

Chapter I

Introduction

Indian English Literature has grown from a struggling eaglet to a full-grown eagle soaring into the skies of world literature. It reflects the culture, thought process, mythology, ideals, and way of living that is exclusive to Indian society. It paints the true colours of the Indian way of living and provides the details of history and philosophy with a realistic portrayal of human thoughts and experiences. Indian English literature has been documentaries that present the reality of changing social and political conditions focussing on the issues like personal struggles, socio-economic challenges, gender disparity, communal diversity, and cultural fragmentation. The writers expose the fallacies of social indifferences that exist in India which propagate gender-based inequalities and relegate the women populace to domestic responsibilities.

The literary endeavours of the women writers in Indian English literature are major milestones to record the injustices imposed on women. The writings of women raise voices against the social immoralities to ameliorate the status and position of women. The women writers crusade against the age-old established social systems to give a new definition and dimension to the liberation and empowerment of women. Their writings are more assertive and articulate the essence of female individual consciousness. Meena Shirwadkar in the book, *Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel* (1979) observes that:

As women received education, they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of

compatibility with their tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male-dominated ideas of morality, and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society – all come up in a welter of projection. (20)

The writings of women are an open window to reconstruct the suppressed emotions and psychological underpinnings of women. It provides an insight into the diverse roles and characteristics attributed to women in the Indian culture.

Women are considered to be the torch-bearers of life and they are presented as ‘Shakthi’, the Goddess in the Indian mythology. *The Upanishads* emphasise that men and women are equal participants in social, political, and economic spheres. Romesh Chunder Dutt in the book, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India: Vedic And Epic Ages* (1889) writes that, “Women were honored in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe. They were considered the intellectual companions of their Husbands... affectionate helpers in the journey of life, and... inseparable partners in their religious duties” (67). Women in Indian myths and epics are presented as *Sahadhamini* (equal partners), who support the pursuits of their husbands, share responsibilities, and actively participate in decision-making. The two great Indian classics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* enshrine imperishable ideals of womanhood through the lives of the heroic princesses, Sita, the wife of Rama, and Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, who are embodiments of ideal wives and mothers, but their virtuosity is tested.

Sita undertakes *Agnipariksha* to prove her chastity and mollify the subjects of Ayodhya after having spent her detention under Ravana. She eventually comes out of the fire trail, unblemished, venerating her feminine integrity, and upkeeps the reputation of

her husband and the Kingdom of Ayodhya. Draupadi is entangled to accept a polyandrous marriage that was bestowed on her. She manages the delicate marital relationship harmoniously and proves to be the acme of chastity. She confronts her values, sentiments, and emotions to be the perfect wife of Pandavas, who stake her life and the Kingdom of Hastinapur in the game of dice, but she saves her five husbands and the empire from disgrace and impending slavery. The lives of Sita and Draupadi depict the hardships of women's lives irrespective of their social status. Despite their mortifications, both the queens, Sita and Draupadi, stoically maintain their courage and dignity, unveiling remarkable resilience and strength of womanhood in the face of adversity. Their consistent efforts and determination have helped them emerge as bold, iconic women, who are respected for their valour and worshipped for their feminine traits even today.

Indian women have been highly revered for their fulfilment of responsibilities in both, domestic and societal roles, but gradually their reputation starts to lose its significance with the passage of time due to the patrilineal culture. A woman persistently occupies an inferior position when compared to a man and is subjected to deprivation as being the 'persons out of history' due to the autocratic and domineering tendency of the society. The leading sociologists, Ramanaiyah and Usha Kiran, in the article "Women Empowerment – Issues and Concerns" state that, "Women who at one hand are given an adorable status by worshipping them as Goddesses... are also subjected to atrocities of various forms on the other hand. This ironically represents... [the] ambiguity in human nature" (21). Social evils against women like female foeticide, female infanticide, gender discrimination, child marriage, and dowry have been rampant in Indian society.

Female foeticide and female infanticide are extreme manifestations of violence against women. The biased practices have prevailed in Indian society because of the preference given to male children. The birth of a male child is looked upon as a feather in the cap with great pride and joy; he is considered to be an asset and a saviour of the family and believed to carry forward the family fortune to future generations. Giving birth to a girl child is seen as watering the neighbour's plants as she is considered to be a liability, destined to get married and move to a different family, discontinuing the generational hierarchy. The gender-selectiveness in childbirth gives rise to gender discrimination in society that is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. The discriminatory values, attitudes, and norms are passed on from the older generation to the contemporary society.

