989. The novel is what Deepa Tyagi (2014) states that "a memoir, the life-so-far of a Mumbai socialite" (Tyagi 234).

The novel underlines the ethical, religious and academic depravity of privileged & influential who have acquired westernization and modernization at the stake of their traditional values. The story is built around the elite society of Mumbai with its focus on the lifestyle of rich housewives caught in loveless marriages, their arrogant self-centered husbands, their miserable extra-marital affairs, stylish gatherings and fake religious leaders. The novel presents an honest and frank image of an upper middle class of Mumbai society by exposing its

hidden follies and hypocrisies. By entering into the world of unusual luxury and moral decadence, the women of the upper middle class from Mumbai defeat their male counterparts in style and fashion. And finally, they make their path to success.

Through the first-person narration, readers are made to see the metamorphosis in the life of protagonist Karuna; her journey from an uncouth middle-class girl to becoming a successful and rich model and then to becoming a self-reliant Bombay socialite woman. A clear dissection of Karuna's whole life into three parts- life before marriage, life in marriage and life after divorce from her husband is an informative account of her desires and disappointment. The need for individuality is the chief encouraging force throughout Karuna's life. Miles (1990) states thus Perhaps the most ubiquitous and enduring theme in the novel is the search for identity and selfhood. (Miles 61)

A person enjoys a satisfactory identity when he feels a sense of belongingness within his/her interpersonal social or religious or professional group. The mutual understanding within the interpersonal relationships becomes a source of self-confidence and delight which further act as encouragement and guiding strength of life. Deepa Tyagi (2014) rightly states that "the lack of association and mutual concern gives rise to separation, puts a stop on an individual's sense of merit and isolates him from his "real self". It also spoils the interpersonal relationships and ultimately obstructs the growth towards self-actualization or self-fulfillment" (Tyagi 235).

Examined from this perspective, the flashback into nearly twenty years of Karuna's life revolves around her incapability to accept wholeheartedly the

prevalent value system of the middle-class in her attempts to find an identity for herself. Initially, it assumes the form of the need to be “special” –“a different girl” and continues throughout her youth. After marriage, she finds herself on the edge of losing her sense of identity. The fear of being dispossessed of an identity and reluctance to give up her “uniqueness” make her feel the need for identity so anxiously and her condition becomes distressing. In the third stage of her life i.e. after her divorce, Karuna’s efforts to style her identity becomes more propelling, more commanding and more mature. Urbashi Barat (2000) writes in her “From Victim to Non-Victim: Socialite Evenings as a Version of Kiinstlerroman” (2000) states thus:

Incorporated into the matrix of Karuna’s need for identity are the other needs like the need for love and companionship, the need for security, the need for self-esteem and above all the need for self-fulfillment leading to self-actualization. (Barat 121)

Karuna's desire for building an identity and the subsequent search for it becomes noticeable even in her shaping years of adolescence approximately between twelve and nineteen years of age. The period being the most momentous fragment in the register of human life remains the focus of psychologists and behaviorists as the development of new proportions of beliefs and deeds is recognized during this time. Belonging to a traditional middle-class family, Karuna has been a problem child both at home and at school. She refused to accept and learn the conventional code of propriety and good manners. Her wish to be observed and acknowledged by others keeps fuming within and often gets sparks in the form of petty actions of disobedience to parents like screeching, being

disrespectful towards relatives, an argument with elders and too much indulgence in the reading of comics. At home, her little misdemeanor is reprimanded as defiance. The way of dressing has always been an important tool at Karuna's disposal in asserting her identity. Despite her parent's criticism, she used to wear sash hipsters in the school to look have an appearance that would declare her different from others. With the rising age, there grows in her an emotional curiosity to identify herself with the outside modern world, the all entralling world of rich girls who had their vulgar and underground business of modeling with her secret assignment as the Terkosa Girl. After her bureaucrat father's posting in Mumbai, the family gets shifted to the city. The magnetic and sparkling life of glamor world of Mumbai entices Karuna so much that she mingles in the circle of Mumbai high society. She feels that the harsh and dry ambiance of her home and her insignificant social status do not offer her suitable avenues for recognition and satisfaction. She feels that she can get away from her dreary middle-class life by achieving the rich and wealthy life of a celebrity. She hugs tightly the aristocratic lifestyle of the Mumbai socialites sacrificing her moral and ethical values. First, Karuna becomes anxious about her body and outward appearance. Karuna's yearnings "...to be part of the smart and beautiful set..." and her unwillingness to be contented with her middle-class status causes great anxiety. To cope with anxiety, she builds up an ideal image of herself as a different person from others and wages a relentless battle to see herself higher than others. She asserts, "I wanted to be different because I wasn't rich". She was "...oppressed at home and hungering for things she didn't have" (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 2-7). Karuna doesn't share understanding and affection with her sisters rather she befriends the

unruly and bitter Charlie, her classmate. She hugs tightly the aristocratic lifestyle of the Mumbai socialites sacrificing her moral and ethical values. She externalizes the consciousness of her sexual identity by developing a love relationship with Bunt, which is again a step ahead in her rebelliousness. Here, Karuna becomes an appropriate instance of Karen Horney's belief that "a human being has two selves: the real self i.e a self that is possible to actualize and an idealized self, one that can never be realizable" (qtd. in Ridgway 5). Neurosis occurs when one lives "with an appearance of an impossible self-followed by the actual self which is despised because it falls far short of the possibilities of the ideal. Hence Neurotics are always divided people, divided with themselves... Their wishes are scattered and go off in different directions because they have no inner sense of coherence" (qtd. in Ridgway 5). In her fundamental actions or attitude towards others, Karuna moves away from her real self and creates a self-inflating idealized image of herself.

Fed on the illusory stuff of the Silhouette romances, Karuna develops a distorted concept of identity and betrays a proclivity for fantasizing about... holiday bungalow in the hills, a personal ayah of my very own...carry my imported school-bag, a uniformed hamaal to fetch me hot lunch ... embroidered table mat with knives, forks and dessert spoons, fragrant shampoos to wash my hair ... ham sandwiches and a chilled Coco Cola ... (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 7)

Despite strong opposition from her parents, she chooses to act her own way. Her sisters do not understand her and she does not want to understand them either. Much against their wishes, she selects the much condemned and challenging career

of modeling because she finds it useful to her in twin ways. It gratifies her want for the newness of experience as well as her keenness to run away from the routine, unpleasant but accepted duties like knitting, embroidering, crocheting, cooking and decorating homes etc. She earns a lot of wealth and recognition and starts feeling that she has entered the group of rich girls. She becomes an active socialite. Anjali, another well-known socialite and the wife of a well-off playboy, plays a key role in Karuna's entry into the high society. In fact, her movement towards a fake society and the fashionable life of modern worlds begins at Anjali's place in Malabar Hill. In the beginning, Karuna finds Anjali's support as an active tool in realizing her visions but this association takes a new twist when Anjali comes to know that Karuna is involved with the same person in advertisement industry with whom Anjali wishes to set up a family. Karuna is shocked to know that Anjali was herself making an effort to engage Karuna in her husband's activities. Anjali accuses Karuna of bitchiness and lechery, her unquenchable hunger for sex. This is seen when Karuna meets with the New Delhi ad film-maker in London. Furthermore, her stay in the United States lends her an air of supremacy and makes her self-confident. Karuna considers it as an opportunity to snap her relation with Anjali. Karuna, with all her attempts at ego-assertion, refuses subscription to stereotypes, to succumb to the hegemony of the malist culture. Her persona falls in the category of people with 'moving against' attitude as given by Horney in *Neurosis and Human Growth attitude* (1950). She is an exemplification of those who believe that "everyone is hostile. The motto is 'only the fittest survive'. The primary need is to control others often by exploiting and outsmarting others. Is hard and tough to lose. Zest and intelligence will make her dependable worker but the job is only a means to end... (qtd. in Ridgway 7).

...the original yokel, well, perhaps with a superficial polish – in a state of suspended excitement prepared for anything – everything. For the very first time, I felt ready. On my own, free of family influences and pressures, free of Anjali, prepared to discover the world on my own terms” (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 42).

Her behavior with her family turns totally different after she returns home from the United States. It is her stunningly beautiful fantasy about identity that makes her daydream about an over romantic future life partner with whom she would feel at the top of the world. Apart from her understanding of feminists like Germain Greer and Gloria Steinem, her stay in New York also changes her perspective about the meaning of identity and packs it up with new thoughts about a liberated woman. A perfect example of this is found in the sudden and unexpected breaking up of her engagement with her Bunty, the hero of her dreams. Thereafter she chooses to establish her existence on her own terms. Thus, in the first stage of her life, Karuna sets worldly riches, wealth, and exoticism as the factors that will define her identity and she strives her level best to achieve these goals. Urbashi Barat (2000) rightly states in thus:

Karuna thus begins her quest for selfhood from Atwood’s ‘Basic Victim Position Three’, in which the protagonist “acknowledge[s] the fact that [she is] a victim but refuse[s] to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable ... the basic game of Position Three is repudiating the Victim role”. She is thus very different from the traditional Bildungsroman hero, who moves from innocence to experience ... (Barat 121)

But this is only one side of the coin. The graph of the rising wealth, prosperity, and fame also brings in its wake many terrible things like a futile marriage, a miserable divorce, and many extramarital affairs that end up with frustration and moral depravity and leaving her painful and decrepit. Deepa Tyagi (2014) rightly observes thus:

The novel is a memoir, the life-so-far of a Mumbai socialite. This is a cinematic frame-by-frame recapitulation of Karuna's life. Going down the lanes and by lanes of the memory of the novel traces her metamorphosis from a middle-class woman into a socialite star. (Tyagi 234)

The second stage of life begins with her marriage to a wealthy businessman. She assumes the role a wife. Her parents are contented to see their daughter happy in her married life. They think that they have found a better future for their daughter. She has always wished that married life would satisfy her desire for a romance and freedom. The other desires like the desire for adoration and consideration, the want for the emotional and physical safety and contentment, the urge for sharing and gratitude, desire for a sense of belonging and above all the yearning for individual achievement and development become more explicit screaming for fulfillment. More she makes efforts to become an indispensable part of the rich society, more the unpleasantness and loneliness in her life grow which become all the more frightening amidst multitudes. Her condition becomes similar to that of a thirsty wanderer of a desert whose condition is figuratively explained by Karen Horney. A thirsty traveler in a desert in search of some source of water and refuge starts experiencing hallucinations as if some source of water is nearby.

It is nothing but a delusion of his imagination which doesn't satisfy him/her in any way. He/she may make efforts to reach it but can't. So the situation ends up aggravating the distress. Sympathizing her own plight, Karuna explains the cause of her unsuccessful marriage thus:

I married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. Escaping one form of overt regimentation at her parent's home, Karuna feels she is fallen a victim to a subtle and covert form of regimentation in her husband's home. She complains that she has been much taken for granted, forced to fall into the overall scheme of things of her husband and has been tricked into a calculated deal.
(Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 57)

Karuna's disloyalty towards her husband and passionate inclination towards Krish, a Calcutta-based dramatist is an outcome of her chase for everything which her married life fails to provide her. In Krish, she finds an assortment of all desired things- poetry, theater and politics. That's why she is totally taken away by the ardent expression of love from Krish. This extra – marital affair too, ends up with disillusionment and Karuna declares painfully that the striking relationship she was dreaming of just appeared not to subsist. As the life moves ahead, Karuna's yearning for love grows rather more experienced. One finds a perfect example of the same when Karuna mentions that no more she can spend her life fainting on flowers or overeating chocolates rather she needs something beyond mere romance.

Through her female protagonists, Shobha De depicts her absolute concern for women and insists upon the eradication of all forms of suppression so that they

could live in an environment of liberty, respect and equanimity with their counterpart. De portrays the Indian man as a person “terribly threatened by self-sufficient women” (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 69). Fear of being deprived of control over the self-asserting wife makes him opt for various measures of self-protection. These measures are maltreatment and perpetrating violence upon his wife. Karuna curiously asks: “how could he communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat reading pages of *The Times of India* while concentratedly picking their noses?” (Shobha De 69) Karuna despises the distant and insensitive attitude of her husband who often remains inclined towards his dull repetitive business activities like reading business updates. Despite slackness and lack of indiscipline, the husband was supreme, a safe haven, and a rock of stability to her. Karuna rightly states: “We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialized. ...roof over our head and four square meals a day” (69). In her book *Surviving Men: The Smart Woman’s Guide to Staying on Top* (1997), De advises her readers to take off the characteristic docile image of Indian women and to work on rebellion, craftiness and confidentiality that could only enthuse in them a great sense of security but could also prove a challenge to patriarchy. De’s radical suggestion for women in this book may appear offensive to as moralist or a conformist. *Socialite Evenings* is the perfect manifestation of De’s concerns for women.

“Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by society” (Beauvoir 445). Karuna believes that the real happiness and true physical closeness in a married life depend on developing a quality relationship with spouse based upon concern, compassion and sharing both- through words and selfless revelations, small dotting signals of warmth and open conversations. This is what her married life lacked. It is a complete failure as it is devoid of love, happiness, and communication. She

thinks that she has married “the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. Her husband is just the average Indian husband, unexciting, uninspiring and untutored. He was not made for introspection. The average Indian woman’s conjugal life to her is an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left and marriage is like a skin allergy, an irritant. But she is not afraid to face this irritant, this allergy. She boldly and defiantly encounters it, for she realizes “marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to” (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 68). Being a part of Indian male dominated society where man whether right or wrong has always a right to scream, maltreat, torment and disparage and the woman submissively listens and tolerates, Karuna falls a prey to domestic violence. Her dream of an over idealized life partner gets totally shattered when she sees the arrogance and cheapness of her husband. Her sense of her self-worth gets muddled up due to lack of communion with him and she loses her passion for life, endurance and buoyancy completely. More she tries to deal with the discontent both at the emotional and physical level, more psychological frustration grows in her. She feels relaxed whenever she escapes meaningless and boring lovemaking with her husband. If she is to move ahead on the path of self-actualization, at least emotionally she should be gratified. So, she finds her marriage utterly meaningless:

Our love-making (if I could call it that) was a listless affair. I would tell my husband, in the days when we still had something going between us, that he generally felt like sex only on the days he skipped the regular workout at the health club. Making love was losing calories to him. I saw it as nothing more than a vague habit ... I could’ve done without it forever. (Shobha De 59)

Karuna had learned from Ritu whom she happened to meet at finance director's party that "...men, like dogs, could be conditioned through reward and punishment" (87). She was exhausted with her husband's obsession in mixing up with people, his hideous safari suits and the gum he always gnawed. But she could not change her husband through either way. Her books, crossword puzzles, newspaper and her dreams were her only saviors in such a dull environment. She understands that she is not "the toy of man, his rattle," which "must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (Surendran 12). Finally, the loveless marriage ends up with divorce putting Karuna under the pressure of her financial uncertainty, daily survival, social standing and luxurious life. Through Karuna, De has tried to prove what Shukla (2006) states that "on the account of various factors such as sexual promiscuity, women's growing independence, increased rate of divorce and more, the institution of marriage is now on the verge of breaking up. Marriages are no longer to be made in heaven" (Shukla 119)

Shobha De has artistically used the technique of controlling language to serve her objective of deconstructing long-established gender hostility which has always been used to complicate the division of wedding knot. It seems as if Karuna's mocking way of dealing with her problems in the patriarchal male culture is a tool used to break the phallogocentric pattern "the fact that his wife had taken a lover excited him. Resisting – it would have only consumed more time" (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 188). Karuna never addresses her husband by his name rather disparages him by calling as 'Black Label.' One finds another instance of the mocking use of language when Karuna challenges male supremacy and detests

her husband's dwelling in "post-mortems" (Shobha De 186). She makes a candid statement about her inner desire to communicate herself through love: "I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chanceIt's the Taurean in me that's surfacing these days. Treat this as a short-term mania that will wear itself out" (186).

Now starts her voyage for self-awareness. With the increasing experiences amidst an upper middle class of Mumbai, Karuna is used by Shobha De to rip off the fake covering of elite society and hold a mirror to the pretentiousness, follies, and deception prevailing in it. But while doing so, she discovers a new category of Indian women who are totally influenced and controlled by this so-called aristocracy and sacrifices a lot to have it all. This is her 'new woman'. Karuna is first among De's new women, who midway through her life starts losing interest in her life but takes it in a very wise and optimistic way.

Each of her failures is used by her as a chance for self-appraisal and one step ahead towards self-actualization. Very honestly, she accepts her juvenile behavior and feels repentant for losing her honor over the worthlessness of glitzy life. Soon she gets to realize that the world which is full of hypocrisy, deceit, and disloyalty is not a place fit for her. So, she comes out of the rut of her madness for pleasure, new experiences, zeal for continuous inspiration and surprises of high-class Mumbai life. Karuna doesn't feel sorry when she remarks that she is not a "wife material". When she learns about Krish's wrong designs on her she neither becomes upset nor does she remain to stick to Krish. The chronology of events of her life makes her rethink and restructure the priorities of her life. The importance she gave to material wealth and rich worldly status in the initial years of her life, yields its place to the confidence in one's capabilities, hard work, and perseverance

in the later stage of her life. She counts freedom above the monetary success. That's why, she happily does lot many part time jobs including ad-hoc work with some theater group, assistant photo shooter, model coordinator and so on, which could bring her self-sufficiency and psychological contentment her identity. She even refuses to leave her part-time job saying that "I suppose my real concerns were different. It wasn't money or success I was looking forward to in my life at that point it was the freedom to do what I wanted. My part-time job gave me that" (265-6).

In the third stage of life, one finds Karuna left with unfulfilled desires for care, protection and respect and hazy expectation of self-achievement. She is battered but not beaten. To lead a life of middle class, she takes up a well- paid job with the help of Anjali. This job enables her to lead a comfortable life where she starts finding the absolute pleasure and freedom. She tries to get away from the boredom of life and seek solace by writing memoirs, offering an unusual peep into a world burning with the lust for control and ravenousness. Her memories are widely appreciated and she earns a lot of fame and recognition. Eventually, she becomes a vigorous socialite and utilizes her newly found fame to raise herself to the place of a marketing copywriter and maker of a television series. Now beside the pleasing company of her parents, Karuna has her own free personal life where she feels satisfied and happy. She even says no to her husband's request to come back to him as she believes that there is no point in surrendering her independent life for marriage which requires innumerable compromises. Towards the end of the novel, when Junior Girish, son of a famous television serial maker comes with a marriage offer to Karuna, on his father's behalf, Karuna reacts with astonishing decisiveness and clarity of vision. She conveys her unwillingness to muddle up her

life with so many sacrifices and false impressions. To her, leading her life the way she wants is more significant than anything else in life.

It seems as if while delineating the character of Karuna, De has observed closely G.B Shaw's heroines Raina or Ann Whitefield. In her actions, attitude and behavior, she has been depicted with totally unromantic realism. She doesn't want to follow the rules provided to her by her parents and society. This is the distinctive feature of De's heroines which make them stand apart from the protagonists of other Indian women writers. Inna Walter in her work *An Invitation Tale from Innocence to Experience (Fiction of the Nineties)* (1995) observes thus:

....Anita Desai makes psychological forays into the minds of her women characters, and Kamala Markandaya depicts rural or urban women as victims of their circumstances. Shobha De depicts Karuna a young Indian from a middle-class family able to circumvent her lot in life and launch into the kind of lifestyle of modeling and independent journalistic essays that are still not acceptable in conventional Indian society. (Walter 83-"5)

Socialite Evenings presents another character named 'Anjali' as an ultra modern woman, who flouts all the norms of conventional morality to rise to the social standing of the elite classes. Shukla (2006) rightly states thus:

The institution of marriage is of unrivaled significance in the life of young people in India. In the life of women, it is the point of maturing. It signifies the flowering of life. According to Dharamshastras, marriage is a sacrament. The idea, however, has got diffused with time and is being dominated by ulterior considerations. (Shukla 118)

The sole aim of her life is to enjoy a luxurious life. That's why she has married a rich man Abe who spends huge money on her. But he is a worthless character having sexual meetings with lot many girls. Anjali has no problem in his extra marital affairs rather she herself tries to make him satisfied by arranging new young virgins for him. Anjali is equally irresponsible and has endless enthusiasm for sex and desire for the body. She has numerous sexual meetings with her own set of lovers be he her cheap husband Abe or the innocent Karan. To her, life means only men and money. Karuna too rejects the inflexible norms of a worn-out tradition for supporting and enjoying her extra-marital relationship with Krish. Anjali, Karuna, and Ritu exemplify well-known succubi who rule at the top of the immoral world and unrestricted libido.

Karuna is, in fact, the mouthpiece of Shobha De to express her own leaning towards the art of modernization and project a team of female characters who symbolize complete independence of womankind from all types of patriarchal reticence. But this vamp philosophy of feminism provides no rescue to the unusual and fallen women of De who, in their madness to break away from male-domination and to establish existence see the failure and are offended in one way or the other. In their assault against patriarchal suppression, their acts of allurements and disloyalty end up being disloyal to women as well. In Indian society, it is believed that a woman marries not just the man but also his family, surrenders her freedom, loses her identity and is expected to oblige everybody. But this new class of women with their newly found freedom from connubial burden takes on different viewpoint and rebel against the old order. They are the representatives of intense materialism and lack of religious devotion which is one of the chief features of the modern age. The collapse of moral and ethical values arouses an

inner conflict within them and they strive to find temporary consolation in different roles and identities. One of the remarkable features of these women is that they have a craving for identity. These women are such enlightened individuals in search of a place in their lives as epitomized by Karuna.

De's second novel *Starry Nights* (1989) is an appropriate fictional corpus for the present research work on new women. The novel is what Geeta Barua states in her article entitled "Rise & Fall of a Star: a Study of *Starry Nights*" (2000) "a faithful portrayal of the film world with all its perfidies, glamor, crimes, lies, and deceits and sexual exploitation. Since Shobha De the novelist has been long associated with the Bombay film world as a journalist she knows it first hand and has been able to portray it well" (Barua 174). It is a realistic representation of presents varied faces of women. De has unfathomed the psyche of modern urban women and drawn the attention of the readers towards subjugation and marginalization of women. Nisha Trivedi in her article, "Search for Identity in *Starry Nights*" (2000) rightly states that "the writers of the post-independence fiction have focused on contemporary problems. They have explored the vital areas of individual consciousness and have projected the fascinating images of cultural change, rather than transformation" (Trivedi 180).

Working as an ad hoc journalist in Mumbai, Shobha De seems to have observed minutely and understood closely the working of Bollywood people, their lifestyle and underneath dark realities. The film industry is a big allurements to many industrialists and business tycoons. The actors getting involved in extra marital affairs is not something new in the circle of privileged people. Divorce or break-ups in relationships are considered routine matters and when to get exposed

in media, they create buzz among people. Taking the essence of her narrative from Bollywood, De came out with *Starry Nights* in 1991. Sonia Ningthoujam in the article entitled “Realism: Lifelike characters” (2006) confirms Shobha De’s familiarity with the film world when she states:

The novel depicts the struggle of a young woman to make it to this colorful world with all its difficulties and shame. The price of Aasha Rani has to pay to become the number one heroine is awe-inspiring. De’s closeness and familiarity with the film world as a journalist might have somewhat facilitated her to portray it in fine detail even though the veracity of the details given may be a matter of her personal observation and opinion. (Ningthoujam 87)

She seems to have written this novel with an eye on cine market instead of telling a story in a real sense. To begin with, the novel was discarded and tagged as ‘pulp fiction’ and ‘street fiction.’ Still, it was a best seller in India. De even faced censure from the sections of men who were unable to accept the truth. Later on, the world of critics began to evaluate it as a realistic representation of Bollywood culture.

