

Depiction of Conflicting Self-Identities in Hindi feminist writings from 1965 to 1995

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Since Ages we have acknowledged a wide gap between the socially expected role of man and woman. They both have some social and moral responsibilities attached to them by birth. Man is believed to be the superior species, dominating other creations of God. This difference is very much visible in literature since centuries. Beginning with the West, the waves of feminism reached East very soon, resulting in the open demonstration against the patriarchal system in India. Women in India started speaking their heart out even before independence but they were recognized late only at the time of independence struggle when they used their pen for swords. After independence the country got free but the condition of women remain as critical as before. They played a passive role at home, dominated by father, brother and husband. Some male writers in their writings depicted the subordinate picture of women but female critics believe that their portrayal of women characters is biased. Women characters were always given a minor role with no powers. Later some women writers mustered the courage to speak their minds out by creating powerful revolutionary women characters. They presented them not merely as a tool to move the narrative but the whole narrative runs around them. Such portrayal of women was not a usual thing and thus these women writers were the target of the severe criticism from the so called main stream writers and critics.

Their women characters, though surviving under the strict hold of patriarchy, are bold and independent, moving away from the stereotype image attached to their existence. I have chosen to look at the fiction of three of the most acknowledged Hindi women writers from 1965-1990, Mannu Bhandari (b. 1932), Krishna Sobti (b. 1925) and Shivani (1923-2003). All the three writers differ from each other in terms of their writing style but the issues raised and the treatment of women as subject is quite similar. They all belong to northern India and have

focused more on the culture of urban society especially the changing relationship between man and woman. Women writing their creative pursuits have a long binding relation with their inner revolt against the patriarchal system. We find that generally all the women writers have been fighting against the social evils and at the same time challenging patriarchal hegemony in relationships. Most of the stories I have taken up, explore and re-interpret the forced dominance of men over the freedom of women and their struggle to break this chain of hegemony.

The style of writing plays an important role in appealing and influencing the readership and bringing in some change in the thinking of the targeted society. Talking about the form and style of Hindi women writers, it's difficult to place them under any single category as their writings have wider issues and larger motives.¹ With each of their work they discover a different form of voicing the problems of women. The form that gets develop relates to the society and time in which the text is composed and thus plays an important role in bringing out the effect of the content. Very common of their style of writing includes the introduction of Indian tradition and values and then breaking them all by commenting directly or indirectly on their uselessness. The difference in form and style of writing make them appear contradicting and challenging their counter parts. (For example, male writers have written about women sexuality and problems but women writers on the other hand are questioning this whole concept of sexuality pre-determined by the male dominated society) and that is why, when men and women write even on the same issue, their style of writing and feeling things is very different from each other.

Their style of writing could be related to the theory of deconstruction because they deconstruct every established idea and construct their own, influenced and inspired by their personal experiences. In the course of time, Hindi women writers have interrogated the cultural tradition and the modern use of patriarchal power in their post independence writings. They have proved extremely progressive in their questioning of the social structure of Indian society, especially the urban society, which treats its women with double standards of judgments. At one place we are celebrating women empowerment and on the other hand we see cases of women molestation at schools and colleges and at work places which were not a woman's domain before some years.

¹ When women started writing in West, their writings were categorized as feminist and when women in the East stated expressing their heart and mind, they were called as unconventional and even "prostitutes" by some critics because they (critics) believe that these women writers were advocating woman freedom in all spheres of life, including marriage and sexuality which could be a threat to the patriarchal society of India.

<http://rajcritic.wordpress.com/2010/08/01/feminist-hindi-writers-are-prostitutes/> posted by Rajesh Shukla.

All such incidents make us believe that women are still regarded as the 'second sex' by the so-called educated and modern Indian society. This secondary consideration of women is also visible in the literature composed by men all over the world. Considering Hindi Literature, women started getting representation in the fiction of male writers even before independence but in the most conventional way.² Eminent writers like Premchand, Jainender Kumar, Jai Shankar Prasad and others have paved way to the representation of women and their plight in 20th Century India. But their women were often weak and suppressed, accepting their marginalized status unquestioningly. Women in the fiction of Premchand are often widows deprived of any respect in the society; women in Jainender's fiction often remained caught between their inner struggles with the outer world. They wanted to break free of the forced and obsolete conventions but are stopped by the fear of being abandoned by the family. Other contemporary writers of Premchand too have attempted to depict Indian women but they couldn't trace the transition of the emerging new women in Indian society, who not only urge for the freedom from the patriarchal constraints of the society but also openly revolts and rejects them. Hindi Women writers thus took the responsibility of freeing the literature from the weak images and asserting a bold image of Modern Women in Modern India.