Child marriage is an immoral practice from ancient times where marriage is arranged for girl children before the attainment of puberty. Child brides are not exempted from the hardships of domestic violence and abuse. They suffer from early pregnancy which results in health complications leading to physical and psychological distress. The unexpected demise of the husbands leads to early widowhood where child widows are deprived of the pleasures of childhood and forced to endure an austere life. Child marriage limits the personal and intellectual growth of the female gender in the contemporary Indian society. The dowry system, too, is a practice of medieval times where gifts in cash, jewels, or property are offered to the groom's family as bride price. It is a custom that drives a woman to the extent of committing suicide when her family fails to meet the expectations of the groom's family. Legal laws like the Female Infanticide Prevention Act (1870), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), and Dowry Prohibition

Act (1961) are framed to prevent and prohibit the practices of female infanticide, child marriage, and dowry, respectively.

Indian women writings shed light on the social problems that disintegrate the lives of women to create awareness and formulate resolutions that contribute to societal change. R. K. Dhawan in the book, *Indian Women Novelists* (1991) says:

One of the reasons that women have, in such large number, taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their world. It has allowed them to set the condition of existence, free from the direct interference of men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading women's writing because it allows them a 'safe place' from which they can explore a wide range of experience of the world, from which they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existences. That's why women's writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women's lives. (11)

Women novelists like Toru Dutt, Krupabai Sathianadhan, Swarna Kumari Debi, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, and Cornelia Sorabji, through their writings, have depicted the problems of being a woman in the Indian society. They try to rescue women from the grip of harmful social discrepancies and recognise their efforts to gain self-identity.

Toru Dutt's novel, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878), deals with the problems of dowry which are deeply rooted in the customs and culture of the Indian society. The novelist highlights the plight of girl children, who are suppressed in the institution of marriage when parents choose to settle their daughters in marriage at a

young age to unload the burden of parental responsibilities. Krupabai Saththianadhan in the novels *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Child-Wife* (1894) and *Saguna – A Study of Native Christian Life* (1895) reveals her ultimate urge to annihilate the social evils like child marriage, sati, and dowry deaths which extirpate the lives of girl children and young women. Swarna Kumari Debi in her novels, *Deepnirban* (1876), *Chinnamukul* (1879), and *Phuler-Mala* (1910), has brought out the significance of reformation in society to enrich the status and lifestyle conditions of widows, orphans, and destitute women in India.

Pandita Ramabai Saraswati in the book, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) lays the foundation for women's liberation movement in India. Through her writings, she tries to reform the principles of orthodox Indian marriages and the marital obligations of Indian women. Swarna Kumari Ghosal in the works, *The Fatal Garland* (1910), *An Indian Love Story* (1910), and *The Unfinished Song* (1913), reflect the middle-class Indian milieu and emphasise the importance of female education in India. Cornelia Sorabji in the novels, *Love and Life Behind Purdah* (1901), *Sun-Babies: A Study in the Child Life of India* (1904), and *The Purdhnashin* (1917) represent the issues of caste and class conflicts to eradicate the marginalisation of women at social, political, and economic levels.

Women not only play an important role at home, but they also play a significant role in the society that they live in. The participation of women outside their homes is an important aspect of the socio-political and economic domains of the country. Indian women of today are exposed to a new set of values, where they try to balance their traditional and modern roles. The women writers, through their elegant writing, have

tried their best to liberate women from the authoritarian control of male domination. Clara Nubile in the book, *The Danger of Gender: Caste, Class, and Gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writings* (2003) observes that, "In modern India, the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of patriarchal system" (271).

Patriarchy is the key word to feminism upon which familial traditions and societal dictates are constructed to govern the lives of women, who are compelled to accept a life of subjugation and their life choices are predetermined by men in the family and society. Sylvia Walby in the book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), defines the term patriarchy as, "...a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (20). The postulates of feminism critique the notion that man is the subject, essential, transcendent, and absolute while a woman is an object, inessential, mutilated, and incomplete in all walks of life. Equality among gender is nullified due to patriarchal inheritance while the oppressive treatment meted out to women indicate that they are handicapped, both in the family and society.