The chief premise around which De has built her novel is that no doubt, women in film and modeling industry struggle hard to reinforce their real talent. But many of them fail in their hurried efforts and find sex & glamor as the only method of easy going to achieve success. Eventually, they end up as prostitutes as symbolized by the protagonist Aasha Rani. Sadly, this new woman of De is geared up to give up her ‘physical self’ to become successful by earning wealth and recognition In her article entitled “Aesthetics and Morality: Emergence of the New

Woman”, Sonia Ningthoujam (2006) depicts the response of the public to Shobha De’s work thus:

The controversy came in torrents when De’s second novel *Starry Nights* hit the bookstands in 1991. Many of the male members of Mumbai’s high society felt outraged. The novel, set in the city’s film industry, is packed with unsavoury characters based on real life tycoons and film producers. Reviewers, mostly male, trashed the book as a low blow, but the public, by and large, loved it. (Ningthoujam 48)

The story is about Aasha Rani, a top actress of Bollywood film industry who uses sex as a ladder to climb the pinnacle of success. The opening honeymoon scene in the preview of the movie, ‘Tera Mera Pyar Aisa’ introduces this South Indian dusky, superficial and flabby beauty. Like most of the actresses of Indian film industry, her acting career is also planned and directed by her mother, Geetha Devi whom she calls ‘amma’. ‘Amma’ is an avaricious lady who wants her daughter to become a celluloid star. She is quite aware of the fact that to sustain and rise in the film industry, her daughter needs the support of some advertiser who can promote a fresh face as a celebrity. Being an opportunist, she tries to cash Kishenbai’s an underworld banker, interest in her daughter’s beauty. At that time, Aasha was fifteen years. Amma finds him to be an appropriate source to launch her daughter as a heroine and thus requests him for Aasha's career. Kishenbai who is already taken by Aasha’s beautiful looks becomes ready to introduce her as lead actress in his first film and in turn, Aasha has to become physically intimate with him. On their way to meet Nitesh Mehra, the director cum producer who makes winning films with newcomers, Kishenbai persuades Geetha Devi to let her

daughter go alone to meet the producer because many potential actresses see the end of their acting career ahead of time because of their meddling mothers. Finally, Amma gets convinced and consents to send her daughter for screen test alone. One finds an instance of psychological exploitation of the mothers who are desperate to see their daughters at the top in cine market.

As a novelist, Shobha De is fully responsive to her responsibility in this globalized world. She not only depicts a new woman who trespasses the traditional boundaries of age long culture rather has also excavated the cruelty prevailing deep down the dazzling urban society which is more or less a source of cultural change. Here the transactions are done in such a pathetic manner that shall leave human beings totally transformed from what they were earlier especially in the case of young female aspirants in an acting career. It is the individual consciousness, perseverance and will power that shall enable one to endure and achieve success. Nisha Trivedi (2000) rightly examines that “The glittering world of cinema is in reality so ruthless, so miserable that it can shatter the moral values and innocence of any human being. But Aasha survives and achieves success” (Trivedi 186). Refused by the Producer Nitesh Mehra, Aasha accompanies Kishanbai in a party hosted by producer Vishnu where she is advised by Kishanbai to go and sleep with him. Since that day, it has been all the same for Aasha. She does not even bother to see the man’s face or body with whom she was staying all night. Her sense of distinguishing between right and wrong is overshadowed by a fake gaudy covering of pomp and glory.

Kishanbai makes it certain that ‘Aasha Rani’s first appearance in the movie Nagin Ki Kasam’ does not go unobserved. The response to the film is modest on

the box-office. It is man's tendency to take advantage of a woman by exploiting her weaknesses. Same is true of Kishenbai. Understanding well the greedy nature of his wife and ambitions of his beloved, he deceives both and makes the most of the situation. A perfect example of the same is seen when his wife learns that her husband has stolen her gold bangles to please Aasha and she insists Aasha's mother for returning the same to her, Kishenbai acts very smartly. He requests Amma to return bangles to his wife with a promise:

As soon as I raise money for the next project, the first thing I will do is to buy ten tolas of gold for Aasha Rani. (Shobha De, *Starry Nights* 12)

When the fame and recognition touch their feet, actresses begin to make new acquaintances to acquire more film contracts as symbolized by Aasha Rani. She befriends with Sheth Amirchand, a Member of Parliament who guarantees her two new movies. During this time, Kishenbai also gets emotionally attached to Aasha and begins to feel overprotective about her. He detests her for getting intimate with Shethji but Aasha and her Amma are selfish and unthankful people who insult Kishanbai, one who has promoted her as a celebrity. Since that day, Kishenbai never meets her. As the story furthers, Aasha falls in love and gets betrothed to already married Akshay Arora, a famous Bollywood hero. Aasha enjoys a lot in her intimate love sessions with Akshay. Her expectations from her lover boy go high. Her love for Akshay makes her think negative for her mother and her brother Ajay. The course of her life finally draws her towards the reality of her love for Akshay, who afterward loses interest in her and returns to his wife. He snaps his ties with her by publishing an article with the caption "Discarded Lover

Boy Seeks Revenge” in ‘The Showbiz’ magazine thereby exposing her as a pornographic heroine. She is traumatized on reading the article and she feels sick. It seems as if Aasha becomes a victim of her lover when her career graph is almost at the peak.

Aasha’s craziness for career, stardom, and wealth force her to start entertaining fat producers, filmmakers, heroes and people from the underworld or any stupid fellow who could help her rise in her acting career. She even develops a relation with a lesbian journalist Linda. As the movie starts Aasha is reminded of the first man of her life i.e. the young hero Amar. In their first meeting, she shares with him: “Do you know you are the first naked man I am seeing, besides my cousin, but he was only a boy?” (Shobha De 6).

Investigating the world of beauty and glamour, Sonia L. Ningthoujam in her article entitled, “Traditional woman versus modern women: A study of Shobha De’s Novels” (2006) states that “if defined from the perspective of traditional morality, women from the world of glamour would be tagged as characterless as they pay no heed to conventional decency. This new generation of ambitious women is ready to make every compromise as long as they can get riches and fame” (Ningthoujam 43).

Sarbani Sen reveals the truth of the film world in the article entitled, “The De Debate: Cultural Politics and De’s Novels” (2000) reveals the truth in the film world saying thus:

The constant reiteration in it of physical couplings may be in keeping with the public secret of Bollywood’s casting couch but it is the Americanized attitude to the body and the un-Indian amorality

signified therein that is noteworthy. What one needs to remember however is that much of India's manners and many of her morals flow in from Bollywood. (Sen 24).

De peeps into the lives of the upper-middle class society of metropolitans and draws the attention towards the way these people are imitating American lifestyle by getting inclined towards pubs, club culture and duplicate American society morals by being attracted towards pub culture.

The question of survival in film industry turns Aasha such a human being who is ready to get the most out of every opportunity at the cost of her body and self-esteem. The whole saga is narrated in a way that it appears to be a discourse on sex. In due course, Aasha starts playing with the emotions of Seth Amirchand who is quite munificent in nature. She thinks herself to be the most privileged when she receives calls from Sethji's office. She is mentally prepared to entertain Sethji by offering what he expects from her. Under his patronage, Aasha gets a lead role in Nitish Mehra's latest film 'Tarazu' and thereafter her acting career rises at a very fast pace. During her short stay in Chennai for some art film, her love for Akshay is renewed but soon she realizes that Akshay can't reciprocate the same as he is only after her fame. She feels psychologically paralyzed and tries to end up her life but fails to do so. Later on, she marries an already married man Jay from New Zealand. Akshay dies of AIDS. Aasha returns to New Zealand and after so many years makes a comeback to India for making her daughter Sasha, a flourishing cine star.

It appears that the love story of hero Akshay Kumar and heroine Aasha Rani presented in the novel is based on the well-admired buzz of a fervent love

affair between Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan and dark gorgeous Rekha from South India. One finds a number of instances and incidents that are parallel to the love affair of Amitabh and Rekha. Bollywood is a sort of fantasy world for most Indians. Rachel Dwyer rightly opines in his article entitled, “Starry Nights: The Novels of Shobha De” (1998) thus:

In some of her stories, De relies completely on incidents included in certain film magazines. *The Starry Nights* is a perfect example of the same where we find the story of protagonist Aasha Rani knitted on a thread of the tales taken from the lives of many top stars of Bollywood industry “such as Rekha (a father 47 who holds a high position in the Madras industry, and who disowns her mother), Zeenat Aman (the hotel brawl), and Parveen Babi (the disappearance), while Akshay shares a number of features with Amitabh Bachchan, the greatest superstar of all time. However, De includes details about the underbelly of the film world which are never included in these magazines – the underworld financiers, the casting-couch, lesbian film journalists, gay heroes, etc. (Dwyer 126)

In the world of glamor, the virginity of women is always doubted because men like Akshay always use women to achieve their own objectives. On one hand, he uses Aasha’s stardom to sustain his position in the film industry and on the other hand, he has deliberately made his wife Malini involved in dozen other activities of social work. She knows that Akshay has chosen her because he needed a homemaker and a sincere and loving mother to his children. She believes her husband and her kids as her chief concerns than anything else in the world. Perhaps

she does not know the difference between childbearing and enjoying the pleasure in love. Murali Manohar in his article entitled, “Rejecting the Hegemony: The 1990s” (2007) opines thus:

What prompts Akshay to want his wife to be a ‘homemaker’ is that children would be affected if both husband and wife have careers. He has seen personally how some women go to the extent of doing anything for a flourishing career. However, he cannot generalize that every film girl will flirt as he imagines. (Manohar 131-2)

When requested by Malini, Rita, the wife of an influential businessman promises to help and asks her not to worry about her husband’s flirtations. Rita also tells that it is woman’s duty to bring the husband back on the right path. Rita asks Aasha why she has disturbed the married life of Malini. Aasha tells her that she is not the one who is the cause for breaking up Malini’s marriage. Fuming with anger, Malini curses Aasha: “Look here, you bloody kutti, we all know your types-stealing our men, wrecking our homes” (De, *Starry Nights* 49). Aasha replies that Akshay is not a toy in the marketplace to exchange. In retort, Malini curses Aasha bitterly that she will regret it one day. Rita suggests Malini that all wives have to pretend and no woman should be foolish enough, to be honest with her husband, where sex is concerned. Sandhaya Dash (2000) rightly observes thus: “Shobha De moved far away from depicting characters in the tradition of Indian woman loved. She stepped out of the threshold of family and tradition to portray the harsh realities that await a woman outside the four walls of her house” (Dash 167).

The feelings of basic anxiety i.e isolation, helplessness and hostility stem from “parental indifference which Horney believed was even worse than outright

abuse because children can emerge from later unscathed but the effect of indifference is more profound” (qtd. in Ridgway 5-6). The patchy and unreliable past of parents always plays a dominant role in building up of their childrens’ nature and character. The same can be observed in the development of Aasha’s character. The life of Aasha’s amma and appa has not been consistent in the past as her appa used to maltreat amma. Later on, he disserted amma and had another family with Girija. Aasha still remembers a series of so-called uncertain ‘Mamas’ with whom Amma used to go in the night on strange meetings and returned home quite late. All this has somewhere developed in Aasha unconcealed revulsion for men. It seems as if amma has lost faith in the sanctity of terms ‘love’, ‘sincerity’ or ‘devotion’ on the part of men because she herself has been through all this. She thinks that if sex can be a means of pleasure to men then why not it can be a way for a woman to achieve success. That's why she finds sex as the most fitting way of getting her daughter enter into the film industry in her flowering years and detests Aasha’s true love for Akshay. Aasha’s mind has also got shaped on the lines of her amma's thoughts. She herself doesn’t find any harm in losing her self- respect and getting sexually exploited at hands of variety of men whose faces and bodies she doesn't even bother to see. What is this all for? Just for money and stardom. In view of Chotte L. Khatri (2004), it is their way of retaliation upon men.

Shobha De maintains that sex is in the center. So do her critics. Contrary to their opinions, my finding is that ‘Revenge’ is in the center of her novels; ‘Sex’ is only the convenient medium in their hands. Aasha and her mother in the past had faced several problems-natural as well as man-made. Now they take revenge against men. (Khatri 139)

It would be wrong to think that Shobha De has focussed only on sexual desires of Aasha Rani rather novel is a tale of a young girl, who under the necessity of circumstances, has dealt with every kind of situation to become a superstar in the film industry. Sandhaya Dash (2000) states that Shobha De's writing seems abominable and bizarre to us as she is a woman and we are not habituated to listen to a woman talking so much about sex so freely and frankly. But the novel is not simply a treatise on sex; it depicts the modern woman's search for identity in a male-dominated Society. (Dash 172)

So, 'sex' and 'Vengeance' cannot be called the underlying motifs of a novelist rather women's struggle for subsistence and anxiety for self-respect remain the focal point of discussion throughout the novel. Sudhir Kumar in his article entitled, "Artist as Vamp: A Feminist Approach to Starry Nights" (2000) accentuates thus:

Shobha De's vamp brand of feminism admits of no redemptive formula for the 'fallen women' and no millennium, for the liberated women. Her women characters who endeavor to liberate themselves often meet with disaster. Before this happens, they send a whole host of taboos devised by patriarchal order cartwheeling. (Kumar 196)

It would be inappropriate to substitute realism in Shobha De's frank narration with the tags like vamp feminism because her purpose is not to depict the women who can get anything by using their beauty or sex as a means rather she has tried to underline the hardcore reality behind sex, which so many women writers in present day have refused to do in a factual manner. Pandeya (2000)

asserts that “Shobha De in *Starry Nights* has graphically depicted the Bombay film world and how could Bollywood be complete without sex and fleshy pleasures” (Pandeya 200). Sheela Rani Khare in “Inner World of a Film Star: Shobha De’s *Starry Nights*” vividly describes the novel thus:

Starry Nights laced with sexuality, can be taken as a realistic study of an astounding conceivable variety of sex, exploitation, and pseudo-glamour of tinsel world, teeming with perfidies, deceit, treachery, intrigues, crimes, and deep-rooted corruption. (Khare 148)

‘Amma’ becomes symbolical of the fact that female celebs are taken as the toy things to be played and fondled with by neo-rich people. Beautifully dressed in her white attire, Aasha attends the premiere show of “*Bechari Begum*” with a hope to meet Akshay but she does not find any sign of Akshay's presence rather she happens to meet Abhijit Mehra, the son of an influential entrepreneur named Amrish Mehra. Abhijit is the chief sponsor of the show. Seeing Aasha, he sends her a message for a meeting. While she was honoring Abhijit at the show, Abhijit touches her warmly to express his interest in her. It is a game in the elite circles where the affluent guys seek the company of star heroines to fulfill their bodily pleasures. In the urban societies, women turn out to be victims to the extramarital relations as is seen in the case of Kishanbai cheating upon his wife and Abhijit enjoying intimate sessions with Aasha while he is engaged to Nikita. After Aasha’s suicidal attempt, Abhijit again tries to take advantage of her fragile health and desolation by coming closer to her. He meets her at the Film City studios where he urges her to get to his suite in New Zealand. Vats (2010) rightly opines that “the

novel successfully portrays the testosterone-excited world of Bombay high society describing the exploits of people in power and respectable husbands who cheat on their wives and leave them sulking in home helplessly” (Vats 65).

After attaining so much of money, wealth, and fame by all means, a time comes in Aasha’s life when she starts looking desperately for a soulful companion. She finds herself estranged from acting and feels as if she has been caught in a vicious cycle of sex and career and maybe true love can bring her some solace. She tries to revive her relationship with Akshay for which she is even ready to put her acting career at stake. She uses every fraction of the time to be in the company of Akshay by annoying her producers. The situation becomes so much that Amma has to come back to look after again her dwindling career though deep down she is after her daughter’s money and fame. Aasha is devastated when her dream of marriage to Akshay does not meet the reality. Akshay is not convinced about the idea of marriage by adopting Muslim religion which allows bigamy. Aasha attempts to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping tablets though she is saved because amma and Kishenbai take her to the hospital timely. Media makes most of Aasha’s alienated situation. Even journalist highlights issues of Aasha’s decision to quit, to marry Akshay and to have his baby. The news of Aasha’s suicidal attempt enhances Akshay’s acting career as his role in her suicide attempt is widely discussed in newspapers and film magazines. Some people call it a simply a bizarre and others call it indeed spiteful. Akshay’s wife Malini plays the role of a true wife who in order to rescue her husband asserts that it is always Aasha who always tries to seduce her husband. Amma advises Aasha to forget Akshay and move ahead in life.

Like in the case of other new urban women of De, with every passing experience of her life, Aasha grows wiser and realistic. Vats are of view states that “the novelist delineates the psychological journey of Aasha Rani through her experiences; with every experience, she emerges more and more sensible” (Vats 60). It is her sense that she tries to come out of despair in her love for Akshay and concentrate on her work. Though she goes to New Zealand on Abhijit’s insistence but eventually this short stay changes the entire course of her life. It is here in Wellington, she happens to meet Jamie (Jay) Philips who impresses her with his awareness of movies and cine stars. When Jay proposes to her, she is surprised and marries him. Jay is a loving and creative husband. Aasha experiences a sense of respite and safety with him as he loves her craziness as well. A daughter named Sasha is born to them. Jay suggests her that they should go back to India with their small family but Aasha is unwilling as she wants to stay away from the bitter memories of past. She has received sincerity and devotion from her husband which she could never expect in any of her romantic affairs, so she does not want to remain clung to her past. But, finally, on Jay’s insistence, she agrees to go back to India. The day when amma comes to know that Aasha is still alive, she decides to make Subha a star by turning her into a pricey thing for Sethji. She tells Sudha: “You have everything in your favour-age, looks talent. Make the most of them. Don’t throw your career away like your stupid sister did” (Shobha De, *Starry Nights* 147). Both Aasha and her mother are the exemplars of the fact that relationships oscillate so quickly in high society. Amma surprises Aasha with her manner of receiving her daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. Aasha gazes at her mother’s face if she is the same woman who has been cruel towards her. The camera is such a thing if someone gets exposed to it cannot keep away from it. The

day Aasha lands in India, the question of her comeback in movies becomes a riddle and an issue to be much talked about in *The Showbizz*. Kishanbai advises her to come back to the cinema but she refuses to say that she is happy with her husband and family but when Jay motivates her to join the movies again; she gives a nod of approval. The way Aasha Rani takes care of her appa in Madras is worth mentioning. Forgetting everything her father has done to her amma, she makes it sure that he is being nursed in a proper manner. Even while returning to Bombay, she takes appa along though Sudha is not happy with appa around.

Aasha's sister Sudha is also an example of a bold new woman who treads on her sister's footprints and mother's guidance to achieve laurels in the film industry. When Aasha Rani is surprised and happy to see Sudha's beautiful bungalow, Sudha tells her that Ranjit Jain, a renowned Delhi designer has got her all these things. "First I slept with him, then I asked him to do my house, but Ranjit wanted Amar more than he wanted me" (Shobha De 178). She talked to Amar for negotiating with Ranjit for a concession. She even suggests Aasha befriend with Amar who plainly refuses to say that her movies and her lovers are taken over by Sudha. Khan in his article entitled, "Shobha De: Vatsayani" (1995) expresses his censure for De's women thus:

Women in Shobha De's books are madly in love with men who are macho. The sissy type of men does not matter to her (the 'gay' or the 'chocolate' boy like Amar in *Starry Nights*). Hence crueler the man, the more is he desired by the woman. Beatings and other cruelties behoove them. Jealousy is a recurring theme. Aasha Rani and Sudha Rani want to possess the same man-Amar. (Khan 81)

De's new women Aasha Rani and Sudha have learned well the art using their physical relations with men to satisfy their desire for material wealth. They are quite aware of the fact these men are the real brutes in blemishing their career and life still they are unable to keep themselves away from them. They maintain their connections with an objective to quench their emotional and bodily needs and in harvesting a blooming flowering employment in the cine industry. Another important aspect of De's new women is that they are considerate even towards those men who oppress them in their dirty love games. This is seen when her heart starts pounding on seeing Akshay dying in front of her. On the contrary, male characters in the novel have no value for their female counterparts. In this context, Vats (2010) rightly states thus:

The men populating the *Starry Nights* have no value for a woman's individuality, dignity, sensitivity, and feelings, though they try to maintain a patronizing stance in order to assert their traditional role of power and authority in their respective capacities. At the most, they are capable of showing generosity and sympathy attitude of pity and condescension. (Vats 77)

Aasha miserably endures mental conflict in sustaining relationships with her relatives and with the people outside in the film industry. She faces physical assaults from goondas sent by her own sister Sudha. No doubt, she is browbeaten in many ways but she comes out as a courageous modern woman who never feels languid and makes efforts to prove herself as a successful person in male manipulated society. Sandhaya Dash (2000) dexterously wraps up the tale of Aasha Rani thus:

Aasha Rani stoically endures a series of shocks one after another- An incomplete childhood with a single parent, poverty, starvation, her mother's cruel dream to make her a film star, the devilish attitude of the people of the stardom to bruise and batter her femininity, the jealousy and unkindness of her sister Sudha, the collapse of her marital life and separation from her own child – Aasha Rani stoically endures a series of shocks one after another. (Dash 168)

Indeed a daring woman, Aasha should be given credit for her fortitude and patience. Had she been a traditional woman, she would have succumbed to the deadly evils prevailing in the pseudo-glamorous world of Bollywood. The situation becomes even more difficult for Aasha when she learns that appa's health has fallen badly. She knows well that appa has never been a responsible father but now she herself being the mother realizes that parenting is not just a matter of survival and livelihood rather it is love, care and compassionate understanding with kids. In the last few years, she begins to accept and understand him. Before his death, she even promises him to revive the family name, reestablish his studio. Her decision in restarting her father's studio speaks of her in inexpressible confidence and undaunted spirit though she has been cheated by her father and her husband in the past.

The meeting between Aasha and Sudha towards the end of the novel is an appropriate instance to show that regardless of so much moral laxity to climb the ladder of success, somewhere in her conscious, Aasha still values relationships. Vats (2010) opines thus:

Despite her indulgence in indiscriminate sex and professional opportunism, Aasha Rani has a critical eye for the sanctity of relations, which she unconsciously cherishes like a wish. (Vats 63)

When Sudha is remorseful for her sins, “I have been evil, I have sinned. Heaven knows what made me do it. I have done you so much harm. You don’t have to forgive me” (Shobha De, *Starry Nights* 232). Aasha Rani instantly forgives her.

Repetitive sexual & psychological abuse continued existence despite a succession of shocks and separation from a loving husband cannot restrain Aasha's inborn instinct to live an independent and successful life. The way Aasha boosts her sister Sudha to fulfill their appa's dream by reestablishing their studio and making films is an appropriate illustration of the same. “Our name will rule the industry and the studio will regain its glory. I promise you that, appa. You will see that I shall do it and prove it to you” (Shobha De 234). Herein, one finds the growth of new women of Shobha De

Evaluating the ending of the novel, Barua (2000) opines that “the novel ends on no definite note. Aasha Rani imagines and visualizes Sasha’s return to India to become a popular heroine gracing movie hoardings and gossip magazines” (Barua 178). She is self-motivated towards becoming a dutiful mother and wishes for her daughter Sasha to become a star which is a dream cherished by so many cine stars. Bringing out the difference between the modern woman and a traditional woman, Narinder Neb in his article entitled, “Feminist Stance in Shobha De’s Novels” (2006) rightly states that “the attitude of modern women like Aasha Rani may accept the responsibility of her daughter like a traditional Indian mother but they do not have the earlier respect for traditional institutions as such” (Neb 175).

Chapter – 4**A Study of Manju Kapur's New Women through her discourse on Marriage, Education and Polygamy in *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman***

For centuries, the picture of a woman has been depicted as subservient, affectionate, tender, fragile, needy and subjugated. They have always been treated as the 'others' in our society. With the passage of time, the image of women started undergoing change. Alfred Tennyson stated that "Man for the field and woman for the hearth: Man for the sword and for the needle she: Man with the head and woman with the heart: Man to command and woman to obey; All else confusion" (Tennyson, *The Princess* 117). This statement makes it quite clear that the women's question has been debated upon since centuries. Almost all the leading literary figures have drawn picture of woman with new flavours of values and tradition. The feminist perspective has been used to demonstrate the structure of woman in context to gender bias, social, cultural and economic differences and inequality. These literary works and movements have brought a number of revolutions but the result is not much obvious and significant. No doubt, certain radical changes have been there in the status of women still much remains to be done. After all these struggles and revolutions, new woman is born. This new modern woman has the qualities like being independent, self sustained, self esteemed, and free from the conventional boundaries of society and home. Women are no more rubber dolls as they can mould easily, rather they have emerged with new objectives, boldness, sovereignty, self reliance and action orientation.