Women writers in Hindi emerged much later than the West but their struggle for survival as writers was equally difficult. In Hindi, women writers made their presence felt for the first time by writing short stories. The only difference is that they do not wanted to write under any pseudonym in order to conceal their identity, like Jane Austen or Eliot Sisters; on the contrary they even shed the surnames of their husbands and stick to their own, without fearing the revolt of society for their writings being so unconventional.

As I have selected to deal with the short stories written by Hindi women writers, it is crucial to discuss in brief the history of short story in Hindi literature and the place of women writers. Short Story is the youngest form of writing in Hindi Literature as it came much later than the poetry and novel. Beginning from the times when India was under British rule many factors contributed to its (story's) evolution and development. Most importantly, with the introduction of Capitalism and feudalism in Indian Society. But with the coming of industrialization in the 19th

² Male writers before independence represented women as passive members of the joint family, playing the role of passive mothers, wives and daughters. Their only concern was to look good care of their family members. They were not allowed to take any part in the decisions of the family. Thus women in male fiction either remained in *Pardha* or in silence, supporting the very conventionalism of Indian women.

and 20th century, a new class emerged on the scenario which was recognized as 'The Middle Class', which consisted of the working class including both men and women. Earlier great epics and poetry was written on the legends of history that were directly or indirectly placed in the aristocratic section of society and common man was given less or no representation in literature. To which Hindi literary critics' argue that it was not possible to trace all the changes of a society in a spontaneous genre like 'poetry' and thus fiction came into existence. The form and style of representation also underwent a change. Later with the development of society, villages started getting converted into small towns and thus the whole concept of urbanization came into existence. As the process of urbanization and modernization³ demands a lot of labour involvement, it became difficult to survive on the income of the male person alone and women were left with no option than stepping out of their houses. This paved way to women freedom and empowerment. They started developing relationships with other men at work places and it complicated their lives and the structure of society simultaneously. This complication of relationships became important feature of the modern Age, which attracted many writers especially women.

Early in the post-independence era there were few male writers writing on women and their sufferings to which later many women writers and critics felt that it lack the touch and depth of personal experience. This lead to the emergence of '*Nayi Kahani Movement*' in 1954-55, with the efforts of Modern Hindi fiction writers like Jai Shankar Prasad, Jainender Kumar, Yash Pal and Yage. These writers were trying to establish a theory different from the pre-independence writers in relation to form, content and style. All the four writers mentioned above wrote very distinctly from each other. Yashpal was a Marxist in his thinking and writing whereas Yage, writing in the same time period, was a Humanist. During the same time many other revolutionary writers made their presence felt in Hindi literature by speaking out the unspoken. Rajender Yadav, Mohan Rakesh, Kamleshvar, Nirmal Verma are few to name. These writers being aware of the changing status and role of women and the consequences, wrote so widely and openly on women in modern India. Their focus slowly got shifted from depicting the day to day sufferings of women's lives to the emerging powerful new women.⁴ The Age also provided space to some

³ Modernization here means re-awakening of common masses against the injustice done by a particular class. They shed all the superstition and turned towards rationality in every walk of life. People started questioning the established norms, in fact started breaking them and women were no exception.

⁴ The concept of new women in Hindi literature is very close to that of English when women started speaking out the injustice done to them. They pour their hearts out by writing about their life experiences, participating in the

of the now prominent women writers like Mannu Bhandari, Krishna Sobti, Shivani, Mrinal Pandey and Usha Premvada. Bhandari's *Trishanku* and *Yahi Sach Hai* (1966), Krishna Sobti's *Mitro Marjani* (1966) and Usha Premvada's *Pachpan Khambe Laal Devarein* (1989) are extremely revolutionary writings of their times which discuss the most tabooed issues like Sexuality, Celibacy, Marriage, Divorces, Second Marriage, Widow Rights, Women's rights to work etc. Speaking on such topics at that time really needed courage, doesn't matter how tolerant the modern society appears to be.