Feminism attempts to study and solve gender-based problems and questions the preconceived assumptions about the multiple roles of men and women in society. It insinuates that women should have equal rights and opportunities like men in all aspects of their lives to choose the path of independence. The global view of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in terms of gender and social rights.

Feminism traces the overall development of women through three formative stages: childhood, youth, and adulthood. The 'Big Three' schools of feminist thought

namely, Liberal/Reformist or Mainstream feminism, Radical feminism, and Socialist/Marxist feminism attempt to draw lines between biological, social, and culturally determined behaviours to emancipate women from their narrowed gender roles. The focus of the schools of feminism is to establish legal protection for women and demand compassion, respect, and understanding from their male counterparts. It seeks to abolish patriarchy and challenges unjust social norms and institutions to eliminate the social domination of women by arguing that equality can be achieved through social reforms.

Liberal feminism focuses on achieving gender equality through legal and political reforms that guarantee rights and freedom to women. It emphasises the importance of individual choice and autonomy for women articulating the significance of equal opportunities in education, employment, and political participation. The pioneers of liberal feminism – Maria Stewart, Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, Celoria Steinnem, and Molly Yard, advocate for gender equality and women’s rights within the framework of democratic principles and social justice. The goal of liberal feminism is to end the patriarchal violence that disempower the capabilities of women. It proliferates that progress of the entire human civilisation is retarded due to reservation of women in a state of ignorance. It works to eliminate the barriers that prevent women from having the same opportunities as that of men in all levels of society.

Radical Feminism views the oppression of women as a systemic issue that can only be resolved through radical, social, and political change. It advocates for women-centered spaces to strengthen solidarity among women to challenge and dismantle the power structures that perpetuate inequality. The pioneers of radical feminism – Mary

Daly, Andrea Dworking, Kate Millet, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, and Juliet Mitchel, believe that male dominance and female subordination are embedded in institutions, laws, and cultural norms. The objective of radical feminism is to eliminate the preordained gender roles that limit personal freedom, hinder genuine self-expression, and contribute to systemic gender imbalances. It not only demands legal and policy changes, but also challenges the deeply ingrained cultural norms that marginalise women in the patriarchal society.

Marxist feminism draws on Marxist theory to understand the link between gender inequality and economic exploitation. It signifies the need for a socialist revolution to address the root causes of female oppression. The pioneers of Marxist feminist school – Friedrich Engels, Margaret Benston, Peggy Morton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Angela Davis, view capitalism as a system that benefits the ruling class (patriarchal authority) at the expense of women and other marginalised groups based on race, culture, and ethnicity. The aim of Marxist feminism is to eradicate capitalism and patriarchy to empower women in a capitalist society.

The schools of feminism view the oppression of women to be the fundamental form of subjugation, one that cuts across boundaries of race, tradition, culture, and economic class. It provides an image of female freedom paving way for the possibility to transform the suppressed lives of women. The goal is to prove that women are not born ‘feminine’, but are shaped by a thousand external processes. At each stage of upbringing, a female is conditioned to accept dependence, passivity, submission, and negligence.

The emergence of feminist literary theory and women writings give voice to the anguish, aspirations, and assertions of women. Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*

(1949) comments that, "...our task is to discover how the nature of woman has been affected throughout the course of history; we are concerned to find out what humanity has made of the human female" (37). Jonathan Culler in the book, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2011) mentions that "...progressive literary theory focuses on the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women, seeking to create a method of analyzing literature written by women and to develop models of interpretation based on female experience..." (140).

The contemporary women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shobhaa De, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Githa Hariharan, and Manju Kapur attempt to strengthen the potentials and proficiencies of Indian women through education and economic independence. M.K. Naik in the book, *Twentieth Century Indian English Fiction* (2004) comments that "The 'new' women novelists naturally share most of the preoccupations of their male counterparts, though in spite of what fanatical feminists would claim, they do have 'a room of their own' in the fictional mansion, in terms of certain pressing concerns and attitude towards them" (210). The women writers create the female identity in the name of 'New Woman', who not only raise questions against the patriarchal system, but emerge to pave new paths to construct a world for themselves and cultivate a rational outlook to achieve autonomy.