In her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft has precisely emphasized her statements about impediments towards women's liberty and self-determination. "Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (Wollstonecraft 58-9) ... "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves" (81). The uniqueness of this work lies in the fact that it discusses as much about the problems of women in the twenty-first century as it did about the contemporaries of Wollstonecraft during the 18th century. What makes the book so significant and deep even in the present era is that – the social and economic realities of women's place in society have scarcely been changed since then. Mary believes that education is not only an inborn right of women but it is also a social imperative as well else coming generations would take over their parents' ignorance instead of their intelligence. In her view, "the most perfect education is —to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (Wollstonecraft 31). Minaben Jesangbhai Chaudhari in her article entitled, "Novels of Manju Kapur: A thematic Study" (2014) observes thus:

Simone De Beauvoir has briefly exhibited the state of woman in her most famous book *The Second Sex*. The plight position of women all over the world enthused the women of flair like Virginia Woolf to do something magnificent in this field and the result was the emergence of Feminism, a movement in the Western countries in 1960. This movement is for the emancipation of women and their fight for equal rights. Their identity remains invisible, potentially unrealized and talent unacknowledged. Their story keeps silent in

obscurity. Marital bliss and the woman's role at home is a central focus, to see the emergence of not just an essential sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. (Chaudhari 536)

But the inequalities still exist in some remote areas of world. There are thousands of girls who are still deprived of their right to education, expression of their desire and aspirations, to think by their selves and lot more. The problem of girls trafficking is still prevailing. The very immediate burning question that comes to mind is that if really the image of woman is changed than why the girls are not still safe, why they are being raped, why they are still in the social boundaries, why they only have to abide by the rules prepared by so called 'society'. There are many magazines like Woman's world, Cosmopolitan, Woman's era, Femina Magazine and etc. They discuss various pros and cons of woman's image.

India and its people believe in traditional values. These values are deep rooted in the society. Still today in 21st century, Indian society is structured around gender bias and males are given comparatively more importance and room at every level and in every custom and institution of society. It begins from the birth of a baby. If it may 'he', it is given more importance than 'she'. It mostly begins from the marriage, the bride's incorporation into the family. She is trained and taught the life style of her husband's family. In spite of doing all the efforts to devote herself sincerely to the upliftment of her family, she is considered the outsider and treated as well. Despite of her being well educated and intelligent, her opinions are hardly considered important. She does not feel it like her own family as her fathers', because she is alienated. But when she becomes mother-in-law and has a protest voice, particularly on the daughters and daughter-in-laws, she does not become an

advocate but the custodian of the same tradition. Neha Chauhan in her article entitled, “Voice of 21th Century’s New Woman: Clash between Desire and Duty In Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant* and *The Custody*” (2014) states thus:

Though women are an essential part of human civilization yet they have always been treated as marginalized in society. Unfortunately, men have always looked down upon women as the weaker sex, as their property and object of pleasure but the modern writers bring new vision for woman where they drew attention on woman’s vision towards life. (Chauhan 152-3)

Indian English novelists from R. K. Narayan to till date have felt a rise of inner clash between consciousnesses of tradition with the modernity. Indian women writers have started questioning the centuries old patriarchal authority. They have proved their potential in domain of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any obstacle. Through their women protagonists, the contemporary women writers have portrayed the intricate, twin and ambivalent distinctiveness of women engendered by a clash of tradition and modernity. They have drawn face of new woman from current society who brings new vision in the status of female. Their works no longer represent woman as a passive sufferer and upholder of traditional values but an individual who fights hard to free herself from the cages of conservative society. Tahamina Durani and William Hoffer (1998) states thus, “Our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets, but would not silence be a greater crime?” (Durani and Hoffer 375). This belief is sufficient to beat the silence for effecting cultural transformation.

Manju Kapur is hailed as one of the most celebrated Indian English women novelists. She is the most talked about and well appreciated writer of contemporary era. Like Arundati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan, Anita Nair and Shobha De; Manju Kapur is one of the growing Indian woman writers in English who live and write in India itself. Mohandas (2009) observes that “Manju Kapur like Roy, experiments with new themes such as gratification of sex from Women’s point of view along with the politics of the day. Feminism and contemporary history go hand in hand to give new dimensions to their fiction” (Mohandas n.p). Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar, a city well known for communal or sectarian differences. She herself has lived through tumultuous times in India. After graduating from the Miranda House University College for Women, she moved on to earn the degree of M.A from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and an M.Phil from Delhi University. Currently, she is teaching English literature at Miranda House, Delhi University. She is married to Gun Nidhi Dalmia and lives in New Delhi.

The picture of the tormented but stoic woman finally breaking traditional boundaries has had a noteworthy effect on Kapur’s mind. Through her art, she has made an effort to take out new significant implications in the changed cultural phenomenon in which social restraints, twin responsibilities, equal options and marital roles are observed from the feminist point of view. Manju Kapur is quite conscious of the truth that females under patriarchal system are made to suffer more social isolation. This system where man is the legal head of the family makes it sure that the coming generations inherit the same ideology as their legacy. “Manju Kapur presents the yearnings of autonomy and separate identity in her women protagonists. All her women protagonists are caught in the conflict

between the passion of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day” (Gupta 11).

Kapur has penned down five novels: *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2009), and *Custody* (2011). She earned worldwide fame and recognition through her very first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998). It also won her the Commonwealth Prize 1999 for first novels (Eurasia Section) and was a number one bestseller in India. Her second novel *A Married Woman* (2003) was called ‘fluent and witty’ in the Independent, while her third, *Home* (2006) has been described as ‘glistening with detail and emotional acuity’ in the Sunday Times. *The Immigrant* (2008) and *Custody* (2011) are her most recent novels. Most of her writings replicate human desires, man-woman relationship, human aspirations, yearning, body, gender bias and marginalization. Her novels are a powerful evaluation of the extensively contested socio-cultural life of modern and urbanized India during postcolonial India. Her understanding on women’s emancipation and self-sufficiency is deep-rooted in the Indian women’s situations within their socio-cultural and economic domains and patterns of the country. Kapur has skillfully crafted all her novels around a serious discourse on the issues of education, marriage and polygamy. She has tried to reveal a variety of ways through which woman is relegated to the margins by patriarchal structures. In almost all her writings she has depicted the numerous designs developed by the patriarchs to curtail female freedom and independence. While imparting education to daughters, her economic sustainability is not the aim rather it is a tool in hands of family to search for her an appropriate matrimonial and become an ideal symbol of Indian womanhood. Therefore, the final institution for all the women to enter after successful completion of their education is wedding.

The spread of education in India after her Independence swept the social heads. The male child is free to desire for higher education, or even education abroad. But when it comes to the daughter, she is provided education mainly to be in line with a outward social change, or no education at all. Thus the melodrama of educating the daughter/s of the family came in vogue. No doubt, the girls were provided education but the western philosophy of individuality was never tolerated to be an agenda of the course of education. This appalling condition of girl education has been persuasively presented in the writings of the contemporary writers. Neha Chauhan (2014) observes thus:

The protagonists in Manju Kapur's novels are caught in the continuous dichotomy between the personal needs and the institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture. She not only portrays the vulnerable condition of women in the Indian society but also delineates how they are being kept ignorant about education and emancipation. In her novels she gives vent to the gender discrimination still overtly prevalent in the field of education...With the British invasion, Indian men became aware of women education but the enthusiasm died out half way. So even after 65 years of Indian Independence, the condition of women has barely changed. Manju Kapur's novels circumscribe the condition of women education since Independence till the present era. (Chauhan 150)

Arpita Ghosh (2013) opines thus:

The discriminating patterns of education proffered before the —sons‖ and the —daughters‖ baffle us. Education for a daughter is seen as an alternate option of marriage. A daughter is educated not to go out and take up a job. On the contrary, her education is a trap to hunt down a good husband and become a perfect wife and daughter-in-law representing —Indian womanhood‖. Thus, marriage is the ultimate institution where all women should enter after the successful completion of education. (Ghosh 16)

Manju not only portrays the helplessness of women in the Indian society but also describes how they are being kept unaware about education and liberation. In her novels, she has found an expression of the gender discrimination which is quite obviously prevalent in the field of education.

A study of few feminist theorists has also been included to expose how patriarchy creates havoc in the lives of women by denying education. With the British invasion, Indian men became aware of women education but the enthusiasm died out half way. So even after 65 years of Indian Independence, the condition of women has barely changed. Manju Kapur's novels circumscribe the condition of women education Independence till the present era. (15)

The majority of the critics are of the view that the charm of Indian Writing in English lies in the phenomenon of literary creativity in a language other than the surrounding mother tongue. It would require very exceptional gifts and total bilingualism to express directly in English the lives of people who do not

themselves speak English. Under English language surface, there lies a radically different Indian mind.

Kapur has come out as a modern Post-colonial novelist spreading awareness about woman's education and empowerment. In all her novels, she makes an effort to characterize new woman. She highlights how present day woman fights for herself, for her individuality and for freedom from the shackles of social traditions. In the first stage, the identity crisis of the new educated middle class women is the background where the question of women comes out actually. The varied issues related to middle class women are dealt in by the writer. The issue whether or not a female has the right to make her own choices and take decisions in life is an issue pulled one way or other, for a long time in our country. This idea exists somewhere in the middle of the chauvinists who assert that woman's place is inside the house, and the feminists who disapproves the idea of taking the husband's surname after marriage. But after all there is a difference between custody and care. Neha Chauhan (2014) states thus:

We observe from historical view to today's scenario we have faced multiple personalities of woman in different field. But the question arises in the mind is that really there is a change came in to the image of woman from traditional era to modern era? Is there really that prominent change came in to the condition of Sita to Shagun? So this is the reality, that there are thousands of literary documents written on equality of sex but in real sense it never practised. Still we came across lots of shocking incidents which threaten the soul of human being. (Chauhan 151)

The concept of new woman in Indian society varies from the one in the west. Manju Kapur in her novels presents women who try to establish their own identity. No doubt, the women of India have attained their success in the other half of century after Independence, but if we talk about the female independence the real sense, much is yet to be done. One finds representation of Indian fashionable women, who became modernized through their costumes, style and food and etc. After all this, still they are confined within the four walls of society. So, woman attempts to win in her fight to assert herself to be respected for though she fails. The lives of women revolve around not only the value education and the higher attainments in life but also about the gloomy aspects of life. The endless vicissitudes of life makes her a developed woman. She crushes and defies the patriarchal restrictions and expectations to assert her identity and achieves self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment in her life. How women survived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society is reflected in the novels of Manju Kapur. One needs to tackle the question of women in context of socio-cultural situation considering the complex nature of their lives, varied backgrounds, histories, cultures and different set of values. Manju Kapur has her own apprehensions, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the dilemmas of her women protagonists. She has created a New Woman in Indian setting holding a mirror to the gender bias, domestic violence and patriarchal oppression. Her females love freedom, learning, love and sex discarding the patriarchal morality. They have come forward with new hopes, aims and self assertiveness. They have disputes with their conventional mothers, elderly relations and traditions. They are caught in the continuous dichotomy between the personal needs and social obligations and responsibilities.

This research work explores the evolution of new women in the novels *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married woman*. The social, cultural, economic and racial contexts have been investigated to trace the growth of new woman. *Difficult Daughters* written in 1998 is the debut novel of Manju Kapur. It won her worldwide recognition. Kapur was honoured with Commonwealth Writers Prize, 1999 for the best first published book in Eurasian Region. The novel was highly commended by the reviewers and critics of Manju Kapur.

Kapur has used historical perspective to emphasize how the destruction caused by partition influenced the Indian women. One finds in the novel various touching sights and images of territorial division of India. These make Kapur's vision for the empowerment of women ubiquitous. She opens out the comprehensive experiences of Indian women. Dora Sales (2004) points out that "in *Difficult Daughters* we do not listen to Virmati's voice. She could not speak out, being certainly situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. What we have is her daughter's reconstruction and representation" (Sales 119).

In a traditional thread, Manju Kapur depicts the craving for self-sufficiency and individualism in her woman protagonist in this post modern novel. The independence movement of the 1940's and consequent disturbance of partition lays down the historical background of the novel. The readers sees Virmati and understands her story through vision and contemporary perspective of her daughter Ida who is trying to join together the excerpts of her mother's past to understand why their relationship has been so disturbed. The plot presents the emotional and sexual life of three women belonging to the three different generations namely

Kasturi of first generation, Virmati of second generation and narrator Ida of third generation. One finds a shift of time period with in the narrative which moves from Virmati to Kasturi to Ida. Ida's wish in the very first sentence of the novel indicates that it is an evaluation of her mother Virmati's story. It also shows that the daughter herself doesn't endorse her mother's way of life although she was conscious of her suffering and pain. "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 1).

Once Ida writes everything about her mother she ends up the narration saying that "Do not haunt me anymore" (Kapur 259). This shows as if she has rinsed out her memory. The novel is the love story of a young and educated girl Virmati and a married Professor of English named Harish who wants to marry her. Born in a highly reputed joint family of Amritsar, Virmati's life moves on a different track the day she meets Professor for the first time. Professor is a man already married and lives as a tenant in their house. Virmati is smitten by his information, manner and magnetic personality. Professor is also deeply fascinated towards Virmati and inspires her to pursue further studies. e. She is torn between the family pressure and her love. She is not able to realize her desire for the Professor. Like so many other women of her times, Virmati is expected to accept a typical arranged marriage. The family pressurizes her to get married and settle down. But Virmati rebels against fate. Against the wishes of her family, she persists with her right to be educated and somehow manages to leave home to study in Lahore. Her effort to distance herself from the Professor proves futile. Professor's visits to Lahore does not let Virmati remain resolute in her decision to be away from him and break her association with him. Virmati becomes anxious for social acceptance as Professor's wife and insists him to marry her. Professor

marries her in rush but fails to accept her socially because he does not leave his first wife. Virmati dresses herself up as a bride: “The only thing she said she wanted was the red ivory bangles that the women of her family wore when they married” (186). The ensuing consequences are unsympathetic for Virmati as she is refused by her own family and despised by her husband. Even marriage which is regarded as a social pledge between husband and wife does not give any solace to Virmati’s desperation. Rather her marriage with the Professor makes her more baffled and distressed. “Though married, she was dispossessed. Well so be it. She would walk tight-lipped, mute, on the path her destiny had carved out for her” (196).

Thus, the story underlines the intellectual longings of Virmati, her love for a scholarly man and her desperation to be socially recognized as legally wedded wife of a Professor. In the post colonial era, partition has been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers.

Kapur projects the image of the rebellious but stoic women ultimately breaking traditional confines in the backdrop of a conventional narrative thread. Dora Sales (2004) in her notes to her Spanish Translation of this novel points out that “Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life opportunities going beyond convention were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British” (Sales 361).

The key idea dealt in *Difficult Daughters* is the quest for control over one’s fate. Virmati searches for human relations that will allow her to exercise at least that degree of control over her life which she deserves. She is the eldest child born

in the family where father, Suraj Prakash is a man of progressive ideas and a mother Kasturi is a traditionalist who believes in marrying off the daughters after they acquire basic qualification of household. She scolds and snaps particularly Virmati as an eldest daughter. “Virus, at least don’t ruin whatever knitting I am trying to do, said Kasturi tartly one evening, ‘why can’t you make yourself useful? There is so much sewing to be done for the baby. There are sweaters to be made for the other children. It’s shame that your hands are idle” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 11). The pressure of family duties particularly the bringing up of her brothers and sisters never allow Virmati to enjoy her own childhood. Despite of this, she continues her studies leads her life under the pressure of family responsibilities she lost her childhood in bringing up her brothers and sisters. She acts as a second mother of her siblings and suffers a lot of problems because of her yearning for higher education.

Virus Pehnji, we need more sugar and flour. You’ll have to unlock the storeroom again.’ ‘Pehnji, she hit me, and took my book!’ ‘It’s really mine! Bade Pitaji gave it to me!’ ‘Virus! Vidya is crying!’ ‘Pehnji! The uncle in school said to tell you Gopi hasn’t done his homework for a month!’ Such statements provided the background chorus of her education, and formed her character even more surely than any book might have done. (Kapur 20)

Rita Felsi (1989) called the novel as “the 'feminist Bildungsroman', the novel is not just a seductive myth of romance but it depicts the real quest of a woman who dares to break the patriarchal conventions” (Felsi 137). The title of the novel *Difficult Daughters* is about Kasturi, Virmati and Ida who are portrayed as

difficult daughters projecting the patriarchal oppression and marginalization of women. Manju Kapur rightly observes thus: “She was to be supervised like a jailbird on parole. Marriage was acceptable to her family but not independence” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 115). The design of the novel moves on two significant levels. Outwardly, Manju Kapur describes the hopes and desires of three generations personified through Kasturi’s mother, Kasturi, Virmati and Ida. It presents the story of three daughters who belong to three different generations – the grandmother Kasturi from the first generation, her daughter Virmati from second generation and Virmati’s daughter, the narrator Ida from the third generation. These three women have lived during different periods in history so the different forms of Indian womanhood, female perspectives and different historical implications have been explored. Some space is also allocated to Shakuntala, Ganga and Swaranlata. At the bottom level, Manju Kapur unearths the chaos in the lives of women fighting to resist the patriarchal oppression. Ida is assigned an important role in the novel. She is the eye of the camera whose task is to search the life history of her mother Virmati.

The journey of this New Woman is narrated through the perspective of Ida who represents young generation of post-colonial India. Ida seeks to reconstruct Virmati’s life against the background of feminism and modernism. As Samuel and Hephzibah (2013) state thus:

When we take a look around at the women in this novel, one may delve into family history and examine grandmothers and great grandmothers. Almost every woman has a story to tell under their cheerful I’m – only – an – insignificant – cog – in – the – wheel facade. Perhaps they wouldn’t think their lives worthy enough, but

we have a lot to thank our foremothers for, from equal political participation to the right to education. (Samuel and Hephizbah 2).

The responsibilities of women in Kasturi's generation were restricted to procreation and household work. Virmati, Shakuntala and Swaran Lata from the second generation are bold as symbolized by their insistence on their right to be educated, their participation in political movement for India's independence. Second generation is against the first one and the third generation is against the second one. One observes that just as Virmati becomes rebellious and becomes a 'difficult daughter' in the family, Ida too develops up going against Virmati. Like her mother, she also becomes a 'difficult daughter'.

Things grow hard and complicated when the daughters learn to dream, to imagine of identity and to emphasize their individuality. Virmati is an epitome of new woman. From her early age, Virmati wants to be independent and overpass all the restraints imposed by the society. She desires to walk hand in hand with men. She has always been looked as an emotionally famished being. In her adolescence, she is influenced by her cousin Shakuntala who is M.Sc. in Chemistry. "May be I will also one day come to Lahore, Pehnji, she wept. I wish I too could do things. But I am not clever" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 18). Virmati's family believed in what Alexander Walker (1987) states "History proves that marriage is essential to the well-being human society, and that celibacy brings ruin upon states" (Walker 80). Virmati was exhausted with the persistent discussions about her wedding all the time, the members of her family were unaware of her mental turmoil except her father who believed in liberal ideas. Virmati assumes the role of defiant woman whose role model is Shakuntala "continuous source of inspiration" to her...

Virmati wanted to be like her” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 115). She becomes an image of a woman struggling to find a space in the orthodox and rigid society. She takes a stand against the destiny, society and patriarchy. She is loving and highly expressive; all her actions are motivated by her principles of emancipation and romance. Reason finds no place anywhere. Eldest of all her siblings, Virmati is made to act like a second mother to them. Her mother does every possible attempt to destroy her liberal hope and desires and cut her wings. She “threatened to marry her off, before she brought further disgrace to the family” (Kapur 61) and she tried to make certain her further happiness by flawless nature of her daughter’s qualification. She had planned a special instruction for her which Kasturi had acquired during her young age: “With all breads she could make, puris with spicy gram incisive, luchis big as plates, kulchas, and white and long, tandoori rotis, layers of flaky flour, paranthas, srisp and stuffed. With seasonal pickles of lemon, mango, carrot, cauliflower, turnip, red chilies, dates, ginger, and raisons, she was going to please her in-laws” (62).

Virmati depicts fortitude and strength of mind. She presses the need for woman’s education and her independence and social standing. She discards the type of life led by her mother. Veena Singh (2000) rightly states that “for Virmati herself education is an escape...an escape from the reproaches of her family from and her mother’s silent disapproval” (Singh 165). She uses her education as a tool to counter resolutely the family’s pressures for her marriage. Thus by deciding the priorities of her life she is able to win her independence. Being the eldest of the eleven children, she is weighed down with family obligations because of her mother’s ceaseless pregnancies. She has to play the role of the second mother to

her younger siblings. But the problem arises when she becomes the pendulum between education and marriage. She receives more harsh treatment when she rejects the marriage proposal. She just sees each happening occurring around her and keeps silent and soon she takes her decision in spite of several unprecedented hurdles. "Virmati, like so many other sub continental women, is asked to accept a typical arranged marriage. She rebels against that destiny, to the lasting shame of her family, above all of her mother. Insisting on her right to be educated, she manages to leave home to study in Lahore" (Rollason 2).

At the age of seventeen her parents think about her marriage with a canal engineer, Inderjeet. She passes her FA exam with marks that were respectable enough for a girl, thought her parents. She becomes more concentrated towards further studies. She gets admission in AS College where Oxford returned Professor named Harish makes a way into her heart and mind. And one day she decides not to marry but to study further. This decision upsets the whole family and she decides to commit a suicide but is saved by her father's servant. Then Inderjeet marries to Indumati, her younger sister, and family decides to send Virmati to Lahore for further studies. Virmati makes up her mind to have nothing more to do with him. She keeps herself to be candid, daring, resolute and action-oriented. Virmati summons up her courage and expresses her desire to continue her studies further. Her father was amazed to know her intentions: "For such a little thing? ...You did this for such a little thing?" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 87). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (2000) writes that "traditionally patriarchy permitted occasional minimal literacy to women while higher education was closed to them. While modern patriarchies have, fairly recently, opened all educational levels to

women, the kind and quality of education is not the same for each sex. This difference is of course apparent in early socialization but it persists and enters into higher education as well” (Millet 42). Virmati believes that she should never depend upon the Professor to solve her problems. She remains firm in her resolution to do BT and increase the honor of her family by making herself teacher and helping others. In Lahore while doing her BT, Virmati becomes more empowered than before. During this period, she participates in various seminars & conferences and attends speeches and movements. ‘Education led to independence and loose conduct’. Professor continues to chase her. She even refuses to meet him but the bloom of individuality and self esteem has a very short life and is soon tainted by the pest of her Achilles’ heel. She is unable to resist the force of the obsession and pleadings of the Professor and submit before his passions. She loses her virginity and also her sense of right and wrong for a moment. She cries but very soon she conquers over the feeling of guilt and tries to rationalize.

She finds great solace in the fact that Harish- a Professor loves her and she must be satisfied with that. But the cruelty comes when she finds herself pregnant. The mockery of the situation is that the person whom she always believed to be her only well wisher in this world is not with her at the critical moment of her abortion. Then Swarna Lata, her roommate helps her in getting her pregnancy terminated by arranging an appointment with a doctor. She supports her emotionally and psychologically and makes her feel better. Thus Virmati gets the child aborted because of her unmarried status. She is torn between learning and illegitimate love. Weary of the reasons and justifications or truths of Harish, one day she pours out her heart before him, “I break my engagement because of you, blacken my

family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace....and why? Because I am an idiot” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 149).