Critics of *Nayi Kahani* popularized the slogan "Booga Hua Yatharth,"⁵ according to which one could only write about the emotions one went through and hence male writers, however liberal they become, could never justify the representation of women in their writings. This gave women writers a sense of belief in themselves and after ages of struggle their works got appreciated and motivated despite of their bold style of writing. They also redefined human relations, opening a wide range of emotions and ideas for their readers. I would like to deal with each writer (Mannu Bhandari, Krishna Sobti and Shivani) individually and then relating the similarities and differences in their writings and characterization towards the end of the paper. I would like to begin with Manu Bhandari, who is believed to be the initiator of such revolutionary short stories which are women centered.

Representation of Women characters in the short stories of Mannu Bhandari:

Among Hindi writers Mannu Bhandari's contribution is most recommendable. She has a dozen of collections of short stories, novels like 'Apka Bunty' (1971), 'Mahabhoj' (1979), and books for children. Her latest book, a selective autobiography 'Ek kahani yeh bhi' (2008) has attracted great notice for its frankness and sensitivity. There is a variation in her women characters, most of them coming from the urban middle class society. Some of them have risen above the traditionally assigned role while the others stick to the stereotypical image of silent sufferer. Anita Myles here rightly point out, "A woman's experiences of life as a member of a

economical and political activities of the nation and started making their presence felt as important citizens of a democratic nation. They got educated and started earning. This increased their importance in the family and society.

⁵ The critics condemned the literature written on women by men on the basis that they have written about what they see from above, which of course is not always true. These critics believe that one need to undergo the kind of pain they are writing about. They popularized this slogan "Bhooga Hua Yatharth" which means one can only write about his/her own experience, not about others. Thus male writers could never do justice to women representation in their writings.

gender biased society formulate her psyche. Moreover, she is bound by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances, society's expectation related to age, class, race etc. Thus each woman's experience of life is different and therefore, unique."⁶

Mannu Bhandari provided a distinct dimension to the social and cultural picture of women in Indian family and society. The discriminating socio-cultural values, attitudes and practice which cripple the personalities of the female psyche get highlighted in her stories. Here I would like to discuss two stories by Bhandari 'Saza' (The Sentence) (1961) and 'Ek Kamzor Ladki ki Kahani' (1971) (Story of a Subordinate Girl)⁷

Saza is a story of a sensitive young girl Asha, who is forced to leave his childhood innocence due to the harsh circumstances created fate and her conservative family. Bhandari here also explores Asha's efforts to harmonize between the traditional society and her modernism which always ask her the reason for the imposed slavery at her. Asha's father was to be sentenced for the embezzlement of twenty thousand rupees which actually was done by someone else. He has been dismissed from his job and her (Asha's) maternal uncle who has just returned from England took all the responsibilities of rescuing her father. Asha and her mother are the silent sufferers of society's injustice whereas Asha's Chachi (Uncle's wife) is depicted as dominating and bold. Bhandari often keeps her protagonists either unaware of the injustice done to them or completely silent towards it. To prove that they have been nurtured since childhood in a society that perpetuates and supports such inequalities. It is a fact that even today a woman is been made acutely conscious of her gender since childhood. Restrictions on her movements are enforced as soon as she reaches puberty. Any girl, who tries to rebel against such restrictions is severely reprimanded and shown her place. Seema Sunil rightly point out, "*Before marriage, women are brought up strictly according to the traditional codes. The moment girl reaches adolescence; she is reminded of her femininity. She is constantly reminded by society that she need not assert her individuality as she is destined for man which is the ultimate goal of her life.*"⁸

⁶ Anita Myles, *Feminism and the Post-Modern Indian women novelists in English*. (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2009)

⁷ Translated as 'The Sentence' and 'Story of a Subordinate Girl' by Manish Chaudhary. Printed in *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, (Vol 2)by Susie J Tharu and Ke Lalita. (eds) New York: The Feminist Press, 1993.

⁸ Seema Sunil. 'Emergence of New Woman in Indian Fiction: A Study of Bharti Mukherjee's *Wife*, Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and R.W. Desai's *Frailty Name is Woman*'. New Delhi: Prestige Books; 1995.P. no. 219.