The women writers emphasise that a woman has to redefine her status which is certainly not an easy venture. They project the significance of scientific and industrial developments, and educational and employment opportunities, which motivate the women community to annihilate the patriarchal hegemony and strive for their assertion. They represent the changing social realities to create a new era for the dynamic

participation of women in familial and public territories. The women writers create a realisation in the society that India cannot afford to stagnate its women population by means of neglecting them merely on the basis of gender. They long for a way of life wherein they can freely give voice to the innermost desires of Indian women, who are often silenced by societal norms and expectations.

The Indian women novelists present the issues such as domestic violence, marital problems, and workplace crimes to reform the status of women from their state of despondency and docility. The patriarchal periphery curbs the growth and development of the women protagonists, who wish to overcome the predicaments of female suffering in the familial and social environment. The women protagonists in the novels of women writers overcome their obstacles in the paternalistic culture using the defensive mechanism of being strong and defiant. The women writers, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai portray the competency of new women to be recognised as equal counterparts to men in the Indian society by dissociating themselves from the Indian patriarchal myths.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), in her novels, awakens the consciousness of Indian women, who struggle to establish their identity in the male-centric society. K. Madhavi Menon in the book, *Kamala Markandaya: A Critical Study of Her Novels, 1954-1982* (1997), writes that, “Deliberate fictional exploration of the feminist roles may not be present but in the presentation of the Indian women, Markandaya knowingly and unknowingly presents her problems attitudes and responses to social milieu” (231). The women characters of Kamala Markandaya, Rukumani and Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Premala and Mira in *Some Inner Fury* (1955), Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*

(1960), Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* (1966), Lalitha and Saroja in *Two Virgins* (1973), Mohini in *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) face difficulty in balancing their multiple roles in the family as a daughter, wife, and mother. They are subjected to binary pulls where they are torn between their personal desires and familial obligations to prove their proficiency and competence in the domestic arena. They become 'New Woman' when they express their thoughts and opinions to shape their destinies for a meaningful life.

The writings of Anita Desai (1937-present) focus on the feminine thinking and emotional reaction of women in their multifarious roles. The reflection of Anita Desai's life experiences is envisioned through her women protagonists, Maya of *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), Amla of *Voices in the City* (1965), Raka of *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Tara of *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Lila of *The Village by the Sea* (1982), Nur of *In Custody* (1984), and Uma of *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), to emphasise the need for a psychological exploration of women and interpret the understanding of the inner-self and the true meaning of existence. Mrinalini Solanki in the book, *Anita Desai's Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies* (1992), comments that,

As a consummate creative artist, Anita Desai shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings, she not only offers an expose of human life in its shocking shallowness or outward show, but also provides down deep, a philosophical probe or basis to sustain our life. She emerges neither as a downright pessimist nor an incorrigible optimist. All along, her earnest endeavour is to hold a mirror to life, and in the process, to unravel the mystery of human existence. (185)

The women characters of Anita Desai accept the mediocrity of futile existence, but they wish to find a resolution to evade their sense of dejection through physical and financial freedom. Anita Desai represents her women characters as ‘New Woman’ when they strengthen their artistic, creative, and intellectual talents to fulfil their personal dreams and desires.

The women protagonists in the novels of Shobhaa De (1948-present) ascertain the female power by confronting their male counterparts, who enjoy unquestioned supremacy through centuries. The women characters, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* (1989), Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* (1991), Mikki in *Sisters* (1992), Amrita Aggarwal in *Strange Obsession* (1992), Swati, Rashmi, Reema, Surekha, Aparna and Noor in *Snapshots* (1995), Nisha in *Sultry Days* (1994), Maya in *Second Thoughts* (1996), and Aasha in *Bollywood Nights* (2007), are ambitious, bold, and creative. They advocate for justice to break free from oppression and empower themselves. They are the ‘New Woman’, who are radical in thought to facilitate their self-expression and question the social hierarchy that defies women to compromise their indomitable spirit to be independent. Pratibha Gupta in the article, “A Social Semiotic Study of Narratives” observes that “De’s style depicts new women in a mood of revolt. It undermines the old mythologies of gender relationships by questioning and revising them. They are challenging the stereotypes, fairy tales, traditions, and histories that are prescribed plots of their lives and estimates their authority and power” (35).