Virmati is fed up with her “furtive meetings in borrowed places” (Kapur 150). Virmati forces him to listen to him “Then marry me”, she said, trying to push him away. Marry me and make it clear to everybody. I will, I will, I will darling. I will. Just give me time” (125) Her annoyance is quite expected as it is she who is putting her self esteem and reputation at risk. It is she who is playing the role of mute sufferer. The Professor enjoys his marital life and social status but it is Virmati who has lost her moorings. Her life is full of tests and troubles, after a number of vicissitudes she acquires an opportunity to discover her real self. At the age of twenty three, she is appointed as the Principal of Pratibha Kanya Vidyalaya in Sirmaur district. She keeps herself busy and happy by managing her school and home. Manju Kapur describes her appearance at Nahan thus “Virmati was charmed by Nahan. She heard the sounds of the foundry floating up at all hours, and felt herself at one with the working people of the world. She stood in her tiny garden and looked across the valley, turned her head and looked towards the school of which she was the headmistress” (183). Virmati doesn't want to be the victim of any humiliation at Nahan but helplessness makes her lose firm stand against the passions of her love and sex. Harish continues his secret meetings and night stays with her. She starts breaking the social norms and start doing the acts of moral disobedience. Manju Kapur presents the scene of her illicit love making thus: “this was the first time they had spent the whole night together. No fear of curfew, or of

home, no fear of anybody hearing anything. For a brief moment Virmati lived that night as there was no tomorrow. In bed, they had looked at one another and smiled, the love flowing thick and strong between them” (190). The School Management doesn't tolerate this faithlessness on the part of a Principal. As a consequence, her career is ruined. Virmati is dismissed from the school. Once again the experiment of New Woman turned counter-productive.

It is significant to note that experience and sufferings make the New Women of Manju Kapur more daring and mature. Virmati is the finest example of the same. The soaring balloon of the imagination of her love for the Professor gets pierced when she learns about Ganga's pregnancy. She feels as if Professor has cheated her. A woman can bear anything except another woman in her life. For Ganga, Virmati is the other woman. The double standards of Professor perplex her as on one side he was making implorations before Virmati and on the other hand he is making his wife pregnant. She is in such a situation where her helplessness develops in her “a great need for affection and approval marked by compulsiveness, indiscriminateness and general anxiety or despondency when frustrated” (qtd. in Ridgway 7). She belongs to Horney's “moving towards” type of people whose “personality is centred around human need for intimacy and belonging. Insatiable desire to feel safe and unbounded desire for affection... Automatic shoulders blame. Pervasive feeling of being weak and helpless” (qtd. in Ridgway 7). This time she takes a firm decision to force Harish to marry her and end dilly dallying of fake love. She boards the train and goes to Calcutta: “How many new beginnings had her relationship with the Professor led her to?” Virmati is in search of her new identity and she can forge it only through her relationship with Harish. Kapur presents her growth thus: “Still with every mile she travelled

she felt stronger. There was a life of dedication and service ahead of her, and in that she would forge her identity” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 198). Virmati reaches Calcutta and meets Professor’s poet friend who knew everything about their love affair and was shocked to find her so upset. He asked “But Why? Has something happened?” (Kapur 198). He manages to call Professor and forces him to marry her. The Professor argued with his poet friend to put off marriage with Virmati: “What can I do? I am hemmed in and tortured on all sides. I know I have been unfair to her- I know. And yet what can I do? ... Everybody will condemn me, her. My children will never accept it, nor my mother. You know the constraints. Surely I need not explain myself to you! ” (201).

Being an Indian woman, Virmati is a part and parcel of dominant patriarchal structure. She is aware of the fact that she cannot run away from marriage because her amorous love affair with a married man would be condemned as moral transgression by her family as well as society. Marriage would establish her social identity and provide release from the fear of criticism and social isolation. She is so much anxious for social & cultural security and peaceful home that the idea of becoming the second wife of Harish does not appear shameful to her. Thus, Professor’s friend plays a significant role in getting them married. In the evening, the “wedding ceremony proceeded smoothly” (202). Finally, Virmati gets married to the man she loves and frees herself from all the burden of her horrendous “past of five years” (202). Her wish was fulfilled but it is not the end of her miseries rather start of her life of marginalization and social separation. After her marriage Virmati returns to Amritsar. But her married life there turns out to be a failure. For Ganga Harish’s first wife, marriage is a sacred and social institution, where love is not the foundation of marriage. She humbly

accepts whatever the Professor does and does not even think of going against the injustice done to her. Krishna Rathore in her article entitled, "Inching towards Freedom" (1996) presents her viewpoint thus:

A woman was not supposed to voice her experiences and anguish in public. She was indeed free to record them in her private diaries or confine in one or two intimate women friends. There are strong taboos against sharing them with men. It was her sole duty to make her marriage successful even if the husband strayed. (Rathore 54)

Ganga has everything except education still she has no complaints from her life, on the other hand, Virmati is educated, good looking and well behaved husband still she has many problems to face. She is ignored and has to face unsympathetic gesture and taunts of all family members. She does not become only difficult daughter but difficult daughter-in-law also. In the evening, "Virmati went to the *angan* to bring the clothes in. The line was bare except for her own hanging forlornly at the end. She took them down, and clenched her lips. She wondered drearily whether this isolation would continue till the end of her life" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 215). Professor has also to face many problems. When Kishori Devi, Professor's mother reprimands him for doing another marriage he gets angry and says "I do what I can for everybody. But, to satisfy all of you, I am supposed to live my life tied to a woman with whom I have nothing in common. Who cannot even read. Who keeps a *ghunghat* in front of my friends?" (Kapur 209). However after some sometime Kishori Devi accepted her fate saying: "We have to accept- this is our lot in life" (211).

Virmati withers away under the cold stares of Ganga, her husband's first wife, with whom she has to live her life. She is not allowed by Ganga and Professor's mother to enter in the kitchen and perform the domestic duties or any work related to Professor. Even the children in the family despise and disrespect her for reason unknown to them. Ganga's son remarks "who is this *gandi* lady? Send her away" (192). Her sister-in-law is also not happy with her. Virmati boasts before Ganga about her family's inclination towards educating the girls: "My mother, my masi, all studied. It is the rivaz in our family" (123). After marriage, Virmati always longs to visit her home. She had written to her mother about her marriage but nobody comes to see her. She feels that she had disobeyed them. That's why her family has dispossessed her. Desperate to meet her parents, one day she goes to Lepel Griffin Road to meet her mother and siblings. Kasturi leaps on her violently: "Get out of here! Why bother to come now!" (210) She tries to hit her hard with her chappal and cries thus: "You've destroyed our family, you *badmash*, you *randi*! You've blackened our face everywhere! For this I gave you birth? Because of you there is shame on our family, shame on me, shame on Bade Pitaji! But what do you care, brazen that you are! " (221). Kasturi declares that her family has disowned her forever "Who is keeping her? Let her go to her cheap, dishonored home! Could we ever stop her? Go! What are you waiting for?" (221) Thus Virmati leaves the place in utter shock and confusion. For the first time, she realized that her act of moral transgression has become a curse for her. She experiences mass of her guiltiness. She cannot even summon courage to tell Harish about it and grasped all disgrace silently because she knew that she herself was

responsible for all her plight. She realizes that the years of tending, care, sacrifice and duty are gone just because of her decision to live a life of her choice. Even her husband Harish starts getting detached from her.

Much against her wishes to study further, he sends her to her to Lahore to be away from her. Her father expired, her grandfather died, she had a miscarriage and suffered misery of being marginalized by her husband. In cremation ground her mother Kasturi pestered her so much: “Would your Pitaji have gone if he didn’t live with the disgrace his daughter caused him?” (240) When her father dies, she curses herself: “Baoji always looked pale and tired. After what his daughter did he was never the same. All last year so silent and listless. Everybody could notice. It killed him. Definitely killed him” (238).Virmati forgets the feeling of individuality and dreams no more of independence. She experiences sharp agony and feels dejected “It was almost as though she had gone mad. Forgotten who she was, who she was married to, and all her obligations” (240). Her anguish is depicted thus “God was speaking. He was punishing her for the first time. May be she could never have children. She had robbed her own womb three years earlier, just as she had robbed another woman of her husband. Ganga’s face, swollen with hate and fear had followed her everywhere, the venom concentrated in the gaze of the evil eye” (246). Pushp Lata (2006) states thus:

Virmati’s journey of realization and freedom scrambles into incoherence and aggravates her misery of life and closes all the doors of happiness. In the intricate odyssey of her life the novel depicts the shattering of all her romantic illusions of equality which

ultimately force her to lead the role of a second wife in a man made society. (Lata 198-9)

After Harish's marriage with Virmati, though all rights of a legally wedded wife remain with Ganga yet her poor soul yearns for her husband. Virmati trickily manages to send Ganga away from Harish's house but the distance does not reduce her love for her husband. Like an ideal devoted Indian wife, she wears daily her *bindi*, *sindoor* and *mangalsutra* though she is not with him. She has become conscious of the fact that despite of his literary taste and intellectual thirst is no more than a lascivious man.

Hence one finds that Virmati defies the social norms and goes after her instincts. She becomes Professor's second wife. Throughout the novel Virmati finds herself dislocated, estranged from her own family, from her husband's family, from the society and even from her husband. She jumbles up between Amritsar, Lahore, Nahan and Delhi in the quest of her roots but in vain. Dipika Sahai (2004) in this regard states thus:

As a rebel she is conscious of her emotional needs. Herself assertion goes to the extent of having illicit love with the married Professor whom she subsequently marries. The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of rejection by her family on becoming the second wife of the professor, and the resultant alienation from society forms the theme of the novel. Her life is a continuous struggle. She wants to establish an order through defiance. She rebels against the accepted and existing moral codes and social norms. (Sahai 8-"2)

Shakuntla is also a personification of new woman. Manju Kapur has given a comparative analysis of Virmati and Shakuntala who have tasted the wine of liberty through an effective use of similes and metaphors. The 'creamy milk' in the novel stands for patriarchal oppression and 'wine' signifies modernism. Virmati's psyche is enthralled by Shakuntla's dynamic personality, liberal ideas and fashionable life style because she is educated and participates in the political Gandhian movement. Virmati also desires to become like Shakuntala who is described thus:

Virmati, looking at her glamorous cousin, marveled at the change Lahore had wrought in her.... Her dress too had changed from her Amritsar days. When they went visiting she wore her saris in Parsi-style, as Shakuntla called it, with the palla draped over her right shoulder. The saris were of some thin material, foreign with a woven silk border sewn onto them. The blouses were of the same thin material, with loose sleeves to the elbows. She wore her hair with a side parting, smoothed over her ears into at the back. Her shoes were black, shiny, patent leather with high heels. Her jewellery consisted of a strand of pearls, a single gold bangle on one arm, and a large man's watch on the other. (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 16)

When Kasturi and Lajwanti remind her of marriage, she gets irritated and says "Another word about shadi, and I'm going back to Lahore" (Kapur 7). The discussion between Shakuntala and Virmati gives the lucid idea of her character. "We travel, entertain ourselves in the evening, follow such other works, read papers, attend seminars, one of us is even going abroad for higher studies" (17).

Here we find that inadvertently Kasturi and her aunt Lajwanti become the representatives of patriarchal norms and orthodox principles that are never revolted and where marriage is regarded as the ultimate destination for a woman. Kasturi is a traditional stereotype of patriarchy. She devotedly followed the guidelines of her mother and comes forward as a winning instance of motherhood. Her kitchen was full of activities; her kitchen as presented by Kapur is full of vivacity and life:

In the kitchen all was noise and hot frying smells. Big pieces of wood were sticking out of fire that was crackling under large heavy khaddhi, half full of foaming oil. Indumati and a dripping Hemavati were cutting vegetables, sitting on wooden patriis on the floor. Gunvati was concentrating on cutting pumpkin pieces to the required thinness and Vidya, young and inexperienced in the art of fine slicing was vigorously grating a long, green lauki. (69)

Kapur has depicted her as a child bearing machine that is always confined in the kitchen to gratify her in-laws in every potential way. The novelist sarcastically comments thus: “Kasturi couldn’t remember a time when she was not tired, when her feet and legs didn’t ache. Her back curved in towards the base of her spine, and carrying children was a strain, even when they were young” (7). Bearing numerous children was encouraged by Kasturi’s mother as “at the birth of the first child she had come with her own food, her dal, rice, flour, ghee, and spices, with her own servant boy to buy vegetables, to draw water from the market pump, to help with house hold work” (9). But when she conceived eleventh time she was totally wrecked in health and lost all her bodily vigor. She is shocked at every new pregnancy as she feels: “How trapped could nature make a woman?” (7)

She is totally shattered with pale face and bloodless bones. She cried out and admitted: “I am going to die, Maji, this time. I know it” (8). In her hard times, she tries to find repose and confidence in her daughter Virmati who facilitates her in nurturing up a team of children.

You are the eldest Viru your duty is greater. You know how much younger ones look up to you. Your grandfather and father both have confidence in you, other wise would they have given you so much freedom, they thought school and college will strengthen you, not change you. Now what will they feel when you want us to break out our word and destroy our good name? How will they understand? (58).

The author also voices Virmati’s struggle of her early life before marriage. She used to spend most of her time in taking care of her brothers and sisters. Virmati recollects:

It was weary work and she was almost tired and harassed...At times Virmati yearned for affection, for some sign that she was special. But when she put her head next to the youngest baby, feeding in the mother’s arms, Kasturi would get irritated and push her away. ‘Have you seen to their food – milk – clothes –studies?’ . . . ‘I am just going’, protest Virmati finally. ‘Why can’t Indumati also take responsibility? Why does it always have to be me?’ ‘You know they don’t listen to her’, snapped Kasturi. ‘You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things, who will? (6-7)

Kasturi's conscience is deeply influenced by the values that patriarchy has nurtured in her. She firmly believes that education for a girl is a license to get married to an eligible bachelor. Mary Ann Fergusson in her study of the *Image of Women in Literature* (1990) states that "one peculiarity of the images of women throughout history is that social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes" (Ferguson 4).

Mary Wollstonecraft in her famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) opines that "the most perfect education is to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (Wollstonecraft 31). When Lajwanti flaunts "How can anyone see her when she has no time? Such a talented teacher, so popular, what an inspiring example she is for the younger ones," declared Lajwanti, about achievements she herself had never understood or cared for. 'Still, it is the duty of every girl to get married,' remarked Kasturi mildly" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 15). When Virmati is extremely influenced by the change that Shakuntla's education has brought in her, Kasturi says disapprovingly "she has become a mem," Kasturi said disapprovingly. 'Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. I studied too, but my mother would have killed me if I had dared even to want to dress in anything other than was bought for me" (Kapur 15). Virmati mutely listens to her mother but being an emerging New Woman she completely ignores her advice since she is "drawn towards Shakuntala" (17). Betty Friedan (1971) advocated freedom for women thus: "for woman, as for men, the need for self-fulfillment-the autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization-is as important as the sexual need..." (Friedan 282). Kasturi snubs Virmati when later complains

her that her household responsibilities have been coming in the way of her studies, later snubs her saying that “leave your studies if it is going to make you so bad tempered with your family. You are forgetting what comes first” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 21). When Virmati denies these values, Kasturi takes it against her own self. She always admonishes Virmati and pours out the following words, “What crimes did I commit in my last life that I should be cursed with a daughter like you in this one?” (Kapur 59). Kasturi who herself graduated at the age of twelve in household because her mother had tried to make certain her future contentment by the flawless nature of her daughter’s qualifications. Kasturi becomes unsympathetic and cruel towards Virmati when later makes an unsuccessful suicidal attempt. She was quite upset and unable to understand her mind but responded in a bitter tone: “This girl will throw mud on our whole family, make us fall so low we will have no name left” (87). Kasturi chastised her daughter for nurturing dreams which were improper for a girl to cherish. She reminded her how “a woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings” (111). She feels embarrassed and curses Virmati’s education that has made her do such a shameful act. Instead of understanding her daughter she plays the role of patriarchy. Suraj Prakash, Virmati’s father accords his consent for her further studies but he remains stuck to the rights and duties of parents and children as decided by the patriarchy. “But why? Every girl has to go to her own home. This is your right, and our duty. As it is, we have taken our time, not wishing to hurry you. We have let you study, as much as any girl has studied in Amritsar.” (87)

The beginning of the novel shows how the impact of socio-political forces brings in its wake the initiation of modernism along with the spread of ideology of

Arya Samaj. Kasturi's uncle persuaded Kasturi's mother about the worth of education. She was sent to her school till the age of sixteen. Manju Kapur demonstrates the impact of the ideology of Arya Samaj when she writes "Kasturi never forgot that evening...Once she gained a proper education, she would be on her way to becoming one of the finest flowers of the Hindu womanhood" (62). The philosophy and beliefs of the Arya Samaj are passed on from generation to generation. Arya Samaj put emphasis on eradication of evil of child marriage is evil. In the novel, we see that Kasturi's mother followed the dictates of her Samaj faithfully. She didn't allow Suraj Parkash to meet Kasturi before marriage as she believed that "their girl was not for display" (64). Kasturi continues the same patriarchal tradition and struggles to transfer all the ideals and beliefs of her mother to Virmati. Kasturi always advises her daughter Virmati to be careful and vigilant in life as the ultimate objective of her life is to be a successful woman in life and to please her –in laws: "Have you seen to their food-milk-clothes-studies? And "Arre, you think there is all the time in this world for sitting around, doing nothing?" (6). Virmati wants to live in her own world and draws her own line of actions in the novel. She has thirst for learning and is motivated to become a knowledgeable teacher. The ultimate destination of her life is not marriage. Her straightforward and liberal ideas about love, sex and marriage make her stand in opposition to her family and society. She rejects Inderjit, the groom chosen by her parents and attempts suicide to avoid marriage. She falls in love with a married Professor who is a teacher at Amritsar. Being from an Arya Samaj family, she could not have expected support for her love affair from any sensible man.

Manju Kapur has built-in an incident to explore the mind set of parents from different generations. Kasturi's mother, a sincere follower of teachings of

Arya Samaj always taught her daughter never to question the authority of patriarchy and follow all the family customs and rituals in spirit. She could not tolerate her daughter's insubordination towards the ideology of Arya Samaj when she finds Kasturi praying before the picture of Jesus Christ. Without delay, Kasturi was withdrawn from the Mission School and admitted in the Arya Samaj School. Kasturi won good name in the family because she seriously learnt to read, write and balance household accounts, sewing and do the Arya Samaji Havan, Sandhya and meditations conscientiously. Kasturi's education testifies what Kate Millett remarks in *Sexual Politics* that "the education of women was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold level of learning, a genteel polish its major achievement. And in most cases it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon virtue a sugared word which meant obedience, servility, and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity" (Millett 74).

Kapur has drawn the character of Virmati on the line of Indian Renaissance which meant the new beginning for the women. By the turn of the century, women were given lofty position in the society. The development movements launched by Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda had great influence on the responsiveness of the social thinkers. A number of social organizations had come up which departed from the conventional idea of suppression of women. A new wave of feminism and women empowerment started in India. Virmati is the creation of these new thought, beliefs and trends of the age. With the setting up of DAV institutions before division, Lahore had become a hub of education. Women were inspired to become teachers in schools and colleges. Both Shakuntla and Virmati are influenced by the emergent social changes when they make up their mind to pursue higher education in Lahore. No wonder, Virmati

suffers as she is unable to go by the style of her mother. She falls in love with Harish, an Oxford returned Professor of literature who finds his soul mate in a student Virmati who is keenly anxious to study.

Virmati always sat in the front row with the four other girls who were in the Professor's class and that was the only place he saw her in college, flower-like, against a backdrop of male students . . . The Professor drank in the symbolism of her posture greedily. It moved him so deeply that he remembered it in all its detail . . . the Professor's desire to possess had extended to her heart and mind.
(Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 46-7)

The remarks of Simone De Beauvoir are appropriate here when comments: "the situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assure the status of the other" (Beauvoir 167).

Kapur came under the influence of William Wordsworth when she conceives Harish. He is a lover of Nature and even his wife Ganga is surprised at his passionate love for Nature. She feels "his face was observed in the beauty of sunset. His glasses raised upwards, reflected the brilliant colours he was contemplating" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 77). Professor Harish is a learned married Indian with a British degree. Virmati's falling in with a married man is her stupendous mistake. It is considered as a sin. Seemanthini Niranjana states the views of Foucault as "the body is the site of a range of institutional and regulatory discourses. The body becomes the very medium through which feminist is constituted" (qtd. in Niranjana 109-10). Virmati is swept away by the flood of love

and illicit sex. One can see her totally lost in the romantic world, getting pleasure from the love poems sent by Harish in his love letters. Discussions of Keats's poetry, Wordsworth's descriptions of Nature and above all the Professor's intensely passionate letters are a new experience for Virmati. She is equally responsive to his love letters and is completely under the sway of Professor Harish. She meets him secretly and does everything in passions of love acting against the teachings of her Arya Samaj family. She knows that her grandfather a renowned businessman will be shocked but love is blind and everything is in fair in love and war. "What has happened has happened for the good. In which world was I living, to be caught up in the illusion of your love? Just as you must do your duty to your family, and your wife, so too I must do my duty to mine. My people have always been straightforward people, Pitaji and Bade Baoji have always been known for their honesty and high standard" (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 107). V. Geetha talking about social attitude says:

Women's bodies were often routinely viewed as objects of male desire and lust; a fact that was particularly evident in media images of women. Women's groups pointed to the range of sexual crimes that were directed at women - child abuse, incest, marital rape - to argue that their social existence was invariably sexualized and therefore not seen as worthy of equality or justice. The family and larger kin group, they noted, actively aided this sexualization of women's bodies by valorizing against women, they insisted, which secured the patriarch's power, both at level of family and society. (Geetha 191)

Despite of her passionate love for Harish, Virmati is never free from the fears of conscience. She cannot forget that her love for a married man is an act of moral transgression. She is quite aware of the fact that she is moving on the wrong path. She is pulled between two opposite forces of a psychological divergence as on the one side there is family, society, patriarchal customs, norms, and traditional values; and on the other is her unlawful love for Harish. “She would sometimes wish that . . . but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No Professor and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 54). Still, she persists the biological consummation of her love. Kapur rightly says: “Virmati was sure she should not believe him. Even allowing for the fact that he might be telling the truth, was it desirable for a man to abandon his children for the love of a woman? And what about her? Her daughter had been bad enough. Now she would be ruining one more child’s life. How could she do it?” (Kapur 122). Manju Kapur ironically comments thus on her plight that “a child of their union, the result of all those speeches on freedom and the right to individuality, the sanctity of human love and the tyranny of social and religious restraints, should meet its end like this!...Her nothingness was total ” (171).

The two significant episodes in Virmati’s life totally alter her life and push her to rebel against her parents. The first important event is her visit to Dalhousie for a short period with her mother Kasturi who needed calmness and rest after the birth of her younger sister Paro. Virmati at that time was already a grown up woman studying for her FA examination. Her parents were preparing for her wedding. Here in Dalhousie she enjoyed in the company of her cousin Shakuntala who loved independence and romance. Virmati was highly inclined towards liberal ideas of Shakuntala. The second important episode of her life was her attempt to

end her life forever. Virmati was exhausted with her dull and monotonous life. She was totally confused what she should do. The sudden entry of Professor Harish in her life had really disturbed the normal course of her life and achievement of her objectives. Her sense of distinguishing between right and wrong was pricking her inwardly as she knew that Harish was a married person and it would be offensive to develop intimate relations with him. With this firm belief that higher education alone can provide her opportunities to relish affection, liberty and adventure, she aspired to pursue her further studies and become a successful teacher like her cousin Shakuntla.

It was a matter of chance that her would-be –father-in law died and she grabs chance by joining AS College for higher education. But blooming love for Harish baffled her and one day she took a severe decision and went to Tarsikka canal to jump into to end her life.