It is important to note here that Asha was not the victim of patriarchy in the literal sense she was more troubled by the women of the house. Her father cared for her the most and never wanted her to waste time in household works. When her dadi once teaches her to do some household work, her father shouts at her and says, “*My Asha will going to be a doctor. I’ll send her abroad. Will I let her ruin her life in this, this inkeeping?*” (p 352)⁹ But unfortunately Asha has to leave her studies because of the critical financial condition and the education of her younger brother which was considered to be more important. When her father sent her to take care of her brother at her uncle’s house in village she takes up the role of a loving mother and also becomes an expert in the household work. Thus the social structure and traditional codes scatter all her childhood dreams. In our society, which is essentially patriarchal, a female child is brought up under the strict control of parents with the view that she has to be given to a new master (her husband) who should find her acceptable, meeting all the expectations of him and his family. Marriage is thus considered a great ambition and ultimate goal of a girl’s life. The traditional feminine virtues and graces are instilled in her so that she could be an attractive 'commodity' in the marriage market. The story thus presents a meek, docile picture of a young girl who represents all those Indian women who are covered with thick, slack layers of convention, ignorance and reticence in literature as well as in real life and who have no autonomous frame of existence. But the real purpose of the story comes out in Bhandari’s critique of the conventional patriarchy and the treatment of its women.

The other story ‘*Ek Kamzor Ladki ki Kahani*’ (1971) almost depicts the same picture of a girl child in the patriarchal system. This story is written ten years after *Saza* but the condition of women hardly got changed during these years. They were allowed to get some education but never let to utilize it. In this story ‘*Roop*,’ since her childhood is exposed to the traditional pattern of society which presumably supposed that daughters will have to lead a sacrificing and submissive life. It is indoctrinated in the girl-child to play the role of a disciplined daughter, a meek and submissive wife on which restrictions are forced upon. *Roop*’s mother dies early and her father remarries. But her step mother, like the typical ones, proves to be very hostile towards her. She makes *Roop*’s father over-conscious of *Roop*’s attending youth and asks him to stop her

⁹ Translated as ‘*The Sentence*’ by Manish Chaudhary. Printed in *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*,(Vol 2)by Susie J Tharu and Ke Lalita. (eds) New York: The Feminist Press, 1993. (pg 352)

studies and let her learn household work which will ultimately going to count more in her life than studies. In a typical Indian set-up, daughter is considered a burden to be eased, a problem to be solved, a responsibility to be dispensed with and a person who has no right to any choice in life.

Roop, like Asha, has the understanding to differentiate between right and wrong at a very tender age but has neither courage nor voice to speak it out. She never wanted to leave her studies but couldn't oppose when her step-mother insisted on it. But even like Asha, Roop's father too was aware of the injustice done to his daughter and observes, "*Slowly, one after the other, all household responsibilities are sliding from the shoulders of Tara devi to Roop and she is also accepting all these silently without any oppose. Within few days she has been changed from student to house holder.*" (pg 435)¹⁰

Bhandari has provided with a convincing portrayal of middle class women, who are often educated but couldn't use their knowledge living in a society that attaches no value to a girl's education but her character and household work experience. Bhandari has tried to depict the rebel prevailing in the hearts of her women characters but surprisingly never provided them with a voice in her texts. Marginalization of woman as daughter, wife, mother, is clearly indicated in her stories. They are suppressed socially, psychologically, physically and spiritually. Her writings could be categorized as feminist but her feminism needed a different definition. Her efforts in developing Hindi story as a distinct genre are commendable, which encouraged many other women writers to write openly about what they see and feel. This gave rise to a bunch of revolutionary writers. Krishna Sobti is another such writer which I would like to discuss in detail

Treatment of Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Krishna Sobti:

In this section I have tried to examine two of her novellas, *Aye Ladki (1991)* and *Mitro Marjani (1976)* in order to trace Sobti's treatment of the most serious issues of woman's life. *Aye Ladki*, which is believed to be written after Sobti's mother's death, represents the picture of two different types of Indian women living in the urban modern society. It is the story of a mother, who lived her life in a traditional society and her daughter, who wants to live her life

¹⁰ Translated as 'Story of a Subordinate Girl' by Manish Chaudhary. Printed in *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, (Vol 3)by Susie J Tharu and Ke Lalita. (eds) New York: The Feminist Press, 1993. (pg 435)

independently, away from the influence of patriarchy. But all her dreams got shattered when she is made to realize that she is a 'girl' and has no identity of her own¹¹. Towards the end the mother 'Ammu', after calculating the happy moments of her life and finding that those moments were never her own and throughout her life she celebrated her husband's or son's happiness, she instructs her daughter not to live the same subordinate life as her. Instead asks her never to surrender to the patriarchal standards of the society but to follow her instincts.