Women writers question, challenge, criticise, and resist the external hegemonic system that controls the lives of women. The women protagonists of Nayantara Sahgal (1927-present), envision themselves to be the exponents, who impregnate the taboos and

beliefs that confine women in family bondage. The institution of marriage reduces the status of women to be mere puppets in the hands of their male counterparts and they suffer to be the victims of domestic violence. There is a need for a persuasive will to sustain the patriarchal impediments and discover the identity of women in their families. Neena Arora in the book, *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison* (1991), writes that,

The young women of today are becoming aware of the biased attitude of the society. They have started asserting their individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. Despite some achievements in educational, professional and legal fields, they have yet to go a long way for their acceptance as equal beings in the prejudiced society where discrimination is practiced against women right from birth. (41)

The women characters, Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Sonali of *Rich Like Us* (1985), Anna in *Plans for Departure* (1985), Bhusan Singh's mother in *Mistaken Identity* (1988), and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* (2000) suffer the torment of broken marriages and separation from the family.

Loneliness, suffering, and frustrations in marriage decipher the inner strength of the women protagonists, who strive to untangle themselves from the marital bond to attain liberty. The women protagonists of Nayantara Sahgal are depictions of 'New Woman', who yearn for personal fulfillment beyond their roles as wives and mothers to preserve their individual identities.

The novelist, Shashi Deshpande (1938-present), in her novels, focuses on the liberation of women from the melancholic and wretched conditions of marriage. The

female protagonists, Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), Indu in *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988), Urmila in *The Binding Vine* (1992), and Madhu in *Small Remedies* (2000) wish to maintain their sense of individuality, but the parameters of marriage are the major barriers that obstruct their path to success. The perception of Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists to achieve gender equality is to establish the man-woman relationship based on mutual understanding. The novelist encourages women to possess the courage to forbid the obstacles that entrap and confine them to the life of domesticity. Siddhartha Sharma in the book, *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study* (2005) writes that "They bring out the power of women, The deviousness of women, The helplessness of women, The courage of women... These women writers shatter the myth that women find fulfillment in marriage and portray an honest picture of women, who aspire, attempt and strive to be their true selves" (85). The 'New Woman' protagonists of Shashi Deshpande fulfil their personal aspirations as they overcome the complexities of changing societal norms, family dynamics, and domestic obligations.

The domestic subjugation and the evil designs of the oppressive Indian society against women are depicted by Arundhati Roy (1961-present). The novelist portrays the views on patriarchal limitations that Indian society casts on women under different circumstances. Riazul Hoque in the article, "Predicament of the Women in Arundhati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*', remarks that the novels of Arundhati Roy are "...the constant fight of the marginalized and subdued women in the society which is controlled by patriarchal mindset" (2). Arundhati Roy through the women characters, Ammu in *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), unfolds the web of psychological conflicts of women to overcome their desolations. Her

writings revolutionise the competence of ‘New Woman’, who are optimistic to venerate the rights of womanhood in the callous society.

The hurdles encountered by women to establish their status quo in society are outlined in the writings of Githa Hariharan (1954-present). A.G. Khan in the book, *Changing Faces of Women in Indian Writing in English* (1995), comments that the novels of Githa Hariharan are “...a Mahabharat of feminism in which women fight their wars and become victims to their own ambitions, humanity, arrogance and submission” (135). The women characters, Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), Mangala, Shahrzad and Dunyazad in *When Dreams Travels* (1998), Mala, Sara, and Yasmin in *Fugitive Histories* (2009) are dynamic women, who register their protest against the oppressive orthodox customs and try to give a new dimension to their empowerment in the patriarchal society. The novels of Gita Hariharan project the slow, but gradual change from the conventional attitude to modernism that is witnessed in the ‘New Woman’ of the twenty-first century.

Manju Kapur (1948-present) in her novels, features women protagonists, who question the conventional standards that degrade the eminence of women when their characteristic traits like sacrifice, purity, softness, excessive endurance, adaptability, silence, and self-effacement go unrecognised. The language and themes integrated into the novels of Manju Kapur reveal the meaningful correlations between the psychological condition and emotional reactions of her women characters. The women protagonists of Manju Kapur represent the intellectual ‘New Woman’, who constantly fight to build a world for themselves, gain economic, political, and social rights in the man-centric social orders, and carry forward their life with individual thinking and uniqueness. They are

conscious of their basic rights of equality and identity. Renu R. Dalela in the book, *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Critical Study* (2015) comments that, “Her [Manju Kapur] novels manifest women’s struggle for emancipation from economic, political, and social bondages. She has tried to evolve her own stream of the emergence of new women grounded in reality”. (50)