Her mind wandered to the thousands of mosquitoes that hovered around the drains and all the fruit and halwai stalls in the market. Then to her father's shop, the old house, her old school, her new house, her new college, incoherent pictures jumbling about in her unhappy mind... The waters going strangely and mysteriously on, having a being in which her own would soon be inextricably mingled . . . Now that she was actually going to merge her body with the canal she felt her confusion clearing. (75-6)

Her idiotic act devastated the family. Her life was saved and all cried "She's back! She'd back!" The entire family took a sigh of relief but much damage had been done. Her mother Kasturi is shocked to know all about her. She had

wished her to be a successful Indian woman so that she could please her in-law after marriage. But Virmati turned out to be a rebel against destiny, to the lasting shame of her family. She scolded her in harsh words thus: “When I was your age, girls only left their house when they married. And beyond a certain age...” (111). She caught her hair and banged her head against the wall. Virmati thus became the victim of domestic violence. R. J. Kalpana in her article entitled “Phallic Reflections” (2005) states thus:

Seen in relative terms to the male, female is denied the opportunity to forge an identity of her own. If and when she dares she comes face to face with the last weapon in patriarchal arsenal: violence. In most simplified form, violence is defined as abuse and it takes on many guises, from physical assault to psychological domination to social subjection to cultural oppression. (Kalpana 68)

Kapur has depicted her vision of New Feminism through Virmati and Shakuntala. They become the signifiers of compelling force of social change and the leanings towards modernism in post independence era. With full zeal and eagerness, she yearns to discover the life beyond the dull household sphere. She is bold enough to break all the patriarchal chains that have bound her. She had always felt forlorn and weak living under the moral control of patriarchal norms and her mother. She envies her cousin Shakuntala who often narrates her own experiences of a liberal lifestyle in Lahore: “We travel, entertain ourselves in the evenings; follow each other’s work, read papers, attend seminars” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 17). Now it was her time to enjoy a free life after a long struggle at Amritsar. Virmati gets entwined with a married professor unwillingly under

psychological compulsion. Her new trip to Lahore for education gives her a relief from emotional pressures of love and romance. Now it was her time to enjoy a free life after a long struggle at Amritsar. She has always felt lonely and helpless burdened by patriarchal oppression and living under the moral control of her mother. Unwillingly and under psychological compulsion, she gets entangled with a married professor who uses every possible tactics to make her psychologically paralyzed and succumb to her passionate love. Her passion for freedom lands her in trouble and forces her to commit sin. Even nature around her adds pain to her troubled state instead of soothing her.

For a long time Virmati lay on the damp coolness of the thick khadi sheets, surrounded by the white net cocoon that once used to make her feel so safe. The moon was bright and make her ache with sadness for herself, for that thing inside her that she couldn't name for the fear of making it rani, so strong on moonlit nights, came floating upto her. The beauty added to her pain . . . Eventually her tears stopped and she lay drained and corpse- like . . . Like lady, Macbeth, she had murdered sleep. (Kapur 162)

Virmati came under the influence of Swaranlata, a staunch feminist in Lahore. She took her in Punjab Women's Students Conference where Virmati made an touching speech revealing her struggle and bewilderment "am I free, thought Virmati? I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. She felt out of place, an outcaste amongst all these women. She thought of Harish who loved her. She must be satisfied with that"

(142). Just as Hardy's *Tess* becomes pregnant and learns the real lesson of life. Virmati also understands for the first time the ramification of freedom she had been so longing in life. She wants to end her life, she takes a knife lying on the table: "She picked up the knife and slowly slashed at the soft skin on her calf" (172). Pregnancy before marriage was unfaithfulness to her family. After abortion she gets to understand the difference between the illusion of romantic love and harsh reality. Marriage to an already married man is neither a bliss nor does it ensure any shelter rather it shall end up with her cultural displacement. Ida's remarks is quite relevant here when she says; "that was all she wanted to do. Forget, forget, forget, forget. She felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she construed as yearning for the Professor. Oh, how she longed to meet him, to throw herself on his chest, babble out her story, feel his love and sympathy, his regret that he wasn't there pouring over her in a great tidal wave that would cleanse her of all guilt and sorrow!" (173).

After her abortion, Virmati emerges as a bold and powerful woman. She becomes more mature and learns the ability of bearing pain and grief. Virmati upholds her individuality and her independence but her concept of freedom is limited only to her body and heart. She does not utilize her education as her cousin Shakuntala did. K.V.S Maheswara Rao opines thus: "*Difficult Daughters* represents the emergence of new woman who is no longer the chaste wife whose suffering can only make her more virtuous, the nurturing mother who denies her own self, the avenging Kali or a titillating strumpet" (Rao 242).

Thus, Virmati comes forward as a New Woman of Manju Kapur in the novel. She dares to puncture the patriarchal morality and laws. To lead an

independent life, she becomes a social rebel. Her life style, dreams and aspirations clash with the traditional mindset of her mother but she sticks to her guns in spite of the turbulence in her life. Susan Polis Schultz rightly says: “The new woman arises full of confidence, she speaks eloquently, and thinks independently, full of strength. She organizes efficiently and directs proudly” (Schultz 39). She is sincere to the core of her heart and remains with Harish under all good and bad circumstances and liberty loving woman. “In all the time wearing salwar kameez no one had accosted her. Now in jeans, she is accessible to the whole city... may be in time she will get used to her belly jutting out, get used to thick stiff material between her legs” (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 152). One finds in Virmati a courageous and more vocal personality who is quite conscious of the privileges for education and economic independence. So, we one can say that she is a spokesperson brought in by Manju Kapur to signify the importance and essence of liberty and leaning for Indian women.

In her second novel entitled *A Married Woman* taken up for the present research work, Manju Kapur uses her writing as a tool of protest, a way of mapping from the perspective of woman’s experience. It was published in 2002. It takes a profound and agreeable glance at the sense of displacement often felt by women in the traditional institution of marriage and family. The controversial political and religious issues of Ram Janma Bhoomi and Babri Masjid provide the background to the novel. Kapur has mastered an explicit portrayal of absorbing political condition analogous with the depiction of protagonist’s inner turmoil. Rollason rightly observes thus:

Astha Vadera, a school teacher with an M. A. in English, lives a comfortable, conventional Delhi Hindu middle class life, within an arranged marriage with her businessman husband, a self-satisfied materialist who sells South Korean T.V. Sets, and their two children, until she meets Aijaz Khan a secular Muslim involved in a progressive theatre group. (Rollason 2009)

Chaudhari Minaben Jesangbhai in article entitled, “Novels of Manju Kapur” opines that “her second novel *A Married Woman* published in 2002. Is seductive story of love, set at a time of political and religious upheaval- a struggle which still persists today, years after the 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque – parallels Astha’s emotional turmoil, told with sympathy and intelligence” (Chaudhari 537).

The novel revolves around the life of Astha from her early days to her forties through different expectations and disappointments, complement and denials, and respect and annoyance. Astha is born and brought up in a homely environment of a conventional middle class family. As she is the only child in the family, her parents consider her to be their only hope and source of joy and always dream for her prosperous future. Her education, her disposition, her fitness and her wedding have become burdensome to them. Particularly her traditional mother Sita like any other woman of her age always prays to God for the happy married life of her daughter Astha. She wants to cultivate religious piety in Astha through practice of rituals. Her father is a bureaucrat who believes in the ‘new’ and strongly feels that his daughter herself will be the architect of her future which is required to be strengthened by a number of books. He always inspires her about her capabilities,

her talent of painting and her way with the words. He is convinced that with little more efforts in Mathematics which is her weak point, she can appear in competitive exams. —“With a good job comes independence” (Kapur, *A Married Woman* 4). He is more inclined towards Astha’s formal education and fostering good habits, interests and mannerism. He has seriously made up his mind to marry his daughter before his retirement from the Indian Civil service. But Astha refuses to everyone who comes to see her home. She feels romantic feelings for Bunty, an Army Cadet at NDA, Kharagwasla. She considers love to be a valued possession to be shown and bragged about among friends. When her mother comes to know the relationship between Astha and Bunty, she arranges the meeting of Astha and an army man without much delay. But Astha refuses to meet him. Astha’s mother ends up the episode by complaining to Bunty’s parents. Towards the final stage of her graduation, she comes closer to Rohan whom she starts meeting furtively in his car at the dark corners of the streets. At her age, girls are very much interested to know if any boy is glaring at them and if anybody proposes, she believes herself to be safe in the hands of such a boy. Astha is used to record the happenings and events of her life in a diary. Her mother comes to know about her feelings, imagination and rendezvous manners from her diary but Astha conceals the truth by stating everything as a part of her imagination. Her mother realizes that the Convent education has spoiled the psyche of her daughter. Finally, her relationship with Rohan also gets snapped when later moves to Oxford for higher study forces. Manju Kapur brings home the fact that in Indian society, right from the birth girls are considered the biggest responsibilities for their parents. So, their education, mannerism and moral development become a source of strain to them. This pressure makes the changing behaviour of parents towards their daughters no doubt

they are very nearer and dearer to their fathers. Astha is the responsibility of her parents, but she is not an easy child to be tied to anyone so easily. After she does her M.A., a marriage proposal comes from the son of a bureaucrat in the commerce Ministry. Hemant is MBA from America and is serving as an Assistant Manager in a bank in Delhi. The marriage takes place. The initial phase of marriage was happy. Astha finds in Hemant an ideal and honest husband who is patronizing, caring and considerate and usually calls her “my baby”. He possesses all the traits of a traditional Indian husband. He also does well in love making with Astha. She thinks that every boy wants a virgin girl. But even they are so by mind and heart. According to the Hindu customs, marriage is a union of body, mind and heart of both of the partners. Days and months pass by. Astha begins to feel as if her life and world has got confined to just thinking of her desires and different roles and responsibilities of her married life. Her in-laws allow her to take up the job of a teacher as a good time pass. Astha believes that the job of teaching has fallen into her lap. The firmament of romanticism has to come down to the ground reality. After retirement, Astha’s parents moves to their house in Lodhi colony, which is inexpensive. But after few months her father dies away and her mother becomes weak and quiet. Astha starts spending her time with her mother for encouraging up her mother. She also makes efforts to arouse Hemant’s interest in the problems of her mother. Since Hemant remains very busy with his office works, Astha keep herself busy with her school. In the beginning she does not like her teaching job, but with the passage of time, happiness finds place in their life. Astha becomes pregnant. Her mother wishes if it may be a son, but Hemant denies this statement and says that “in America there is no difference between boys and girls. How can this country get anywhere if we go on treating our women this way? ” (Kapur 57).

Astha gives birth to a sweet girl named Anuradha. But after her birth, Hemant's attitude is changed. One can say that an American father has turned to an Indian one. He wants to have another child as a son and bluntly says that if the second child is a girl they will go for the third. In Indian society people believe that the family legacy goes on only through a boy not through a girl. Here Hemant also believes so. Luckily, second child comes to be the baby boy and he is named Himanshu. When Astha finds herself pregnant again, Hemant, Astha's mother, and her mother-in-law, everybody wants that it might be a son. All of them offer poojas (prayers) and many other such things. Astha gets fed up but she cannot help it. She tries to stay quiet for the baby's sake and takes to meditation and dwells on peaceful thoughts. But she is not allowed to forget the judgment of everybody, her colleagues, her in-laws, wives of her husband's friends, her mother, the cook, the gardener and that almost universal opinion is that it will be a son and a heir. Finally a baby boy comes in the hands of his destiny. Astha gets busy with her children and a job. Hemant also submits to the gripping necessity of worldly needs and starts his own factory in the name of Astha. As a result, he becomes all the more busy and distant. She almost complains that he talks only of business, house or children but not of themselves as they used to do before. But Hemant persuades her with a promise to give more time to family in future. Astha is now a single mother virtually. She feels stressed by job, small children and house, so she sometimes thinks of resigning from school, but she prefers to continue her school job because she has become the principal's right hand and is much appreciated. Moreover, marriage and birth of her children have brought much change in a Astha, a woman who only wished for passionate love now values independence. Besides all these things she experiences happiness in intermingling with young minds. Manju Kapur

explains this change thus “She found this soothing, and later scolded herself for being so demanding. Hemant was busy, Hemant was building their future, she had to be adjusting, that was what marriage was all about” (67). She tries to curb her dissatisfaction and concentrates on her responsibilities as a mother, wife and daughter-in-law. She has to learn to adjust with domineering husband, intrusive mother-in-law and disapproving mother. Her children, husband parents-in-law and increasingly passionless marital sex take up most of her life. She finds herself caught in a choking traditional society which frowns upon any expectation of change in the domestic chores of responsibilities.

To reimburse her husband’s timeless situation for her she wishes to give more time to her children but they are already busy with their grandparents. She feels isolation and disaffection. She tears from her eyes when she complains of this to Hemant. He fails to understand the real cause of her problem. Because of hypertension, she starts suffering from intolerable attacks of headache and has to be hospitalized for few days for a minor surgery. Hemant looks after her. Even the nurse appreciates this and says that every husband does not do so. Since their talk usually end up with some dispute, coldness and more trouble, Astha to find a temporary relief resumes writing poetry and drawing sketches that she has been doing right from her school days. Though the natural settings, the solemn faces of gardeners tending plants and never getting credit, love, denial and longings form the themes of her writings yet her own experiences continuously replay language. Hemant proves himself as the greatest financier. It is revealed when Astha’s mother hands over the money to Hemant after her death to be safely invested for his children. The obvious reason for this is that Hemant has proved his administration ability both in his service and in business whereas Astha becomes

failure in doing any one of them at least. She is more devoted towards her school, poetry and painting in order to sooth her neglected emotions. The year 1987 proves a turning point in the life of Astha when her Principal invites The Street Theatre Group to hold a workshop on their campus. It is here she meets Aijaz, a theatre personality. He is a lecturer in history and organizes street plays to strengthen communal harmony in the country. Kapur describes Aijaj as

He was of medium height, his body compact. His face was the clear delicate luminous brown of freshly rained-on earth. His lips were a darker brown than his skin, and his eyes were black and narrow. While working he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, allowing Astha to view at her leisure his round arms, hairless, smooth and muscular. He had prematurely grey hair, which, thick and springy, fell about his face and neck in ways that suggested a good barber. (112-3)

At first Astha does not pay much attention to Aijaz. Being an expert in understanding the psychological anxieties of the women, Aijaz starts giving attention to Astha. He praises her handwriting, poetry and paintings. She feels that Aijaz is only one who can actually understand her worth. She is fond of watching his stage performances. Astha feels sensation and romance when Aijaz touch on her knee “She thinks that- What did it mean, did he like her, did he want to have an affair with her, why had she been so startled by his hand on her knee, why hadn’t she responded, but she was a married woman, with two children and those rights before her eyes” (114). A few months later Astha hears that he is going around with a woman Pipeelika Trivedi, daughter of a widow. Pipeelika is working in an

NGO. She believes in her own choice of partner and lives alone in Delhi, cut off from conservative society. Her mother revolts when she learns of her engagement with a Muslim. Pipeelika's brother Ajay is settled in US. After school, she did an Honours' Degree in sociology in Miranda House College. After that she did an MA from the Delhi School of Economics. Her brother wants her sister to pursue a Ph.D degree in US, but she does not wish to join the Diaspora and wants to serve her mother. She joins an NGO (Ujalla) run by three women, dealing with alternative education for slum children. She is entrapped by the personality of Aijaz like many. Their mutual understanding and nearness strengthen their passion for each other and despite all opposition from both the families they get married. But Aijaz's first wife always remains the creation of public awareness and communal harmony at the cost of his life. Aijaz belongs to Shahjehanpur and after a year of their marriage, they go there. Even he did not tell anything about their marriage to his family due to the Hindu-Muslim disturbances in the environment. Suddenly, one day Hamant reads the newspaper headline to Astha 'Theatre Group Burned Alive in Van'. Aijaz Akhtar Khan is also involved in this group. Astha could not read the whole news for the tears in her eyes. A few days later at the meeting of the Sampradaya Mukti Manch, forum set up in memory of The Street Theatre Group, it is decided that painters should donate a painting for a display on the theme of labor unity and secularism. And this work is held by Astha, lover of painting and it is also one of the gratitude paid to Aijaz. Her mind is all the time preoccupied with the figures of her paintings, the spaces and the colors of her canvas even when she is teaching. At home, after lunch she paints. Her headaches become worse and often in the evening, after the children's homework, she lays on

sofa, balm smothered, dopey with pain killers. She becomes politically active and starts attending the meetings of the Manch. Now she devotes herself towards a cause which is beyond her family. During these activities, she happens to meet Pipee. Her painting exhibition is appreciated and she gets reward of thirty thousand rupees from the Manch. But her self-respect and self dependence is deeply hurt when her husband stops her from buying an antique silver box in Goa. He discourages her and frowns upon her mention of the money that she earned. All the time he thinks of money. After returning from Goa, he counts the money he spent and concludes that nine thousand five hundred rupees for five days well spent. But Astha thinks the other way round and sees it as one of the most dreadful weeks of her life. Hemant's arrogance, controlling outlook, feeling of supremacy over Astha and unwillingness to acknowledge her achievement completely freeze in her marital bliss. Her miseries estrange her further. Similar circumstances and the like mindedness bring Astha and Pipee nearer. They have sympathy and emotions for each other which further develop a lesbian relationship between each other. This relationship grows strengthened during their pilgrimage to Ayodhya. Pipee starts working on broadening the turbulence in Astha's married life to establish safe place for her. Astha is cautious in revealing the amount of time she spends with Pipee. Astha pours out her scratched heart before Pipee to which she applies the ointment of kindness. Pipee tries to brainwash her by saying that true love cannot be felt at bodily level only but it should ensure union of souls, emotions and ideologies. Astha feels her more confident and stronger in company of Pipee. On Pipee's insistence, she deserts her children and family. To be in the company of Pipee, she goes on the Ekta Yatra from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. During this time,

their close connection makes their bond even stronger. Here Astha is disappointed to learn about Pipee's lesbian relationship with Neeraj and Sameera. She finds herself in a confusing state whether she should continue to live under the protection provided by her dearest family and tradition or she should run for liberty and absurd love. In this regard she tells Pipee:

I love you, you know how much you mean to me, I try and prove it every moment we have together, but I can't abandon my family, I can't. May be I should not have looked for happiness, but I couldn't help myself. I suppose you think I should not be in a relationship, but I had not foreseen..... Oh Pipee, I'm sorry I am not like you.
(242)

Astha also thinks that if husband and wife is one person, then Pipee and she were even more so. She feels complete with her. Astha's family becomes worried when Hemant has a heart attack, and it is up to Astha to change herself, because Hemant is not going to change his own. Every morning she makes sure they go for a walk. Kapur expresses Astha's thoughts thus:

Was these where her life had led her, this the space she had travelled between those walks and these? Striding briskly to still the thoughts in her head, speaking to mask the feelings in her heart. She looked at Hemant, swinging his arms, concentrating on getting his heart rate up. Perhaps he was disappointed too; perhaps he had looked for something different in marriage. They didn't talk about such things, she would never know. (283)

Now, Astha spends lot of time thinking about herself. She is a traditional wife as Pipee had assumed. She sometimes feels irritated at the idea but she is certainly performing her duties as a devoted wife. Astha very bravely faces the truth of Pipee's leaving for US to pursue her Ph.D. Astha is alienated again. And for a moment Astha experiences a forceful condition of jealousy, not just for Pipee, but for anyone who has the possibility of a new life. She has to make herself believe strictly that if she too has many options if she wishes.

Like Virmati, Astha is Kapur's new woman. She is the personification of Manju Kapur's vision of liberating women from the oppressive measures of patriarchy. She is "conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes" (Malik 171). Since her childhood, she complained against the dominating role played by the trap of social customs and values. She never inherited the values of her mother who quite often says: "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastra say if parents die without getting their daughters married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth" (Kapur, *A Married Woman* 1). Astha's strong reaction on this is: "I don't believe in all that stuff and I think as an educated person neither should you" (Kapur 1). She does not submit to the calculated move of her patriarchal father for finding an eligible match for his daughter. He very craftily conceals his real intentions, while encouraging his daughter to work hard. Marriage is the only and final destination fixed by him for his daughter only viewpoint is changed. He has seriously made up his mind to marry his daughter before his retirement from the Indian Civil service. But Astha refuses to everyone who comes to see her home. She feels romantic feelings for Bunty, an Army Cadet at NDA, Kharagwasla. She

considers love to be a valued possession to be shown and bragged about among friends. When her mother comes to know the relationship between Astha and Bunt, she arranges the meeting of Astha and an army man without much delay. But Astha refuses to meet him. Born and brought up in middle class values, Astha seems to enjoy her mental joy for a long time but soon she starts feeling that surely there is something lacking in her life. A feeling of incompleteness, misery and despair is further provoked by her involvement into the external world of upheaval and disputes. She again gets emotionally and physically involved with Rohan. Burning with the excitement of adolescence, the eager youngsters often break the rules and cross the limits of modesty. The couple seek gratification of their bodies in kissing, touching and pressing each other. Rohan's actions receive no resistance from Astha who is anxious to flout all conventions to satiate her physical desires like the hungry haste of the river as implied from the following lines: "All she wanted was for him to start, so that the world could fall away and she be lost. This is love, she told herself, no wonder they talk so much about it" (24-5).

Through the life of Astha, Kapur has presented the heavy struggle of women for a place which is decent and equal to men in a society. Chaudhari Minaben Jesangbhai (2014) states that "the novel is a feminocentric protest against the phallogocentric patriarchal culture. The male world imposes unlimited controls on women. Kapur however in this novel empowers her protagonist Astha to give a strong resistance to patriarchy by denouncing the prescribed norms of a society" (Chaudhari 538).

After Astha's father dies away, she becomes more worried about her mother. She repeatedly requests her mother to come and stay with her family, her

mother says: “It doesn’t look nice.” Astha replies to her mother in anguish: “I wish you wouldn’t be so stick-in –the-mud, Ma. Why didn’t you have a son to look after you were old, if you cannot take anything from a daughter? Why did you stop with me? ” (Kapur, *A Married Woman* 85). She even feels jealous to see Hemant’s straightforward relationship with his parents. What disturbs her the most is that neither her parents nor her husband ever give her any importance in trivial or significant decisions. When her mother donates her books to the library, she argues with Hemant and bursts at her mother: “Why did you do that, they were mine as well, I loved them” (Kapur 87). In another instance, when Astha’s mother sells her plot and gives the balance to Hemant, she is completely traumatized to see this partiality considering women as weak and incapable of managing things. It is not that through her anguish, she is claiming the position of a man. When she can perform her duties at home so sincerely, why can’t she participate in all the deeds and management? This aspiration makes her a new woman. Her statement testifies it when she says: “Really Ma, don’t you think women can be responsible for their own investments?” (97). All of her statements testify her desire to be treated as an equal being. Astha wretchedly finds error in her father who always thought that his wife, i.e. her mother shall be incapable in running money matters. She also finds faults in her mother-in-law “for bringing up Hemant to never regard women as beings so to be consulted in their own lives” (98).

Hemant, a foreign return, is no doubt a very considerate and affectionate husband. But he has his double standards. During Astha’s pregnancy, he himself told his mother who hopes the child to be a son: “But Ma, I want a daughter. In America there is no difference between boys and girls, how can this country get

anywhere if we go on treating our women this way? ”(57). It seems shocking to see that he is the same man who inspires Astha for joining teaching but expects her to be a traditional Indian wife, the other self of her husband. When Astha conceives second time, Hemant also wishes the fetus to be a son. He totally agrees with her mother on asking a priest to perform rituals to make sure that he is blessed with a son. Not only this, when Astha considers her job significant, Hemant’s Indian male-ego is hurt again. He belittles teaching saying that “hardly a serious job, you just go, talk to some children about poems and stories, organise a few clubs and come back” (68). Astha feels insulted again hurt again by his attitude of male supremacy. Thus, this new insight of being treated with equanimity makes Astha a new woman. Bhagabat Nayak (2004) opines that “like every married woman, no doubt she has a liking for motherhood but she does not like a sex subjugation of her in-laws. She is surprised at the reaction of the family and society when they remain cypheric of Anuradha's birth but gets an overwhelming approval of motherhood after the birth of Himanshu” (Nayak 130).