Taking the forms of dialogue, the book opens inside a sick room and closely explores the relationship of a dying woman and her daughter. The mother often thrashes the daughter, who's independent and single, with pointed references to her barrenness. The mother, having brought up to care the needs of the 'brothers' in the family and after marriage devoted her life to her husband whom she loved dearly, stood by the conventional rules of society. She now questions all the restrictions under which she's lived and voices her regret at having sacrificed her youthful ambitions to fit into her husband's family. She comments, "When the journey's nearing its end, god knows what different things knock at the heart. The many pleasures make one look back, while the soul pushes towards the infinite. And back again."¹² It got translated as *Listen Girl* by a Dogri scholar Shivanath in 2003. The novella whether in Hindi or English, was a classic for several reasons especially for its portrayal of two absolutely different kinds of women living in the same household. This may also be considered as the difference of generation or time but then it's also important to note that Ammu was bought up under the strict control of her father and brothers whereas the daughter was bought up by a widow mother. This liberal environment at home and equally unfavorable outside could also be responsible in framing the daughter's thinking and her being so rebellious unlike her mother.

The other novella *Mitro Marjani* represents another kind of unconventional image of woman by Solti who is a young newly married woman, Mitro. Solti depicts her to be very bold when it comes to the question of physical satisfaction in a marriage. Mitro is not satisfied with her

¹¹ Ammu, the mother character in Krishna Solti's *Aye Ladki* is the only girl child in the family but still she has to sacrifice all her leisure to her brother's caring. Her education was stopped because her brother's education was more important according to the parents. She was married off at an early age despite her protest. Even in her in-laws house she led a subordinate life. She had no identity of her own; she could never take any important decision even if it's about her own life. In India girls are not born as girls but are made by the conditioning on the society. The mother did not want her daughter to be like her so she warns her of all the hindrances that will stop her from becoming what she desire for.

¹² Shivnath. *Listen Girl !*. New Delhi: Katha, 2003.

married life as her husband was more interested in making money than his wife and consequently Mitro started seeking that sexual pleasure outside her marriage. Her courage is apparent not only in the audacity with which she taunts a closed society, but also in her ability to change her own attitude when she feels it necessary. Or perhaps it is the basic honesty of her nature that allows her to face herself and all she has believed in as unflinchingly as she faces her husband's violent wrath and mother-in-law's awed remonstrations.

If Mitro is the overtly strong woman character, the others are no less so. There is Dhanvanti, capable of standing by her daughter-in-law in opposition to her son if she feels he has wronged his wife. There is the elder daughter-in-law Suhagvanti, with intelligence enough to understand both Mitro and her mother-in-law and compassion enough not to set them against each other though privy to their thoughts. And there is the youngest daughter in law Phoolavanti, well versed in the art of maneuvering to her preferred destination within the straits of male dominance using deception. In this novel we can either love or hate but not be indifferent to, as a brazen and unapologetic Mitro explores her sexuality within the confines of a traditional joint family in a language which was shocking in its frankness. It was with Mitro's language and her willingness to engage with the issue of desire rather than her actual choices that Sobti raised the bar on how far a woman writer could go to explore her truth. However that may be, the novel is not concerned with psychological debates. It races merrily to its somewhat surprising conclusion, telling the story in familiar, endearing images. Through glimpses of Gurudas' life with his wife Dhanvanti and of their sons with their wives, we see the different faces of a traditional Indian household. These are pictures we can find today too, without seeking in overly remote areas.

Krishna Sobti is a writer who provides voice to the marginal. She is a bold writer whose novels and stories speak about the most unspoken issues of women life. The depiction of sexuality is no more a prohibited issue in her novels. Her characters are independent of all the restraints of orthodoxy, conventions, and morality. Krishna Sobti's style and idiom impart an authentic touch to whatever theme and situation she portrays. The essence of her creativity lies in her honesty and eagerness to reach the truth and to look into things, rather than at them. Within her eclectic oeuvre, she has innovated with literary forms and dramatic characters, framed within a broadly humanistic vision. It would not be wrong to say that with the passage of time women writers in Hindi have carved out their own spaces to deal with issues such as marriage, divorce, sexuality and women's education. Krishna Sobti has challenged the power structure that assigns women a

subordinate position. Characters like Mitro and Ammu (Mother in *Aye Ladki*) are the master piece of Sobti's fiction. They are neither the stereotype of Indian traditional women nor the revolutionary figures in the real sense but they are women with bones and flesh are thus are not independent of bodily desires and pleasures. The texts written by Krishna Sobti openly discussed about all such issues which women actually hesitates to talk about. Thus her writings introduce these issues with new emphases and new orientations.