Manju Kapur strives to steer the empowerment of women with respect and dignity in the patriarchal socio-cultural structure. She believes in the opinion of Helene Cixous, who in the essay, “The Laugh of Medusa” pens that “...woman has never *her* turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that, writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (879). Manju Kapur incorporates the feminine experiences of her women protagonists in the novels to acclaim the virtuosity of women in the domestic and social terrain. In the interview with Saudamini Jain for the *Hindustan Times*, Manju Kapur asserts that “Well, I am...aware of feminist thinking. I have been deeply influenced by it...I don’t set out with a conscious feminist agenda, but in describing the relationship between men and women a feminist perspective is often inevitable – and this applies to books written well before the term was invented” (1). Manju Kapur underlines the feminine prospects to fight against the social taboos and the dreadful authority of male chauvinists to create new possibilities for female liberation.

Manju Kapur insists on the urgent need to institutionalise the freedom of women which would become more vivid if every individual start to realise the importance of their multifaceted roles in the family and society. She endeavours to find a possible

avenue for women to emancipate themselves from the deeply entrenched gender stereotypes. She captures the spirit of Indian civilisation and its traditional values in her works. The novels of Manju Kapur are set in the Indian patriarchal norms, where issues of women revolve around personal desires, family responsibilities, and social expectations. She lends a forceful voice to the women folk through her protagonists, who try to break the silence of suffering. Her women protagonists refuse to be stifled under oppressive restrictions and demand the rightful place, recognition, and respect to make their existence meaningful. They are caught between the dichotomy of tradition and modernity in their efforts to attain liberation in the secular Indian culture. The novels, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011), and *Brothers* (2016) deal with varied subjects like parenting, generation gap, struggle for survival, cultural displacement due to immigration, marital obligations, and workplace crimes. Apart from novels, her short stories, *Chocolate* (2001) and *The Necklace* (2005) give an insight into the problems of women in their parental and marital homes, the exploitative nature of family, cultural conditioning, and patriarchal socialisation.

The maiden novel, *Difficult Daughters*, reveals the saga of the tales of three generations of educated women from a middle-class Indian Arya Samaj family – Kasthuri, her daughter, Virmati, and granddaughter, Ida. Kasturi, an educated mother, gets married at an early age, bears the burden of being constantly pregnant and relies on her eldest daughter, Virmati to foster her children. The validation of the lives of women that comes from marriage, is a lesson learned by Kasturi and imparts the same to her

daughter, Virmati, who performs well in her academic endeavours and postpones her marriage to lead an individualistic life.

The vision of Virmati to pursue education is not entertained by her mother, who fears that society would criticise the dreams of her daughter. Virmati exposes her defiant nature to seek freedom of choice against the conventions of morality and becomes a difficult daughter when she stands against her family to chase her dreams to procure a career. Her relationship with her parents is disrupted when she reveals her decision to marry a married man, which is unacceptable and impermissible in the Indian social context. Kasturi represents the voiceless Indian women, who wish to protect the long-standing traditions while the character, Virmati represents the non-conformist modern Indian woman, who is courageous to oppose the conventional injustices.

Ida reconstitutes the life of her mother, Virmati and questions the existing traditional roles preordained for women. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the ways and follies of Virmati's life, which demeans the self-actualisation of women. She turns out to be another difficult daughter when she has no qualms to question the male-dictated injustices against women in the family and opposes the patrilineal social customs. The novel is not only about difficult daughters, but also about parents, who find it difficult to diverge from the conservative norms of society. Manju Kapur portrays the plight of Virmati and Ida, who are criticised for questioning the basic values of society and the consequences they face when they learn to think for themselves.

Astha, the protagonist of the novel, *A Married Woman*, learns to empathise with her aspirations to keep her identity intact. She is entrapped in the strict nurturance of her parents, who acquaint their daughter with the Indian tradition and culture right from her

childhood. She is frustrated of the parental dictates to abide by tradition and the persuasion to get married. She marries Hemant, a businessman and the marital life turns incompatible when her status is deciphered to be an unpaid servant in the marital family. Astha carries forward the charade of married life for the sake of her children, but feels incomplete as an individual when her ideas, opinions, and life choices are perpetually belittled by her husband. Astha faces social ostracism and criticism to achieve individuality, emotional liberation, and financial freedom. Her life of repression and anguish reclaims solace when she starts to focus on her passion to become an artist.