For Astha, marriage does not mean means physical union but also a spiritual. She feels her physical relationship with her husband is a sense of fulfillment both at emotional and spiritual level. To her, physical relationship with her husband is a kind of fulfillment both at the emotional and spiritual level. Towards last part of the novel she meets Pipeelika, widow of Aijaz. A bond is quickly established between them. Her connection with Pipeelika grows and the two women become passionate lovers. The closeness and ease she renews from this affair, is dissimilar to the detachment she experiences in her strictly defined

role as a wife and mother. But this new kind of relationship disturbs her and she is at times in confusion. She finds herself in a dilemmatic situation to take a decision on whether she should go ahead with the radical alternative of her lesbian lover or settle within the protected ties of her family.

Manju Kapur emphasizes the fact that a new woman should not be labeled as a mutineer. A new woman is one who happily and sincerely performs her duties in all domains of her life and also wants to be considered as an equal individual to men though with a different biological composition. Astha is the perfect example of the same. Her sense of responsibilities calls her and makes her realize that her association with Pipeelika cannot have a future altogether. Her family needs her more and she should not ignore it.

While studying the traits of new woman in the character of Astha, one is reminded of the great iconic figures from the history like legendary Rani Jhansi. Rani Jhansi personified new woman because she was the one who proved to the world that woman could not be confined to the four walls rather they could also rule. She challenged the Britishers and made them believe this. Indira Gandhi, the former prime Minister of India, was also an exemplification of a 'new woman' as she not only performed her roles and responsibilities as a woman but also worked as an effective administrator. She is still remembered for her brave and intelligent action on sensitive and crucial issue of "Kashmir" though it is not yet resolved. Astha is a mirror image of contemporary Indian woman who not only claims rights at par with men but also wants to be treated as equivalent to man in society. Manju Kapur has used lesbianism as a means to underline the intense struggle of Astha as a 'new woman'. Besides her safety, calmness and decency, she also wants her

emotions and spiritual needs to be understood. Through Astha, Kapur offers “a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organisation and comfort mechanism” (Nayak 137).

Like her contemporaries, Manju Kapur also endorses her concern for women “with a missionary zeal and seems to suggest that a married woman’s job is not to complete wifing, child-bearing and housekeeping but to do something more. Her Astha appears to be an Ibsenite who raises her voice against the ages old customs and trends” (Singh 65).

No doubt, their upbringing and aspiration to lead a life full of independence turn Kapur’s protagonists into new women yet it does not imply that they want to get rid of their family and responsibilities rather they are anxious to fulfill their duties with full vigor as we see in case of Virmati and Astha. Kapur’s new women are not arrogant or rebellious but are daring, honest and determined. They are the New Women with confidence and courage.

Chapter – 5

**Diverse Facades of Bajwa's New Women amidst Glaring
Inequalities of Urban India: An analysis
of *The Sari Shop***

Rupa Bajwa, *India's new literary find* created commotion in the realm of contemporary Indian-English fiction with the appearance of her debut novel, *The Sari House* (2004). Born in Amritsar, Punjab in a Sikh family, she started her writing career as a book reviewer and columnist in various famous publishing concerns such as 'The Telegraph', 'The Tribune' and 'India Today'. She writes immense reviews and articles. One of her articles entitled "Dark Things Do Happen in Gurdwaras Sometimes" published in the every day 'The Telegraph', an Indian paper, has brought her enormous criticism for the depiction of her own Sikh community. "That rare creature, a writer who can interweave comedy and tragedy with élan [Bajwa's is] a stunning debut" {Out Look}, publishes her first novel, *The Sari Shop* in 2004, depicts about her hometown and distinction of class in India..."

Bajwa's next novel *Tell Me a Story* published in April 2012 was also received with a huge response. It is neither completely a story of the individual(s), nor it is based on the fairy tales. It is in fact, a surprising description of the events and happenings of the daily life of the major Indian middle-class families with the delusions they have and sudden unexpected damage of their expectations. A part of its story satirized the citizens of New Delhi so it aroused serious deliberations amongst the literary circles in New Delhi.

Coming from an ordinary Sikh family, Bajwa has spent the most of her life in the rented spaces of Amritsar. The novel *The Sari Shop* taken up for this present research work is an outcome of her microscopic observation of her hometown. One finds in it a straightforward projection of class dynamics prevailing in Indian society, mortifying control of wealth, the bare and tedious subsistence of lower middle-class people and their discontented life in post-independence era. Because of the unpretentious portrayal of the events and the characters of her hometown, the novel caught so much of attention among critics and reviewers. Vandana Pathak in her article entitled “The Marginalized Psyche in Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop*” (2015) rightly states thus:

All women novelists are the unacknowledged sociologists of the world. Of late, many fiction writers of Indian origin are projecting the other side of ‘Shining India’ and ‘Rising India’. Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga have won prizes for their debut novels depicting this other side of the coin. Rupa Bajwa in her debut novel *The Sari Shop* presents two diverse, contradictory faces/ aspects of India. It projects, on one side, the rich and epicurean India and contrasts it with the poor, exploited and deprived stereotyped characters. (Pathak 1)

Although Bajwa faced a bit of censure yet she won an international acclaim for her narrative. She was honored with a number of prestigious literary awards such as Grinzane Cavour Award for a finest primary story in June 2005, the Commonwealth Award 2005 and India’s Sahitya Akademi Award 2006. The novel was also listed for the Orange Prize for fiction in 2004. It has also been translated

into several languages such as French (*Le vendeur de saris*), Dutch (*De Sariwinkel*) and Serbian (*Prodavnica sarija*). Samita Devi in her article entitled “Analysis of Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop* (2013) states thus:

The revolutionary growth of Oriental Literature through their writings counter attacks on Oxidant thus paves a sparkling way towards world literature where we found a novel taste of Oriental literature with its delicious aroma where some precious gems of Indian literature with their unique creativity glorified the name of Indian literature with its beautiful, realistic Indian context and also paves various dimensions for the readers to enjoy the Indian literature with a fresh look. Thus, while reading the book *Sari Shop* I also experienced such kinds of fresh taste within it, notably themes like “Every coin has two sides or sometimes more than two” which is not merely a theme rather a fact which is applicable in ever one’s life, thus, contains a symbolic representation of microcosm of the macrocosm and shows the oppression of capitalist’s people on proletariat through its central characters. (Devi 1)

Bajwa shows an intense social and political awareness about people around her and their sufferings. She narrates a realistic story of the plight of women which is rife with humor and irony. Since the human civilization saw its first light, a spirit of competition and conflict has been prevailing among the human beings. They are denied opportunities and are being shackled and tortured by their own class of species. One is forced to think why this occurs in our society. Maybe it is due to the scarcity of resources and unlimited needs. Why one is dominated and the other

is overbearing? Why is one's vision of a satisfied life devastated by obstacles and interference caused by others unnecessarily? Parminder Sohal (2015) states thus:

Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* gives a pen portrait of such class discrimination through the medium of her characters. It beautifully reflects the class conflicts, the disparity of thoughts between the literate and the moneyed class. The clash of the domineering classes is evident in the talks of Mrs. Sehdev and Mrs. Gupta. It highlights such problems in a very pathetic manner and fills the hearts of the readers with 'pity and fear. It is a mirror of the society which is evident to everyone but not an accepted fact. It is a juxtaposition of goodness and evil prevalent in human nature. (Sohal 1)

In an interview, Rupa Bajwa stated that "I wrote about my people, about the world I grew up in. I wrote in the response to my own society; even though I do believe that human nature remains essentially the same everywhere. And, so being acknowledge by people from this society is definitely important and satisfying" (Bajwa 3). The streets of the holy city of Amritsar build the background of the novel. Bajwa has very realistically described the city life of Amritsar. "The bazaars of Amritsar were busy places where, every day, throughout the year, transactions were made, prices were bargained over, shops were opened in the morning and shut in the evenings" (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 2).

Various sub-plots and episodes are interwoven within the text. The central character Ramchand is assigned the task of observing them but as the plot moves forward, he gets involved in all these events. Every experience may it be with upper middle-class women like 'Rina' or 'Mrs. Sachdeva' or with 'Kamala' or

‘Sudha’ women of lower social background, brings him new insight on social realities and meanness prevailing in the society.

The first part of the narrative primarily focuses on the routine life of sari shop assistants at Sewak Sari shop, trying their level best to persuade their women customers buy different kinds of saris available at their shop. This part explores the past life of central character Ramchand, his miserable condition in the present and his dealings with different sections of rich women, their tastes, likings, and vanities. Corresponding to the first part that deals with the culture, values, and preference of rich women, the second part of the narrative is drawn to depict the life of women from lower middle class. Pathak (2015) rightly remarks that “parallel to the plot these rich women and as an antithesis to it, the story of the mother of Ramchand, Sudha and Kamla has been set. Rupa Bajwa has very skillfully depicted the differences in their values, cultures, family life, social and economic conditions and standard of living. Their priorities too were different in life” (Pathak 3). The third part of the narrative focuses on various events like the death of Lakhan’s (dhaba owner) sons, the inability of his wife to face the reality of her son’s death and Kamala’s death resulting from her husband's beating. These happenings have been included to show that Ramchand has always been running away from situations and life.

The main action of the story takes place in the Sevak Sari House which is an attraction and purpose of visit for women of all types. It is a prominent place where women assemble to buy new saris. This place is also a replica of trend, style, social influence and economic background. The author has deliberately presented it as a coffee house of 18th century English society where huge literary

figures such as Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Dryden and Jonathan Swift used to gather to talk about and ridicule the follies and foibles of their contemporary society. Only difference here is that the shop assistants such as Gokul, Hari, Chander and Ramchand are not literary personalities of huge stature but lower middle class people who can only notice and make remarks. Their lives are plain with Hindi films as the only source of their leisure during break time. They consider the dirtiness surrounding their homes as destined. Education is something they consider a magical entry to the world of English speaking jobs in corporate of big cities. The action begins with a usual morning in Ramchand's life who works as an assistant in a sari shop. A working class which moves only around capitalists is seen in opening description "Ramchand had overslept, waking up only when the loud noises of a brawl in the street..... he rushed out of his room and made his way towards the shop ... was one of the six shop assistants who worked in the sari section" (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 3). Ramchand was not a born poor rather he belonged to the family of shop owners. His past time as a child was to "explore the maize of sacks and tins in the shop, open them to see what was inside and lose himself in the exciting smell of the shop" (Bajwa 42). His father always wished that his son should study sincerely so that he might be able to join an English medium school. He would frequently roar at his son: "Go away...Go away. Go and study. Try to become something in life, unless you want to continue to measure out besan, pack up sugar and haggle with housewives for the rest of your life" (43). Ramchand was quite affectionate towards his mother and loved his company. She fulfilled all his wishes and persuaded him to study hard and become something in life. "Ma ...ma, you said make the most beautiful thing in the world... I don't know... I don't know what is the most beautiful thing in the world. She didn't

laugh at him and she never knew how grateful her son was to her for rest of his life for not laughing her son was to her for rest of his life for not laughing... .. she hugged him tightly and stroked his head gently” (41). The tragedy of his parents’ deaths and treacherous capture by his uncle over his inheritance made him wretched. He developed a phobic temperament and became moody. He did cry “occasionally like a child.” He didn’t like the “physical contact “His eyes “would grow cloudy and ears would tickle slowly down his cheeks” (45). Ramchand was sent back to a distant uncle in Amritsar. Life was very miserable there. He got “new home, new school, new smells” (46). The hounds of fate chased him furiously after his uncle died, his aunt “politely asked him to leave and find his own way in the world. He was fifteen years old; he carried a small trunk and set out on his search for identity” (47). By the necessity of his circumstances, he started working as an assistant in the Sevak Sari House owned by Mahajan. His inheritance was also grabbed by his own uncle. “Years later Ramchand had realized many things. He realized that he had once had a shop. A very small one ...by rights that shop should have been Ramchand’s. Instead, it now belongs to uncle’s son...Ramchand just couldn’t be bothered to fight for what was his anymore” (47).

The life of Ram Chand is very plain; he has to serve the ladies who come to buy saris. He would sit with his fellow workers rolling and unrolling the yards of fabric catering to the needs of women and daughters coming from all types of families. He is a straightforward poor worker educated only up to middle standard but has the passion for learning. He is in search of position and permanence. Ramchand’s visit to Kapoor’s house in Green Avenue brings sudden

transformation in his life. Given the responsibility of bringing saris to the rich Kapoor family on the occasion of their daughter's wedding, he is mesmerized to see the life style of Kapoor family. Seeing them talking in English, he is immediately reminded of his father's dream. He is dissatisfied with his middle-class life and is actually disturbed when Rina Kapoor calls him a "stupid sariwalla". He gets illumination here and comes to the conclusion that his only dream of becoming rich and affluent can be fulfilled through learning English only. He feels encouraged and decides to pack up his mind with all English vocabulary. To rise above his childhood confusion at words like "hearth", "pixies" and "toadstool", he buys some tattered English books and an 'Oxford Dictionary' and begins his struggle of life. He attempts to improve his English using books like *The Complete Letter Writer* and *Radiant Essays for Schoolchildren of All Ages* and by memorizing every word in the English dictionary. But very soon he becomes acquainted with the cruel reality of life. Rina Kapoor's marriage to a military officer is Bajwa's way to bridge the gap in the society. She has a magnificent and sumptuous wedding in Indian style. Ramchand too attends the wedding even though he was an uninvited guest there.

One finds an analogy between the narrative of Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* and famous Victorian novelist Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. It presents an image of a society driven by consumer culture, pretentiousness, and self-importance. Ramchand is the only person in the novel who in the capacity of a sari shop worker comes across almost all kinds of women coming from different sections of society. This is in line with the design of novelist who wants to what Sebastian (2013) states:

Showcase about the world of the women customers who frequent the Sevak Sari shop. By juxtaposing these two unequal worlds- one where men dwell in extreme poverty and struggle for survival and the other where men comfortable lives in unparalleled luxury and splendor the author lays bare the society of the twenty-first century India which is characterized by consumer culture, individualism, snobbery, and hypocrisy. (Sebastian 1).

It is Ramchand's powerful imagination which Bajwa has cashed in creating her female world. In fact, it is through his eye, we get to know about the images of different women, their problems, their hypocrisies, sophistry, their boredom, unresponsiveness and their vanities. His proficiency in selling saris to women sharpens his imagination, providing a vision to distinguish between right and wrong. He has seen "Innumerable women choose saris" (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 63) and has thereby learnt to observe their moods and expressions "Though women were otherwise strange, alien creatures to him there was one part of them that he knew intimately the way they chose saris" (Bajwa 63). Mrs. Sachdeva, the English Lecturer in a local college, likes decent and sophisticated colors that could be worn in the workplace. "Some dullish color, you know. Like brown or gray", said Mrs. Sachdeva condescendingly. She liked to look plain and business-like. She wasn't one of the vain, idle housewives that this city was so full of. She was a literate woman, the Head of an English Department" (28). Mrs. Kapoor, in her middle age, likes expensive silk salwar suit, classy shawl and precious ornaments of gold and diamonds. She has the reputation of having bought pashmina shawls worth ten lakhs. Her daughter Rina is a modern girl. He could easily guess when they are surely going to get a particular sari. "He could tell when they were in two minds

and had to be pushed into buying one. He could immediately sense when they had made up their minds not to buy anything and were pretending to be interested” (64). When young girls visit his Sari House with their mothers to buy saris for their wedding festival, Ramchand immediately understands the anxious state of the girls:

Ramchand had also seen such girls look into the mirror with melancholic eyes as if the sari was quite all right; it was the idea of this particular marriage that wasn't so happy. This happened rarely but when it did, it would tug terribly at Ramchand's heart, though he would later tell himself that it must have been his imagination (64).

Sometimes, he feels restless because of his participation in their dealings and miseries. He is there to probe into the inner world of Mrs. Sachdeva, Mrs. Gupta, Mrs. Bhandari, Sudha, and Reena. He believes that almost all rich women from upper strata of society live worldly lives full of pretentiousness. It is also effectively described by Gokul, a shop assistant when he says “These women can be real headaches. If they are not bragging about their houses, it is their husbands. And if isn't the husbands, it is the children” (209). The miserable condition of Kamala is also described through the vision of Ramchand.

The remarkable feature of the novel is the observation of others with an objective of transforming one's own self. It is evident in Ramchand's changed behavior. His meeting with Kapoor family especially Reena and Mrs. Sachdeva is a source of wakefulness. This change is evident when he gets a scientific book from the bookstall for his child. Ramchand can be termed as a multidimensional

character that not only grows through his dealings with the varied women customers of Sevak Sari House but also ironically depicts and mocks at the vanities of the upper-class women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders* states that “Feminism without borders is not the same as “border-less” feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent” (Mohanty 2). The trend towards social change encouraged women to initiate women’s movement in the twentieth century with a new energy. No wonder, women were inspired to enter into business and offices for jobs. The middle-class women came ahead and the explored career opportunities in the offices, schools, and colleges. By bringing women into fiction, feminist literature and feminist criticism have positively contributed towards the growth of woman. Today, even the political parties are using it as a means to win faith and confidence of citizens. Rupa Bajwa has also seen and felt the spirit of this social change that’s why she has taken up women as the subject matter of her very first novel *The Sari Shop*, depicting their varied experiences from hypocrisy of empowered ladies to the plight and traumatic experiences of underprivileged women. *The Sari Shop* represents the contemporary Indian middle –class struggle. Her skill in making psychological exploration of subconscious and unconscious levels of her women’s psyche remains matchless.

Just as there is a rich assortment of sarees in Sevak Sari Shop, same can be said of women presented in this novel. A gallery of female characters, all distinct and apart in style, language, mannerism and ideology have been presented in it. In one way or other, they have been presented as the products and victims of the commercial world. One group of women presented in the novel includes well educated and esteemed women. These women lead a life of empowerment,

personal preferences and self-determination represented by Rina Kapoor, Mrs. Sachdev, Mrs. Bhandari and Mrs. Gupta etc. Post-feminists are an appropriate term that can be used for them. Within this category, there are further subgroups- one is of domestic housewives of rich & affluent families and other is of learned working women. What brings them together under the umbrella of new women is that they are ruled by shopping culture, style, trend, hybridism, and absurdity. To look modern and updated as per the needs of society, most of them lay a special importance to their female physique.

Rina Kapoor, the daughter of a known business family is at the top of the list of new women presented by Rupa Bajwa in this novel. She leads a lavish life and is away from any kind of economic worries. Reena has her own choices and perspectives on everything whether it is a matter of her outfits or she makeover or her future prospects. She is very choosy about everything: “I was thinking I must be very careful while buying both clothes and jewelry. I don’t want the usual conventional bridal trousseau. I want a collection that is a mix of traditional and contemporary styles” (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 67). She wants to pay due regard to her traditional values but at the same time also desires to assume a modern style. She considers education a significant component in effecting change in the country and detests the snobbery of her mother thus: “Mother, there are other things in the world besides money. You know this is a big world, and out there, there are people who are considered very high status because of their learning, because of the work they have done” (Bajwa 91).

Reena has done masters in English Literature. Certainly, she is special from other girls around her. “I am not like the rest of the girls in Amritsar. I find them so

stagnant sometimes, so content with the pretty little lives they have made for themselves. I can't imagine being like that. I like to read, I like to explore new things, I like to take every day of life as a new experience" (81).

Rina is a 'new woman' in the sense that she is progressive, open-minded and socially conscious. She is the replica of a contemporary woman who aspires to bring about a revolution in the society. Her strength lies in her spirit of combat and her enthusiasm for education. This post graduate girl with the power of her determination and reason revolts against the traditional patriarchy and persuades her industrialist father for marriage to a man of her choice. When her father learns that she is in love with an army officer, he is not happy and says: "marry a rich man and go to the kitty parties" (82). She rejects the conventional thinking of her father who is an affluent person in the society, enjoying all the amenities of life. "I am not one of those girls who'll just marry a rich man and go to kitty parties. Besides, I don't really need any more money" (82). She herself states that she was "breaking the commercial streak that ran through her family and was trying to span the gap" (93).

Rina has huge regard for educated people. She doesn't see her life limited only to wealth and material comforts rather love to think and do out of the box. She believes thus: "Look at the family I belong to, but that is not at all it is not the end of the road for me" (81). After her marriage, she makes her mind to establish her identity as a novelist. She plans to write about the struggle of lower class workers for their existence. "These are of course, what we call the service class families. They look down upon us moneyed...they have no money, no big house..." (93). Ramchand, "trembling sari-wala standing by the security guards and had heard him

lie about being invited by her to the party” (186) is the inspiration behind her work. Few days after her wedding, Rina visits Sewak Sari shop to know more about Ramchand’s life and his struggles. She finds him to be an appropriate symbol of lower class people and a model for the protagonist of her novel. She “asked him questions about himself, where he lived and how much he earned, was he married etc...his opinions on different issues, his tastes, his emotions” (135). Rina’s interactions with RamChand depict the growth of new woman of Bajwa as these conversations help her a lot in drawing a pen portrait of her protagonist 'Sitaram' and preparing the first draft of her novel while she is still on her honeymoon. Though completely ridiculous and full of odd characters and supernatural effects, Rina's novel is well designed and wins admirable reviews. But ironically Bajwa attributes the major part of Reena’s achievement to her rich economic background when she writes:

If she had been a plain, unmarried girl from an ordinary family, it wouldn’t really have much news in Amritsar, a city that had much money but only one real bookshop. But since Rina was recently married, rich, glossy and permed, and wanted to draw the attention of the cream of Amritsar, she did. (186)

When her mother Mrs. Kapoor, a high headed lady indulges in a disparaging conversation with Mrs. Sachdeva who comes from a salaried class; Rina very smartly tries to divert the topic of their discussion from class consciousness to post-colonialism and paradigms of poverty demonstrating the fake signs of harmony with the suppressed sections of society. Though educated and empowered, Rina lacks humility towards lower middle class people. She has a

skill in using them for her own purposes. It is seen when Rina arrogantly orders Ramchand to show the sarees which he has carried to their house and later deliberately visits him because he will be the one to give her protagonist an identity. Mrs. Sachdev is the Head of the English department in a local college. She also writes columns for *Sunday Tribune*. She possesses the traits of a new woman. She is confident, socially well connected and enjoys self-sufficiency. She motivates and admires Rina for her daring decision of marrying into a service class family. In Ramchand's view, Mrs. Sachdev "must be terribly knowledgeable and well read" (26). Thinking her to be a wise and compassionate woman, Ramchand shares with her the plight of Chander's wife Kamala. But the moment he tells Mrs Sachdev 'the whole ugly, sordid story' of Kamala, the double standards of Mrs. Sachdev comes out. (213) He is shocked to see the reactions of Mrs. Sachdev. She looks fiercely at him. 'How dare you' she in a low, angry hiss, her voice trembling'. 'How dare you, a mere shop assistant, bring me here to this corner and tell me filthy stories about the kind of women you seem to know....The Guptas are respectable people. They happen to be friends of the Kapoors. Do you know what you are saying? And why are you telling me? What have I to do with this dirty business?...she said speaking through clenched teeth ...I don't want to listen to all that vulgar rubbish again, that too in Hindi. Why are you bothering me about all this? It is of no concern to me...There have been some horrible, filthy things going on, and now respectable people are to be dragged into it" (214). Like Reena, Mrs. Sachdev too is a hypocrite whose so-called social respectability and education are her tools to survive in the society of rich people with her head high. In reality, she lives in a world completely cut off from the lives of the lower human beings the underprivileged ones.

Mrs. Gupta, Mrs. Sandhu, Mrs. Kapoor and Mrs. Bhandari also represent new women of Rupa Bajwa. In this extremely distinctive category, most of them are housewives whose life is thought to be confined to the domestic affairs only. But these women have changed the conventional definition of the domestic sphere which was earlier linked with hard work of kitchen and captivity. They have achieved female sovereignty and independence by establishing a space for themselves in crucial household decisions. They all belong to the category of the urban elite.