The last writer I have chosen to work on belong to the late 20th century and is least talked about. It is not because she is as important a writer as Bhandari and Sobti but because her stories discuss the society and culture of a particular part of the country. Her stories too deal with the urban life and its complexities placing women in the middle. I could like to title it as:

Portrayal of Women in the Prose of Shivani: Aspirations and Realities:

Shivani is the pseudonym of Gauri Pant (b. 1923-2003) who is believed to be the most prominent of the modern Hindi writers¹³. She is also considered to be the most influential feminist voices in India. I have chosen to explain two of her early works, *Laal Haveli* (1944) and *Chaudah Phere* (1972), which explore her feministic zeal in the times when women were either not allowed to speak or left unheard. Shivani's upbringing could be one of the reasons of her revolutionary writings. Being educated at Santiniketan, the Idyllic ashramlike school and university established by Rabindranath Tagore in 1913, her works carry an influence of the teachings of Tagore and Gandhi. Her fiction is suffused with small events, little gestures, and nondescript people. In support of my argument I would like to quote from *Twentieth Century Women Writer* by Sasie J Tharu and Ke Lalit, "*Shivani's fiction proclaims a quite humanism. Characters who might seem pale and uninteresting in real life- an undistinguished, very orthodox Brahmin priest in a village up in the foothill of Himalayas, his traditional wife, the village idiot, the widowed mother- take on a human glow and their lives an unexpected resonance.*" All this make her feminism very humanistic though in her fiction there are few contradictions and problems that cannot be transcended with little sympathy.

¹³Some critics regarded Gauri pant as first modern writer for various reasons. First because she wrote in the Age which is regarded as modern period in Hindi literature and second is the density with which she revolted against the society of her times and last but not the least, because she could depict her women characters as very unconventional and critical of the society they live in.

Her women were mostly upper-caste, living in traditional Kumaoun families, fighting oppression in a gentle and non-threatening way, expressing solidarity with similar oppression among lower caste women but her too much focus on depicting the beauty of women make the literary critics dismissive towards her writings and categorizing them under romantic writings. *Chaudah Phere* is one of Shivani's most popular novellas which depict the unconventionality of modern women in India in the 20th century.¹⁴ The title of the novel suggests a Hindu ritual of taking seven rounds of the sacred fire at the time of marriage. Usually one takes seven rounds whereas the novel is titled as "Chaudah Phere" means fourteen rounds of the fire. Shivani's use of such a title could either be related to the two marriages of 'Ahalya', the protagonist or to critique and question the sacredness of the whole institution of Hindu marriage. Ahalya is a rich businessman's daughter. Her parents got married at an early age without any mutual understanding which Ahalya feels is the reason of the failure of their marriage. Her father was never able to respect her mother because she was not educated and modern. Ahalya's childhood was spent amidst her parents quarrels, which always made her think why people just not leave each other alone when they can't survive together, to which her mother always replied, "*I am married to your father and he has all the authority to treat me the way he likes, he is my God. In this society we are trained for such a life, which we can just regret but never change.*"¹⁵ (p 34). By the time Ahalya grows up she develops a kind of dislike for arrange or forced marriages. In fact she could never believe in the fragile concept of marriage until she meets Raju and falls in love with him but he ultimately rejects her. Basically the plot like most of Shivani's novels explores the complicatedness of man-woman relationship in the light of the plight of women. Shivani has populated the canvas of her story with so many women characters but they are basically of two types, one who accepts everything that comes to them unquestioningly like Ahalya's mother, her Taai ji and her cousin Basanti and those who always fights back, not only for the injustice done to themselves but also to others, like Ahalya, her student Lalita. The novel also depicts the plight of women in brothels who are forcibly pushed in such a heinous profession. Thus the novel covers a wide range of characters with different backgrounds but the

¹⁴ With modern women I do not just mean the 20th century Indian women but women who are educated and are aware of all their rights, who hold the courage to fight for their rights and dare to do what has not been done by women since ages. Thus Shivani's fiction is rich with powerful women characters.

¹⁵ Translation from the original text in Hindi. *Chaudah Phere*, New Dehi: Rawat Publication, 1972. (p 34) (Translated by me)

common thing among them is their urge to come out of the forced patriarchy and lead an independent life.