The endeavours of women to liberate themselves from the oppressive measures of patriarchy in compliance with society and the household in a joint family are the central focus of the novel, *Home*. 'Home' is a place that provides shelter and security, but Nisha, the protagonist, feels insecure at home and endures the meanness of life due to the prejudiced treatment of her family. She has to unquestioningly obey the stereotypical conventions in the ethos of the joint family. She attempts to achieve equality with that of the male heirs to become an entrepreneur and stands against the constant restrictions and opposition from her family members, who consider girl children to be the domestic assistants to their mothers.

Nisha vehemently stands against the antithetical expectations of her family to unveil her identity as a businesswoman, but her marriage is the primary concern of her parents, Sona and Yashpal. Horoscope plays a major role in Indian marriages and Nisha is predicted to be a '*Manglik*'. The fear and anxiety over the astrological conditions create disturbances in the marriage of Nisha and it compels her to marry a widower. She is caged in the confinements of matrimony and wishes to spread her horizon beyond the

traditional limits of the family and household. Determined to be a woman of financial independence, Nisha takes up the road to self-reliance to establish her identity. She advocates the importance of economic freedom for women and emphasises that they should be strong-willed in achieving the right to equality.

The efforts of women to gain rights for survival in the patriarchal world, unravels the life of a young, educated, and attractive woman, Nina, the protagonist of the novel, *The Immigrant*. The life of Nina is transformed through the efforts of her widowed mother, Shanti, who gets her daughter married to a wealthy groom from Canada. Nina experiences cultural displacement after marriage which demands nonchalant acceptance of the Western land as her home away from home.

Nina finds it difficult to get accustomed to the Western culture, but is keen to engrave a niche for herself in the foreign land without forfeiting the tradition and culture of her native land. She swings like a pendulum to balance between the Indian and the foreign culture. She feels lonely, alienated, and frustrated in the Western ethos, but her husband, Ananda helps her to overcome the trauma of acculturation. The marital life of Nina is soon addled with fear and insecurity when she discovers the truth about her infertility and the clandestine affair of her husband. She is affected psychologically, but manages to mend her emotional tyranny through education, empowering her to lead a self-contained life. She comes out of the conjugal restrictions to create a room of her own and embrace the life of freedom.

Shagun and Ishita, the two protagonists of the novel *Custody*, are female representations of independent thought and action. Manju Kapur brilliantly narrates the sorrows and exuberance of her protagonists, who do not wish to submit themselves to the

rigid customs of the patriarchal society. She uses the institution of marriage to disclose the infidelity of Shagun and the infertility of Ishita. Shagun is bold enough to choose an epicurean lifestyle, fascinated by modernity to create her own space, but she is torn between her sense of responsibility and the desire to attain independent identity. The inclination toward profession affects the marital life of Shagun and she struggles to define her multiple roles in the family. The cruel and rude domestic dispute between Shagun and her husband, Raman results in the dissolution of their marriage, creating an adverse effect on the innocent lives of their children, Arjun and Roohi. Shagun wishes to transcend her dejected mindset and rediscover her identity as a media artist to attain financial independence after spousal separation.

Ishita, mortified by her infertility, endures an unfortunate destiny as her husband Suryakanta, stigmatises her to be barren and her marital life ends in divorce. She conceals her trauma of marital estrangement and barrenness when she marries Raman and fulfills her delight of motherhood by fostering his daughter, Roohi, respectively. She also achieves economic independence by procuring a job as a teacher and a counsellor. The institution of marriage devastates the life of Shagun when she wishes to pursue a profession to attain personal growth and self-fulfillment while Ishita becomes a victim of unharmonious circumstances in the patriarchal society. Shagun and Ishita renew their life journey with an optimistic approach as they break the conventional perceptions and the dogmas of the patriarchal society.

The discordance of marital life is experienced by Tapti Gaina, the protagonist of the novel, *Brothers*. The parents of Tapti foster their daughter according to the doctrines of the patriarchal society to inculcate the values of womanhood right from childhood. She

is a well-educated woman with an unwavering ambition to fulfil her aspirations to be independent, but she is imprisoned in the discourse of matrimony. Tapti, who gets married to Mangal Singh from the Gaina family, feels unworthy and dejected of her marital bond, which compartmentalises her identity to be a child-bearing machine.