To them, men are equal partners and never a rival or their victimizers. They all belong to the category of the urban elite. They are the liberated women whose sad weaknesses are their hypocrisy and snobbery. Though they have no individuality of their own and are recognized by their husband's surname and traditional hierarchy of family yet they enjoy a free life. They are not worried housewives who from dawn till dusk toil in their kitchen and are confined to the four walls of their houses. They feel proud of managing their domestic sphere and are the heirs of the Victorian living room mistresses. The clan of these ladies remains happy in their standardized domesticity. Their daily routine includes activities like chitchat, shopping and matchmaking. They are liberated women, who are intelligent, independent, self-confident, willing to acclimatize any change and self-efficient.

A representative of 'power psychology', Mrs. Sandhu is the wife of a Chief Engineer in Punjab State Electricity Board. She is deeply involved in her house. She may be called a cleanliness freak. She 'had planned the construction as well as the furnishing very carefully' (12). She has tried to embellish the architecture of

her home by purchasing antique super style furniture, carpets from Kashmir and luxurious domestic appliances in her kitchen. Tamed in a conventional way, she is contented with the fact that she is the ruler of an urbanized kitchen. Mrs. Sandhu thinks that “she has gone beyond feminism because she has all the comforts of life. She had a beautiful house, status family, a caring husband and good looks...” (13). Her conversation primarily revolves around latest brands of cosmetics, clothes and new designs of saris. Mrs. Gupta may be called a fitness freak. She takes pride in her much younger looks than her real age. Even in her fifties, she looks much younger through “her careful diet and regular exercise...On the dressing table below the room reflection, stood a jar of L’Oreal anti-ageing cream, a bottle of lakme cleansing milk, packs of deep –red bindis and a bottle of perfume...These were the things that she used every day” (14). Moral values have no meaning for her instead she is more concerned with her status among the society of business tycoons. The matrimonial alliance of her son Tarun with Shilpa is more of an economic deal as physical compatibility of the couple has been ignored altogether. She shows off in this manner: “I am such a lucky woman; I know I should try to do something for others. I was talking to Mrs. Bhandari, and she really encouraged me to do something for the poor...I sometimes feel she is little snooty may be” (23).

Mrs. Bhandari has been the winner a beauty contest and she is now in her forties. She is involved in various social activities and organizes charity programs at the Rotary Club. She claims her reputation as a good cook. “She could bake a marvelous cakes that could beat the cakes in Delhi’s best bakeries” (26). Surbhi Tresa Sebastian (2013) rightly states thus:

This is the brand of women whom Germaine Greer points out in *The Whole Woman* as women who are presented as ‘have it all’ — a career, motherhood, beauty, and a great sex life — by the consumerist market which actually only resituates them as consumers of pills, paint, potions, cosmetic surgery, fashion, and convenience foods. (Sebastian 5)

These new women of Rupa Bajwa have twin personality. Amongst their own social circles, they pretend to be highly sophisticated, compassionate, talented and well respected but their real gets revealed only when it comes to their dealings with poor people. Jaspal Singh and Arvind Khanna in their article entitled “The Idea of False Sisterhood: The Post-Feminist echoes in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*” (2015) observes that these women “take pleasure only in shopping and gossiping and evade serious issues and fail to redistribute the comforts and pains of their less privileged sisters” (Singh and Khana 379). They are suffering from a superiority complex as is manifested in their approach towards the shop assistants. For them, the poor women are the slighter mortals whose existence is possible only by serving them. Bajwa has, in fact, brought the bleak reality of Indian society where rich & affluent women perform the role of oppressor and poor women become the other i.e. the object to be victimized. Mrs. Sachdev, the Head of the English Department at a local college is quite arrogant. Mrs. Bhandari is a snob and takes false pride in her husband’s honored rank in the Police department. She boasts of organizing various social & charitable programs for the welfare of the weaker people of society but it is only her hypocrisy to remain famous in the society. It becomes clear in her attitude towards Kamala. Her so called benevolent

nature does not bring any relief to the poor people of her area. Her scolding of the shop assistant when he fails to understand her choice of sarees— “you can’t really make these people understand’ all exhibit their callous attitude towards the people of the lower strata of the society”. Similarly, Mrs. Gupta and Mrs. Kapoor do not feel empathy with Kamla because she is the wife of an attendant at ‘The Sewak Sari Shop’.

Naomi Wolf in *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (1993) calls them “the power feminist generation who are ‘unapologetically, ‘free-thinking’, ‘pleasure-loving’ and self-assertive” (Wolf 149).

The other group of women presented in the novel comprises of those who dwell in the lowest sections of the society in miserable condition and continue to live with this traditional drudgery and confinement. They are the economically fragile counterparts of richer women presented in the novel. In their lives, optimism, expectation, and violence are lastingly intertwined. The plot of the novel consists of horrendous incidents of stealing, molestation, and killing. At any point of time, the narrative does not appear vulgar and coarse. Bajwa reveals the puzzled state of Indian women who strives hard in search of her existence. This makes the novel a valuable document in any debate or discussion on a new woman. Her women dare stand against the patriarchal suppression and the corrupt economic system of Indian society though their raised voices get subdued in a highly selfish world. This is exemplified by Chander’s wife Kamala, and Sudha etc. They raise their voice not to become equals to men but to remain stuck to their fundamental right to live and to be considered as humans.

Kamla is a new woman of Bajwa. She is not petrified of her failures in life rather she personifies courage and determination. She uses violence to record her revolt against the wealthy and well off people of Amritsar. Bajwa has created the character of Kamla using all the stylistic devices of humor, sarcasm, and imagery. She is the only character who shows valor to face the oppression at the hands of capitalist society. She is beaten and molested yet she dares to hit Ravinder Kapoor with a stone to show her strong complaint against the exploitation done by the capitalists. The financial burden of life and the suppressed desires end up in causing miseries to her. Her plight is depicted thus: “Her face was deeply lined, though she could not have been more than thirty, even less perhaps” (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 104). Kamla was never conscious about her rights and was forced by her circumstances to work at a very small age of eight. Kamla’s life exemplifies suppression to liberation. From her childhood, she did all her domestic work herself as her mother used to tell her: “girl must learn household work and the sooner they started, the better it was for them” (Bajwa 41). The death of her mother brings in its wake new liability on Kamla: “Now, after your mother, you will have to look after the house. You will have to take care of your father and brother, okay? Behave like a big girl now” (143). The author has described the end of Kamla’s mother in a tragic manner:

Mother was searching a pickle jar for dinner; as the jar was on the upper shelf and not visible to her, she suddenly slipped and jar broke upon her head. A pool of blood formed solely under the head. The glass jar of pickles had broken too. A film of mustard oil began to spread towards the blood. The two mingled. Pieces of pickled lime and carrots were strewn around in the blood oil puddle like pebbles. (142)

At the age of sixteen, she gets married to Chander who often drinks and beats her up. “She would be all alone in Amritsar with a stranger in a new strange house” (148). She knew, men often beat up their wives. “It was a matter of routine, nothing personal. It shouldn’t have worried her” (152). Before marriage, it was her husband’s orders she used to abide by and after marriage husband has taken the place of father. With meager financial resources, she always tries to find out new methods to save money. She becomes an economical homemaker: “She darned holes in old clothes, repaired and strengthened their seams... she carefully stored used cooking oil instead of throwing it away” (151). Kamla performs the role of a housewife in best possible manner whereas Chander comes out as Bluebeard patriarch a folk character of France who is bossy, brutal and a drunkard draws sadistic pleasure by beating his wife. After marriage, Chander expects Kamla to bear children and bring them up in a proper manner. “You can always start to work when the children grow up. Until then we can manage. I am not that poor” (151). One day Ramchand visits Chander’s house and finds thus:

Ramchand was about to speak when his eyes took in the room behind Chander. Inside a frail woman lay huddled in a heap in a corner. Red hand imprints stood out clearly on her face. Her hair was disheveled, her green salwar kameez was in disarray; her back chunni lay on the floor. Tears ran down her face. A corner of her mouth was bleeding a little. (105)

Ramchand becomes curious to know about the root cause of all her sufferings. Kamla’s sufferings start with her pregnancy as she believes that the real contentment of a woman lies in her motherhood. She begins to dream about her

child and the future. “She had never imagined that it could make her so happy. Her world seemed to change overnight. It became newer, fresher and the gloom that had settled on her for the past year lifted. She smiled to herself sometimes while she worked. She began to look forward having a child of her own” (153). Being an uneducated lady, she doesn’t really know how to take care of herself and her child. She suffers the agony of a miscarriage. She would never become a mother again and this fact has shattered her completely. Rupa Bajwa describes her agony thus: “she felt angry with her mother-in-law for being absent, she felt furious with her own mother for being dead, and she hated Chander for leaving her alone every day. She wept and wept, hating everyone, the feeling of wetness between her legs increasing frighteningly every moment” (155). She comes back home in a shock. She waits for Chander who comes late “even more drunk”. Kamla tells him everything in breaking voice. He looks even more lethargic because he shares with her that he has lost his job. It comes as a bolt from the blue for Kamla. Destiny has been so cruel to her. There is no one who could help her in this hour of physical and psychological pain. All her dreams about her child and a new domestic life are shattered. Chander is disheartened. Out of despondency, he exclaims: “You have been very unlucky for me, Kamla. Ever since I married you, I have been having nothing but bad luck” (156). “You have a black heart, a black heart...You killed your mother. You ate up your own father. Your brother lost his job. Now you have eaten up my child. Soon you will also devour me” (157). Kamla cannot muster the courage to speak anything. Chander cries in hopelessness thus: “Your child was dead. Your husband was dying. But you slept like a queen all night.” (158) Kamla’s life becomes hellish. She is shaken to know that her husband hates her and considers her an ill omen.

Kamla's situation is the perfect example of Dr. Karen Horney's observation when a man or woman feels desperate, lonely or psychologically dejected; the result is the growth of depression and phobia. Kamla, when dejected by her husband, develops a sharp depression syndrome and starts taking alcohol to get rid of tensions and worries of life. She "started by taking swigs from this bottle. She would drink just a little bit, and to make up for it, she would fill the bottle up with water, making sure she dried the outside of the bottle and the cork with one end of her sari *pallu*" (158). Kamla too takes liquor when Chander is away. One day she is caught and this discovery troubles Chander who totally ignores her. Kamla decides to protest against the rich people who are the root cause of her troubles. She tries to make her voice heard by hurling stones at Mr. Gupta's and Kapoor's house and shouting abuses at them: "May God burn all of you up in that big house or that big car of yours. May you die thirsting for a sip of water... your son is also a villain. Will your grandson be also the devil?" (168) Kamla is arrested at the call of Mr. Gupta who bribes constables by giving them five hundred rupees. She is raped mercilessly at the police station and is let free in the morning. Completely shaken, she goes back where Chander is waiting for her who is unable to understand the inner turmoil of Kamla and also hits her in the face and cries out: "Staying away all night, drunk. God knows where. You should just kill yourself, Kamla, if you have any shame left" (171). Mr. Kapoor is taken aback to find a lower class woman cursing a big industrialist and perforating his superiority in the street for the injustice done to her husband.

To save his market reputation, Mr. Kapoor sends four hooligans to attack and finish Kamla who is burnt alive. In the most realistic manner and emotional

tone, Bajwa has depicted the scene of destruction thereby bringing to the forefront the cruelty and violence perpetrated by the upper class over the suppressed people:

At seven in the evening, four men broke into Chander's house. Kamla was alone at home then. One of the men held Kamla, while the other three proceeded to break every single thing in the house, down to the earthen pitcher. They threw out all the utensils in the house. They emptied jars of rice and daal into the garbage heap outside, they even broke the fragile door. They smashed the old smoky glass of the window. They broke the bulb and emptied the kerosene stove...They systematically broke her collarbone; they kicked her till two of her ribs broke. The back of her head split...Then they dragged her outside and paraded her in the neighborhood with her hands tied behind her back so everyone could see what happened to those who stepped beyond their limits.

(217)

This brutality and atrocities prevailing in so-called civilized society of Amritsar may be compared to the darkness in savage tribal society in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* referring to the savage tribal society. Ramchand notices a strange questioning in Kamla's look: "Her eyes were like dark, twin tunnels that led nowhere. Ramchand recoiled from her gaze. But he couldn't look away. Something in her face held him there on the spot, squatting silently...Then her dead eyes blazed at him. She dropped her upper lip in a snarl like an animal. Ramchand watched in horror. And suddenly she did erupt with an angry snarl: "Help, you want to help me?" (182-3). Thus, Kamla undertakes a prolonged journey of protest which ends up with people calling her insane and her death. Her

defenselessness is the defenselessness of millions of Indian women. Her misfortune is an exemplification of disparity prevailing in Indian society at various levels be it cultural, social or economic. It is worth mentioning that there is no authentic way out that Bajwa has suggested for such women but the readers watch this poignant melodrama and the helplessness of Ramchand who feels distraught and confines himself for twelve days in a lonely room. Like Shakespeare's Hamlet, he realizes that the ridiculousness of human nature is beyond his understanding and faces the truth of life: What had he done? People died to get a good job all their lives....he had thrown a perfectly good job away. How could he survive now?" (237)

Sudha, the wife of Ramchand's landlord symbolizes servility and calmness. She never questions or demands anything. She is happy and satisfied with whatever she has with her. Her family is at the top of her priority list. She dresses up like a perfect Indian wife. "She wore *sindoor* in the parting of her hair; a red *bindi* on her forehead and *kajal* in her sparkling eyes. She wore earrings in the shape of flowers." (87) Sudha exemplifies a responsible mother as well as an excellent wife. Though herself she is not employed yet she is fully aware of her responsibility of nurturing good values and preparing her children for becoming successful in fast developing contemporary world. In this sense, she is an example of new woman.

...contented herself with cooking meals, cleaning the house and washing clothes, her placid manner intact, she took over the responsibility of bringing up her children to be successful in the new world that was emerging- the world of English speaking jobs and passport and visa...(90)

Bajwa's female characters are insightful, self-conscious, intelligent and inventive. Her women desire to revolt against the labeled roles assigned to them by the society. The new woman emerges out of them, in the context of her socio-cultural ethos and economic standards prevailing in the society. The picture of a woman and her roles decide her dilemmas and changes required on her relevant world. Bajwa differs from Western feminism in the point that she loves liberty beyond constraints of life. She neither glorifies nor attaches any emotional significance to the Indian womanhood keeps the focus of her discourse on reflection of woman as woman, and woman as a human being outside her family and her personal relations. There is the emergence of 'career woman' who wants to get rid of the clutches of the chains of male domination. The new woman as an expert tries to sort out disputes and counter all the challenges against her career, within and outside her home.

Conclusion

Feminist historiography, feminist writers and critics from the West as well as East have already done a commendable job by revealing the historical process of women's subjugation, their rising out of various suppressive power structures and occurrence of 'new woman' in society and literature. A systematic exploration of western feminism & feministic theories in Chapter-1 underlines seven types of feminist thought that had also some impact on the women of emerging countries like India. These are: Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, Radical, Psychoanalytical, Existential and Post-modern feminism. It also brings out various socio-political, historical and economic factors that led to the emergence of new woman in 19th century. But this image of new woman never remained static rather it kept on assuming various forms and shades over the time. Since 1980s, the standpoint feminists of the West have emphasized that feminist movement must address those concerns that are rampant at the global level such as sexual assaults, unlawful carnal knowledge or adultery etc. They have taken feministic trends beyond the trivial politics of equal rights and opportunities thereby giving birth to a new wave of feminism i.e. the New Feminism. The New Feminism is a kind of post-feminism that became famous in the 1990s and focuses on a younger generation of women who express their desire to fashion new styles of feminism. New feminism provides an optimistic and celebratory picture of a confident, assertive group of young women who are reporting high levels of achievement and success across private and public sectors. But it also stresses on the relevance of feminism in the modern day female existence. As Natasha Walter (1998) states thus:

Feminism is still here, right at the centre of these new lives' where it is needed to address a central paradox of this 'brave new world'. In effect, the New Feminism presents a contradictory picture of unprecedented female freedom and independence coupled with continuing blatant inequalities us the contradictory picture of unprecedented female freedom and independence coupled with continuing blatant inequalities....The average woman, 'with all her new dreams and beliefs', still faces a number of concrete, economic and social injustices,... and an increased chance of living in poverty. (Walter 67).

New feminism claims itself as more recognized, more comprehensive, more enthusiastic to hold power, more liberal in crossing political restrictions, a feminism that belongs to men as well as women, conformists as well as socialists. In the West, where the new woman of the 19th century was audacious, stylish, educated, and fervent to revolutionize everything and even took sexual liberties too, the new woman of the twentieth century came out as a rational, contradictory character, introvert and caught in the web of conflicts and tensions.

As the Indian society forms the fictional corpus of this present research work so the later part of chapter-1 investigates the position of woman in Indian society and studies the rise of the feministic wave in Indian Writing in English in its pre and post independence era. It also highlights how the concept of 'new woman' in India has emerged as a by-product of feminism. In India, since ages, women have been leading their lives as per the dictates given by their society. The allegory of the "angel in the household" held a woman and her virtuousness high

on a pedestal and eventually her role was declared to be confined to the domestic household only where she as a meek creature, was expected to abide by the decisions of patriarchy. Defining patriarchy, Catherine Thankamma in “The Women Patriarchy Created” (2000) opines thus: “Patriarchy is the system that traces family descent and economic inheritance down the male line. in a joint family the senior most male is the head, the patriarchy, while in the nuclear families of today, it is the father” (Thankamma 42). Consequently, females in a house begin to develop disbelief in their self-esteem and deem their lowliness as pre-ordained.

Talking about the 21st century, one can see that the thoughts and movements of Western feminists and their representations of their female subjects have some impact on the women of emerging countries like India. With the rise of new feminism across the world, a new group of Indian feminists has come forward to struggle for the individual sovereignty, freedom, rights, open-mindedness, education, support, sexuality, bias, patriarchy, chauvinism, abortion, birth control, divorce, equal pay, maternity leave, and prostitution.

This dissertation investigates diverse social, political, economical and cultural reasons which brought about the emergence of a new woman in the fiction of select Indian authors and their selected fiction. Selected authors belong to the different time periods, social backgrounds and cultural milieus thereby projecting different facades of Indian new woman. Fictional lives of the female characters in selected novels have been used to trace the chronological journey of development of Indian new woman. It starts with Mahasweta Devi’s sympathetic representation of subalterns immediately after decolonization i.e. the post-independence era and

then proceeds towards Frank narratives of Shobha De on the new woman of urbanized elite segments of 1980's and 1990's and finally to the picture of 21st century new woman as presented by contemporary writers like Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa through their discourses on issues of women like education, marriage and divorce etc. The objective is to highlight the fact that if the social situations, economic scenarios and religious patterns of female characters of each of the chosen authors are diverse, their forms and manifestations of growth are also varied.

All the writers under study are similar in the sense that they refuse to be associated with any specific school of feministic thought but apparently represent their own feminist mindset. A mere set of demands for fundamental rights for women is not the agenda of their discourse rather an honest representation of what actually is going on in the society and to what extent women can go to establish themselves as an essential part of society is the underlying design of their discussion. Mahasweta Devi has used her ingenious not to discover the reasons for their endless sufferings in the patriarchal society but to recommend a way out which in her view "lies in the hands of the oppressed, when they rise and fight back, only then history can be changed". It is her radical feminist realism that persuades her women to find a solution out of the problem as we see in the case of Sanichari and Bikhni in *Rudali* who, eventually grow up to take advantage of their repressive exploitative structures.

An extensive assessment of personalities of Karuna and Aasha Rani brings out De's sexist outlook in her handling of women's questions. She raises her protest against the malist culture and endeavors to deform the traditional good old

image of woman 'as a subordinate' who voices for independence and parity but her cries go unattended to. Karuna and Aasha have not been portrayed as ones so deeply lost in love or slaves or mere domestic helpers rather they are tough in character and are courageous enough to take a life to change decisions to endure in society. Through Virmati, Shakuntala and Astha, Kapur accentuates the fact that her new woman should not be branded as a mutineer. A 'new woman' is one who happily and sincerely performs her duties in all domains of her life and also wants to be considered as an equal individual to men though with a different biological composition. Her new women are neither egotistical nor mutinous rather are brave, educated, self-sustained, sincere and resolute. Virmati and Astha exemplify what Susan Polis Schultz states that "the new woman arises full of confidence, she speaks eloquently, and thinks independently, full of strength. She organizes efficiently and directs proudly" (Schultz 39).

Bajwa's women also lead a life of empowerment, personal preferences and self-determination as we see in the case of Rina Kapoor, Mrs. Sachdev, Mrs. Bhandari and Mrs. Gupta etc. Besides presenting the vanities of upper middle-class women, Bajwa also sympathizes with the miserable condition of the women whose families are the victims of capitalistic culture. Thus, it can be said that a truthful and sensitive portrayal of Indian women's subjugation, their resultant rebellion perpetually add feministic elements into works of all the writers under study. Except for Mahasweta Devi's new women who were not much exposed to the impact of industrialization, education and western culture, the new women of Shobha De, Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa exhibit the traits of post-feminists as they lead a life of empowerment, personal choices and autonomy and are driven by consumer culture.

One common underlying factor that brings about the emergence of new women in the works of writers under study is that all these females are the part and parcel of post independent Indian society. The scientific and industrial developments in post- independence era, the widespread of education and western culture motivated Indian women to reject the patriarchal hegemony and strive for their individuality. New values and cultural transformation which urbanization brought in its wake altered the psyche of women. Moreover, the ideas of the welfare state and new rights preserved in Indian Constitution further led to women empowerment.

This factor of post-independent social and political awareness is less significant if one talks about the growth of new woman of Mahasweta Devi because the underlying purpose of her fiction is to hold a mirror to the lives and problems of all those people who have no voice elsewhere and to create a forum of expression for the same. Devi's narratives of activism on tribal realities- their dispossession, poverty, abuse and the struggle for survival cover her own observations and involvement in various social and political events of colonial India such as World War II, the Quit India Movement of 1942, the Bengal famine of 1943, the division of 1947. Just as globalization in the name of technological, scientific and business advancements has left the third world countries (developing nations) marginalized, the same way political independence of our nation from colonial rule has not provided assured growth and freedom to all the segments of society. Shekhar (2006) quotes Gayatri Spivak's views on Mahasweta Devi's fiction "been widely read and critically theorized as a powerful representational attempt from the point of view of the third world marginalia" (qtd. in Shekhar 4422). Devi's narration proceeds to question the relevance of various social and

political objectives of a newly independent nation which is evidently directed towards the growth of materialism, capitalism, democracy, and nationalism. Alaknanda Bagchi in her article entitled “Conflicting Nationalisms: The Voice of the Subaltern in Mahasweta Devi’s *Bashai Tudu*” (1996) rightly states thus:

Although post-Independence India has seen the rise and fall of several governments, the Congress Party has dominated the political scene in the second half of this century. The popularity of the Congress stems from the nationalistic role it played during India's freedom movement. In the decades following Independence, the leaders of the Congress continued to propagate the ideals of nationalism in order to keep the country unified. However, secessionist forces soon began to surface, and Naxalbari, Gorkhaland, Khalistan, Jharkhand, and other movements proved to be forceful enough to disrupt the complacency of the reigning Establishment. As the nation reeled under the impact of terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare, often conducted by those who had been marginalized by the dominant system, writers like Mahasweta Devi began to question the concept of nationhood. (Bagchi 41)

Having played a determining role in personification of idea of women empowerment in India, Devi never thought of women as separate beings rather believed in the fact that their subjugation was a part of the “oppression of class and caste” (*Women Writing in India* 235). She like a subaltern is conscientious in her thoughtfulness towards females and records moment of combined fight in which men and women join together when “their condition of work or education suffer

from gender or class discrimination” (Spivak, *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* 215). *Rudali* is a perfect instance to depict how Mahasweta Devi questions the poverty existing in certain states, the evil of caste system, hypocritical Indian funeral practices and ensuing subjugation of unprivileged in general and women in particular, at the hands of wicked powerful sections of society. Mahasweta Devi in an interview with Anjum Katyal in Calcutta on May 26, 1993 stated that “set against the exploitative system is the issue of survival. ‘Rudali is about... “how to survive”..... “bread and mouth”. It is very important in my story. The whole system is exposed through this.” (Katyal 9)

Apart from this common factor, the growth of all new women discussed in present study is led by their respective socio-cultural backdrop, prevailing economic conditions and the purpose of their creator. That’s why the tools used by these female characters to achieve success are relative depending on their situation. Heilmann and Beetham rightly remarks thus:

The common feature which recurs again and again in different cultures is the identification of the New Woman with the modern and with the disruptive, that is with challenges to existing structures of gendered identity. Resistance to the New Woman frequently calls on traditional, cultural or national identities. (Heilman and Beetham 2)

In *Rudali*, it is the matter of sustenance, shelter and economic security after the death of her son Budhua that force Sanichari, a woman of immediate post independent era to take up the work of a mourner. The evolution of Sanichari and her friend Bikhni as new women lies in their courage, strength and willpower to

which they turn a social ritual of mourning into a profession. Eventually, Sanichari is able to understand weaknesses of the same exploitative system of sinful wealthy lords at whose hands she and her family had been suffering for so many years. To these exploiters, if sorrow on the death of some dear one is just a public show of effective mourning by hired rudalis then these depraved women shall leave no chance unused to turn this profession into regular business. Thus Sanichari uses her exploitative system as a tool to come out as a new woman.