The other novella, *Laal Haveli*, compliments the above discussed argument. Here Shivani, talks about the psychological dilemma of Ruksana, a Muslim woman, who is a Hindu by Birth but has to convert during the riots at the time of partition in order to save her honor and life. The story depicts Ruksana's internal trauma and her urge for identity. This happens when after a few years of her marriage with Rahman Ali she by chance goes back to the village where she first got married to Mohan at the age of sixteen and whom she loved dearly. When her present confronts with her past, she could not control herself from going back to Mohan but is stopped by all the conventions of right and wrong, moral and immoral. Ruksana has a daughter who wants to be a Doctor. She dares to dream so being a Muslim, where women's status is believed to be the worst. But the novel does focus much on the condition of Ruksana in any of the particular religions either Hindu or Muslim but on the duality of her character. This may be because earlier when she was a Hindu, she got married in a very well to do family, who poses a big Haveli and later also when she got converted, she re-marries Rahman Ali, a rich businessman. Thus Ruksana is treated well in both the families by her in-laws and husbands; the only problematic thing in the story is her struggle to deal with these dual identities. She wanted to be what she was but her responsibilities towards her second husband Rahman Ali and her daughter never let her listen to her heart and finally she decides to forget her old live and husband forever. Common thing about both the stories in the unnecessary emphasis on marriage by the society and the way Shivani breaks all the spirituality attached to this institution of marriage is worth praising. Both the protagonists got married twice but failed miserably to seek solace in either of their marriages.

The fictional microcosm of her novels and short stories usually delineates her native country Kumaoun in many-faceted variety of culture, tradition and lore. She is often strongly critical of society but in the end she supports it and her involvement in both the failure and achievements of her heroes and heroines, villains and vamps that make her writing some of the most broadly based pieces in the fictional game of her time. Here is a vision of a world tempered with realism. She makes her readers look at the world which is real and recognized tradition not merely as given but as a volatile product of innumerable choices, decisions and adjustments. Her rebellious young women question the validity of a reductive view of life. India after independence is a country where a tradition bound, caste based society has undergone massive upheaval, large families have broken up both in the urban and the rural areas. All this occurs again and again in

her novels. A predominant theme in her latest novels and short stories is the passing away of a traditional way of life and the transition of a whole middle class society, basically rural ethos to a halting urban life.

Talking about the place of Hindi women writers and their fiction I would like to quote Sobti's words in one of her interviews with Meenakshi Kumar, where she is aware of the tough competition by the Indian writers in English but she feels that the writers writing in Hindi or other vernaculars (The Bhasha writers) are closer to the soil of India. She Says, "The reality of Bhasha writers comes from small towns and villages. Today, they are narrating the nation more realistically, accurately and with so much more density. They are still closer to democracy than those writing in English. Bhasha writers are connected with the collective consciousness of the country. Their writing is so much more vibrant. But that doesn't mean that the writing in English is bad. A lot of it is good but not so connected." Hindi women writers have played a very important role in providing women with a new position in Hindi literature. Their attempts to change the stereotype image of women have succeeded to a great extent but still they are not given much credit for it. Here I would like to quote Indu Prakash Pandey's observation of the women characters in Indian fiction, "*The tone of Hindi Feminist writers is melancholic, not even really tragic as there is no heroic attempt to do something to change their circumstances in their favour. Hardly any female character shows some courage to put her foot down and take a decision and act to fulfill her wish. Even if the female characters have shown some courage...their rebellion ends up in tearful submission. Whatever slight fire seems to burn in the beginning gets extinguished by their own tears towards the end of the story.*" (p 15)¹⁶

To conclude the discussion I would say that I do not completely agree with Indu Prakash Pandey's observation because Hindi feminist writers do not completely failed to empower women in their fiction on the other hand they have succeed to a great extend. They have initiated a kind of writing which is partly democratic writing, which is by women but not only for women. Their writing motives were to convey their thoughts and revolutionary ideas to the society which also include men. They felt that, it's not only the women who needs to change for bringing progress in the society but its man who need to change his attitude towards woman and should stop looking at her as an object of exploitation and entertainment. Hindi Critics of the 20th

¹⁶ Pandey, Indu Prakash. Romantic Feminism in Hindi novels written by Women. New Delhi: House of Letters, 1989.

century have appreciated their efforts for speaking their hearts out and also for paving way to a different kind of revolutionary feminist literature which definitely is the need of the hour.

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