The gomastha would agree to everything himself. What option did they have? Everyone wanted them after seeing their performance at Bhairab Singh's funeral. They were professional. The world belongs to the professional now, not to the amateur. In big cities, the prosperous prostitutes competed for such jobs. In this region, it is Sanichari who has taken up this business. After all, this is not the big city. There are no prosperous prostitutes thronging Tohri. So, he has to agree to Sanichari's demands. (Devi, *Rudali* 74)

The growth of Sanichari is modeled on what Gayatri Spivak states "when the subaltern 'speak' in order to be heard and gets into structure of responsible ... resistance, he or she is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual" (Spivak, *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* 215). To realize this aim, Devi has built up the character of Dulan who embodies awareness about the vices and weaknesses of powerful social and religious system prevailing within the society. In every tense moment of her life, Dulan mediates to counsel, assist, instruct and inform Sanichari. The author is not bothered about bringing to the forefront various gender-based issues rather she is focused on providing a solution to the subjugation of tribals in general and of women in particular. "That Dulan might be perceived as

a male playing mentor and guide to helpless females is not a concern of author's and as a Dulan and Sanichari interact as peers, unselfconsciously free from any hint of asymmetry." (Katyal 10)

From Mahasweta Devi, the focus of research moves towards the new women of Shobha De "the high priestess of gossip and innuendo" (Raj 32) who asserts herself to be "among the first to explore the world of the urban woman in India" (*The Illustrated Weekly of India*). Her works including *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights* invited unfriendly reviews. Sethi (1991) has labeled *Socialite Evenings* as a work "choked with listless lust" and "criticized for its witless dialogue" (Sethi 41) and *Starry Nights* with its blatant description of sex and sex exploitation were tagged as a confession of man-eater (Jain 195). Despite such critical reviews, Shobha De's works are serious attempts at "discovering India through Indian eyes" (Davidas 43). Each and every aspect of her writings may not be commendable yet her dealing with the challenges, dilemmas, principles and way of life of present-day urban Indian is her most noteworthy contribution. She herself once opined that "I write with great deal empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about woman's situation. (*The Hindustan Times Magazine* 3). Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* and Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* are led by their intense career-orientation, their innate instinct to live an independent and successful life and their craving for authority to govern money-matters. They want to enjoy this authority and even fight to obtain and hold on to such authority. These goals of life force them to go for the sensational and demanding careers of modeling, acting, and journalism. They are required to show their leaning towards flamboyancy, western culture & sophisticated ways of life where there is hardly any room for conventional morality and rituals.

In fact, the strategy used by De's new women against men, to achieve material success in their careers is sex. That's why they have come to be recognized as new urban women in 20th century. For all intents and purposes, Karuna and Aasha Rani are liberal about their sexual life. They are well conscious of their sexual potential which they can use to make the men fall at their feet. They are intolerant about any unfaithfulness on part of their husbands and flout all the sexual taboo like anything with great courage and enjoyment. We get an idea about psychological conditioning of Karuna on sex when she states: "Men like dogs could be conditioned through reward and punishment" (De, *Socialite Evenings* 87). By this reward and punishment, she obviously means providing and withdrawing sexual pleasures. The same is true of Aasha Rani when she says to Kishanbhai: "All of you are just the same, but wait I will screw you. I will screw you all, beat you at your own game" (Shobha De, *Starry Nights* 26). To the conventional middle class Indian society, this subverted kind of lifestyle is very unwanted. That's why, they have been labeled with the adjectives like 'modern', 'westernized' and even 'characterless'. In real sense, De's new women are her ambassadors to express her free thinking about sex. She herself once opined thus: "sex is the bedrock of all relationships. The very fact that sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised three letter word in India is enough cause to celebrate. But there is nothing derogatory or clandestine in sex". She advocates a sensible approach towards sex. She highly criticizes dull, emotionless and routine sex. The union of bodies has its own meaning and significance in her fiction. In most of her novels, we find neglected wives of men who are too busy in earning wealth and least concerned about expressing love to their beautiful wives. Karuna is the most appropriate instance of the same. The vamp philosophy of feminism does not save the strange

and morally fallen women of De who in their craziness to break away from male-domination and to establish individuality use sex as a means, face disappointment and are slighted in one way or the other. In their attack against patriarchal suppression, their acts of allurements and unfaithfulness end up being disloyal to women as well. Talking about the growth of Karuna, one can say that it is her journey from moral & ethical depravity towards her self-actualization. After her divorce, she is left with unfulfilled desires for care, protection and respect and hazy expectation of self-achievement. She is battered but not beaten. The way she rises again through a well-paid job and settles herself as a widely appreciated writer of memoirs, is really commendable and speaks of her traits of a new woman. Same is true of Aasha Rani. Repetitive sexual & psychological abuse continued existence despite a succession of shocks and separation from a loving husband cannot restrain Aasha's inborn instinct to live an independent and successful life. The way Aasha boosts her sister Sudha to fulfill their father's dream by reestablishing their studio and making films is an appropriate illustration of the same. "Our name will rule the industry and the studio will regain its glory. I promise you that, father. You will see that I shall do it and prove it to you" (Shobha De, *Starry Nights* 234). Herein, one finds the growth of new women of Shobha De.

From Shobha De, the momentum of discussion moves to the new women of post-modern era as depicted by 21st-century writers Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa, through their discourses on sociologically and psychologically responsive issues of women like education, marriage, identity crisis, divorce, and polygamy etc.

A thorough examination of Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman* brings home the fact that she has tried to portray a new visage of Indian

women who are self-determining enough to condemn their age-old slavery to conventions and make their society a place where 'self' has occupied the centre and values, ethics and morals have become secondary. Taking up those subjects on women that are so widespread in India, she has made her readers understand how hard it has been for the women to reach such developed state of mind already caught within a complex milieu of religion and ritual. In *Difficult Daughters*, Virmati's evolution as a new woman is because of her intellectual longings, her love for a scholarly man and her desperation to be socially recognized as the legally wedded wife of a Professor. She uses her education as a tool to counter resolutely the family's pressures for her marriage. Veena Singh (2000) rightly states that "for Virmati herself Education is an escape...an escape from the reproaches of her family from and her mother's silent disapproval" (Singh 165).

Thus by deciding the priorities of her life, she is able to win her independence. "Insisting on her right to be educated, she manages to leave home to study in Lahore" (Rollason 2). The success of Kapur's art lies in the manner the journey of her new women is explored through the depiction of three generations of women in *Difficult Daughters*. Furthermore, this journey is narrated through the perspective of Ida, a woman of the young generation of contemporary India. The role of women in Kasturi's generation was as ordained by the society i.e. childbearing and domestic work. Virmati, Shakuntala and Swaran Lata from the second generation are aspiring individuals and must be admired for their resilience and strong will power in their insistence on their right to be educated, their participation in the political movement for India's independence, their economic sovereignty, and their social repute. They reject the kind of life led by their mothers Kasturi and Lajwanti. The second generation is against the first one and

the third generation is the second one. Virmati dares to puncture the patriarchal code of morality and laws to lead an independent life. Just as she proves a ‘difficult daughter’ because of her craziness for education, freedom, and individuality, Ida too like her mother becomes a ‘difficult daughter’. She is sincere to the core of her heart and remains with Harish under all good and bad circumstances and liberty-loving woman. Even Astha in *A Married Woman* is “conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes” (Malik 171). She too is an embodiment of Kapur’s dream of liberating women from the oppressive measures of patriarchy. Since her childhood, she has been complaining about the repressive role played by social customs and values. She never inherited the values of her mother who quite often says:

When you are married, our responsibilities will be over. Do you know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughters married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth? (Kapur, *A Married Woman* 1).

Astha’s strong reaction on this is: “I don’t believe in all that stuff and I think as an educated person neither should you” (Kapur 1).

Through Virmati, Astha, Shakuntala, Swaran Lata and Ida, Kapur gives us new women of 21st century whose passion for education, self-sufficiency, equality, and individuality become instrumental in their fight for liberation from financial, political and social repressions prevalent in their contemporary society. Throughout life, both Virmati and Astha strive to find such human relations that would grant them a right to manage the course of their life and would accept them

as learned beings. Dora Salvador Sales (2004) in her notes to her Spanish Translation of this novel points out,

Kapur emphasizes the efforts made at that time by numerous women who, while demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life opportunities going beyond convention were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British. (Sales 361)

Like a rich collection of sarees in Sevak Sari Shop, one finds an array of women characters in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*, all distinct and apart in style, language, mannerism and ideology. Like Kapur, her new women are also astute, self-conscious, intellectual and ingenious. They use their resourcefulness, education, and position in society as the weapons to solve disputes and counter all the challenges against their career, within and outside their home. Rina Kapoor, Mrs. Sandhu, Mrs. Gupta etc. have been presented in one way or other the products and victims of the commercial world. They include the domestic housewives of rich & affluent families and the learned working women. What brings them together under the umbrella of new women is that they are led by their inclination towards education, modern shopping culture, style, fashion, hybridism, and absurdity. Rina is a 'new woman' in the sense that she is progressive, open-minded and socially conscious. This post graduate girl with the power of her determination, the strength of mind and enthusiasm for education revolts against the traditional patriarchy and persuades her industrialist to the father for marriage to a man of her choice. "I am not one of those girls who'll just marry a rich man and go to kitty parties. Besides, I don't really need any more money" (Bajwa, *The Sari Shop* 82). Mrs. Sandhu signifies 'power psychology'. Chander's wife Kamala

and Sudha are the representatives of economically weaker sections of society, who work hard a lot to earn their bread and butter and seek shelter. These women are courageous enough to stand against the patriarchal suppression and the corrupt economic system of Indian society though their raised voices get subdued in a highly selfish world. But if we talk about the victimization of women of lower strata, these new women assume the role of oppressor and perpetrate violence on 'others'. Through subaltern character Ramchand and the twin personality of her new women, Rupa Bajwa's seems to shatter the traditional concept of feminism wherein men are considered as the only reason of female subjugation. She upholds her take on post-feminism when she blames that the women face subjugation not only at the hands of their male counterparts but their own sisters of upper strata are equally sympathetic towards them. Mrs. Sachdev, the Head of the English Department at a local college is quite arrogant. Mrs. Bhandari is a snob and takes false pride in her husband's honored rank in the Police department. She boasts of organizing various social & charitable programs for the welfare of the weaker people of society but it is only her hypocrisy to remain famous in the society. It becomes clear in her attitude towards Kamala. Her so called benevolent nature does not bring any relief to the poor people of her area. Her scolding of the shop assistant when he fails to understand her choice of sarees— "you can't really make these people understand' all exhibit their callous attitude towards the people of the lower strata of the society".

The character of Kamala emphasizes the underlying truth that the movement of feminism has not pervaded in all the segments of society. She is not terrified of her failures in life rather she represents courage and determination and

goes to the extent of perpetrating physical violence to show her rebellion against the wealthy people of Amritsar. She is the only character who shows valor to face the oppression at the hands of capitalist society. She is beaten and molested yet she dares to hit Ravinder Kapoor with a stone to show her strong objection against the exploitation done by the capitalists. Such women raise their voice not to become equals to men but to remain stuck to their fundamental right to live and to be considered as humans. Thus, Bajwa's new woman emerges in the context of her socio-cultural ethos and economic standards prevailing in the society. Teresa Sebastian (2013) states thus:

The chasm that separates the privileged and the less privileged in a multicultural, multilingual Indian urban society is deep. One can find here, at the same time, an emancipated woman and her emaciated counterpart. But the women in India cannot confidently embrace their own power unless they balance the disparity between the economic classes and free all women from the strands of victimization. (Sebastian 6)

There is a point of similarity between the renowned German psychologist Karen Horney and the characters of Karuna, Aasha, Virmati, and Astha. Just as Karen had "poor history with regard to relationships with women (estrangement from her mother and daughter) but particularly men, with many affairs in which she sought desperately to be loved... (qtd. in Ridgway 3), these women also suffer disaffection and distancing in relationships because of the basic anxiety in their personality. This anxiety is created by their own over idealized self. Even a stage comes when these women appear problematic. Now the question arises what is there that takes

them to the stature of new women. It is their voyage from neurosis to self-realisation that paves their rise as new women.

The tradition of marriage is of unparalleled implication in the life of young people, particularly in India. It has always been a period of blossoming and growing in the life of the woman. Alexander Walker (1987) rightly states thus: “History proves that marriage is essential to the well-being human society and that celibacy brings ruin upon states” (Walker 80). It has always served human society and culture with affection, safety, and family. But in the present times, due to sexual promiscuity, increasing economic independence of women, increased number of divorce, this superlative of marriage has lost its age-old significance. Today, a woman who earns sufficiently with a roof over wants to marry someone because she wants to share the joys and sorrows of her life with somebody in true sense not because she wants some bread winner. Such a woman can also not be compelled to perpetuate a failed marriage.

Talking from the perspective of roles and responsibilities in marriage, we find that Shobha De’s women stand apart from the new women of rest of the authors. Economic factor being an indispensable part of their power struggle compel them to enjoy sexual liberty at the cost of marital responsibilities and mutual commitment. De suggests that Women must develop in themselves qualities such as command, capability, confidence, and boldness as these traits have always been considered as the special inheritance and safeguard of men only then she can come out of their protection shield and face the real world. It is appropriate to state here what Bhaskar Shukla (2006) opines thus:

Educated, attractive, confident and assertive socialite women in Shobha De's novels define marriage afresh, in which mutual fidelity till death (*Anticrime*) is replaced generally by sexual freedom. The change in attitude towards marriage represents, according to Shobha De, a big step forward. (Shukla 119)

No doubt, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* symbolize suppression of Indian wives at the hands of their husbands but she possesses the knack to abominate the heartless approach of her husband who remains all the time anxious about uninteresting repetitive activities. Her marriage to a wealthy businessman is a complete failure as it is devoid of affection, happiness, and understanding. "I married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. Escaping one form of overt regimentation at her parent's home, Karuna feels she is fallen a victim to a subtle and covert form of regimentation in her husband's home" (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 57). She believes that "marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to" (Shobha De 68). Even her disloyalty towards her husband and her passionate inclination towards Krish, a Calcutta-based dramatist is an outcome of her emotional and psychological gratification which her married life has failed to provide her. Finally, the marriage ends up in divorce. De justifies Karuna in the sense that she attempts to lash hypocrisy prevailing in Indian society. In her detest for an arranged marriage or interference from parents and relatives, she doesn't intend to be a rebel rather her emphasizes the significance of what is most noticeably missing in Indian marriages i.e. communiqué. Rita is right when she makes an ironic statement to Karuan: "We demand communication, attention... Arrey baba, forget it. We all should be happy

if they (husbands) don't beat or burn us, torture us, insult us, discard us. That is all" (117). On the contrary, Devi's Sanichari sets an example of a fully devoted wife, caring daughter in law, responsible mother and a loving grandmother. From the beginning of the story until the end, she is seen taking care of her sick mother, supporting her husband, after his death bringing up her son Budhua and after Budhua's nurturing her grandson Haroa. Even Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* considers it as moral transgression on her part to continue her physical and emotional relationship with professor without getting married to him and is anxious to give it a social name so she instantly gets ready to become his second wife. Her wish is fulfilled though it is not the end of her unhappiness rather beginning of her life of social isolation. She tries her best to become a responsible wife and dedicated daughter-in-law though the stigma of having become the second wife of Harish doesn't let it happen. In Amritsar, "Virmati went to the *angle* to bring the clothes in. The line was bare except for her own, hanging forlornly at the end..." (Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* 215). Same is in the case of Astha. Her wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong and her sense of responsibilities make her understand that her lesbian relationship with she cannot go ahead in her with Pipeelika as her family should be her top most priority.

When compared to their male counterparts, the female characters of both Mahasweta Devi and Shobha De are more audacious and remarkable to fight the system and take a lead for their reasons. They resemble the 19th century new women from the West. The males in Devi's works seem to be deficient in understanding into what is happening to their existence and are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. They act as an inert audience when their

wives pass through tough situation created by the same unconcerned establishment. Sanichari's husband Ganju is a relevant example of such males. Ganju's attitude on the death of his mother, his brother, and sister-in-law is passive. It is Sanicahri who gathers the neighbors and makes the necessary arrangements for cremation and sharadh. "When her mother-in-law died, Sanichari didn't cry... Dragging the neighbors home with her, and handling all the arrangements for the cremation, she was so busy that there was no time to cry" (Devi, *Rudali* 54-5)

Ganju's death due to some poisonous drink is also an instance of his meek acceptance of his fate as ordained by the wicked power system in society. Shobha De's females are also more methodical and sensible as compared to their companions, who appear meek, indifferent or even feeling less. An Indian man is depicted as a person "terribly threatened by self-sufficient women" (Shobha De, *Socialite Evenings* 69).

The new women of De do not feel culpable about their moral laxity and attitudes or to put it another way the question of morality and ethics cannot stop them from marching ahead successfully on the difficult road chosen by them. Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* expresses her own inclination towards the art of modernization and symbolize complete independence of womankind from all types of patriarchal reticence. She very well comprehends how women in Indian society have been relegated to an auxiliary place yet she despises the distant and insensitive attitude of her husband. To her, the average Indian woman's conjugal life is an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left and marriage is like a skin allergy, an irritant. But she is not afraid to face this irritant, this allergy. She boldly and defiantly encounters it, for, In fact, she belongs to a new class of

women who with their newly found freedom from connubial burden takes on different viewpoint and rebel against the old order. She represents intense materialism and lack of religious devotion which is one of the chief features of the modern age. The disintegration of moral and ethical values on her part arouses an inner conflict within her and craving for an individual existence. So she becomes an enlightened individual in search of a place of her existence. Indeed a daring woman, Aasha in *Starry Nights* should be appreciated for her fortitude and patience. Had she been a traditional woman, she would have succumbed to the deadly evils prevailing in the pseudo-glamorous world of Bollywood. She also comes out as more commanding and gutsy than Akshay. She is bold enough to give up her successful acting career for the sake of marriage with Akshay but it could not materialize only because of Akshay's disloyalty and lack of courage. Aasha has planned her own rules of conduct for herself that are free of the gender roles and sexual constraints defined by the conventional society.

The meeting between Aasha and her sister Sudha towards the end of the novel is a perfect example to show that regardless of so much moral laxity to climb the ladder of success, somewhere in her conscious, Aasha still values relationships. Vats (2010) opines that "despite her indulgence in indiscriminate sex and professional opportunism, Aasha Rani has a critical eye for the sanctity of relations, which she unconsciously cherishes like a wish" (Vats 63).

So, it can be said that Mahasweta Devi has brought in her new women Sanichari and Bikhni to make an appeal to the subalterns to find out, not the causes but a solution to their subjugation out of prevalent power system itself. Subaltern women must learn not to accept their suppression as ordained by their destiny

rather stand up and understand the lacunas of repressive economic and social structures and prepare themselves accordingly to make the exploitative system addit to their strengths. Shobha De, through her artistic brilliance, has gifted her new women a skill to pierce into men's psyche. Frequently men in her fiction are unresponsive and feel endangered by self-possessed and self-dependent females. Her women puncture the conventional image of Indian womanhood both in expressions and actions, be it their career or carnal pleasures. Her new woman symbolizes that frailty is no more a synonym attached to her if gets a chance she turns to be a woe-man. Like other writers of their generation, both Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa have also made their new women their spokespersons to emphasize the significance and essence of emancipation and learning for Indian women. Neither they hold high nor they add any special importance to the Indian womanhood rather keep the focal point of their discussion on the manifestation of woman as a woman, woman as a human being, woman within her family, woman outside her family and woman in her private relations. Through Virmati, Astha, Rina Kapoor and Kamala, they uphold their concern for women "with a missionary zeal and seems to suggest that a married woman's job is not to complete wifing, child-bearing and housekeeping but to do something more" (Singh, *Indian Woman Novelists* 65).

Apart from literature, if one talks about the real India, the very first question that comes to our mind is are our girls really liberated, educated and given equal treatment? If the answer is yes then why girls like Malala from Pakistan has to raise her voice for girls' education and equality of genders. For her radical campaign she was targeted to death but her determination in spite of various social, educational and cultural reforms to improve the condition of women in India, the

very first question that comes to one's mind Why Malala has to raise voice for girl's education?. For her campaign she was targeted for death her determination won against her destiny. She has enough audacity like a man. She is a perfect illustration of a new woman in the 21st century who proves that women are not meant to live in four walls but they have their own identity and it's their right to get it. That's why she is nominated for the noble peace prize.

Like Malala, we have several other examples of Indian new women who have attained the pinnacle of achievements in the domains of singing, acting, film direction, modeling, administration, corporate business and much more. The names like Lata Mangeshkar, Indian Nightingale, Asha Bhosle, Anu Radha Podwal, and M. S. Subbulakshmi as famous singers. Madhu Bala, Shreedevi, Madhuri Dixit, Rekha, Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Chopra and much more as Bollywood queens. Kiran Majumdar Shaw, Managing Director of Biocon India is the acknowledged corporate queen of India. She is the wealthiest Indian woman entrepreneur. She wanted to become a doctor but could not get admission in medical colleges but even then, she did not lose courage and went on and on and become corporate queen. Forbes magazine's list of 100 most powerful women in the world includes Congress President Sonia Gandhi at 13th position, and ICICI Bank's Lalita Gupte and Kalpana Morparia at the 93rd position while Vidya Chhabria, Chairperson of Jumbo Group is at the 95th place. Apart from this, we have other names such as Naina Lal Kidwai, Vice Chairperson and Managing Director of HSBC Securities and Capital Market, Sullaijja Firodia Motwani and Mallika Srinivasan as corporate ladies. All the new women under study namely Sanichari, Karuna, Aasha Rani, Virmati, Astha and Rina Kapoor and Sudha are replicas of these above mentioned Indian new women.

Future Scope and Usefulness of Present Research Work:

In spite of the substantial contribution of Mahasweta Devi, Shobha De, Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa to Indian literature in English, their works have not been fully examined. A number of books and research articles have been published on these authors but after a minute study of these, one thing is quite clear that the topic of the emergence of the new woman in the post-partition era is comparatively unexplored area and there is no elaborate work on it except for a few research articles. The critics of past and present have not so far fully explored the socio-economic and socio-political forces/causes which led to the emergence of a “new woman” in the post-colonized Indian society. The purpose of this study is to fill in the lacuna and also to highlight how a new wave/ journey of feminism started with Mahasweta Devi and reached its climax with Shobha De and has assumed different forms and shades with Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa in the contemporary era. Exploration of the new woman and reinterpretation of issues concerning the women protagonists of Mahasweta Devi, Shobha De, Manju Kapur and Rupa Bajwa will be an addition to the critical literature. The present study will make a rich contribution to the growing corpus of feminist literature and will further supply the aesthetic simulation to the scholars and researchers.

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