Tapti, the mother of two daughters, objects to the idea of giving birth to a male heir to carry forward the Gaina lineage. She has continuous rifts with her husband when she stands firm against the suggestion of another pregnancy. She feels relegated to the socio-cultural belief that women are esteemed only when they give birth to a male child. Manju Kapur presents the idea that the defining role of a woman in giving birth, can be traced to a complicated web of reasons – the deeply rooted traditional cultural norms, societal expectations, and the tight grip of gender inequalities. The novel is an effective portrayal of a woman's anguish to invigorate her psyche from suppression to revelation.

The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina are personifications of 'New Woman', who exercise control over their lives personally, socially, and economically. They resist the irrational customs and orthodox concepts, to emancipate themselves from patriarchal control. They struggle to eradicate the unequal distribution of power between man-woman and the burden of inhibitions that are imposed on women for ages by parents, family, and society. The women protagonists, who claim themselves to be the major stakeholders of the society, break their silence by questioning the patriarchal customs that suppress their identity. Meenakshi Thapan in the article "Images of the body and sexuality in women's narratives on oppression in the home" comments that "Both within and outside the family, women engage in the twin process of compliance and resistance, submission and rebellion, silence and speech, to

assert their identities as women in what they clearly and assertively recognise as oppressive contexts and situation” (170). According to Manju Kapur, the perception of women’s moralities and modalities are deeply stretched within the confines of socio-cultural values, economic spaces, and paradigms of the country.

Manju Kapur has enriched and contributed her novels, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody*, and *Brothers* with a revolutionary outlook to do away with historical injustices like gender bias, prejudiced parental treatment of sons and daughters, oppression, domestic violence, and inequality in the socio-economic sectors. The fictional narratives of Manju Kapur are the expression of the educated female protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina, who wish to liberate their conscience to be free from the clichéd traditional norms and the torments of gender bias. The novels of Manju Kapur are therefore the story of women, who struggle for freedom, their search for alternative planes of existence to the one that is solely rooted in domesticity and strive to establish their identity by constant critique, resistance, and subversion of the patriarchal tradition.

Manju Kapur envisions feminism to unfetter the female folk from stale social customs and traditions. Her writings tend to unravel the fact that feminism is the consequence of culture and society, which are shaped and governed by men to suit their requirements and interests, regardless of women’s basic needs and happiness. Feminism, as exhibited in the novels of Manju Kapur, is never against the sanctified conventional traditions and customs, but against the patriarchal system, its idealisation, and monopolisation that work together against man-woman relationship by creating a wide gap between them. Her feminist literary writings are meant to improve the man-woman

relationship in the family and society which should be based on mutual cooperation and understanding. She interrogates the patriarchal moralities, which deprive women of their basic human rights. She highlights that it is not women alone, but the entire human race that would suffer due to the oppression of women. She supports women's quest for self-revelation, self-respect, self-analysis, and self-discovery to lead an unconstrained life.

Manju Kapur tries to put an end to the perpetual difficulties of women and paves the way for rigorous scrutiny to improve the status and position of Indian women. She exhibits a modernistic aura in expressing her women characters as empowered and self-assertive individuals. She represents that the Indian civilised society is still in the surpassing phase to attain equality with respect to gender, class, and caste. She looks forward to a futuristic society where men and women are to be considered equals. The feministic ideals of Manju Kapur demand social rectification pertaining to the issues of access to education, workplace inequity, and political rights of women.

Periodical transformation is observed in the characteristics of the women protagonists in the novels of Manju Kapur to mark their footprints in the realm of patriarchy. Elaine Showalter in the book, *A Literature Of Their Own* (1977) classifies three phases of women's transition – "...the feminine phase of internalization, the feminist phase of revolt, and the female phase of self-discovery" which are crucial in the evolution of feminist consciousness to acknowledge the authenticity of individualism (13). The women protagonists wish to revolutionise the patriarchal strategies that suppress the evolution of women from subordination to establishment of their individuality. Manju Kapur seems to voice for a better living environment where every individual should enjoy equal respect in the society. She does not verbalise any

moral judgment, but addresses the social concerns that need attention and rationality. She desires to spread awareness about women's access to employment and economic rights.

The portrayal of women in the fictional works of Manju Kapur has been explored by many researchers and critics. The study of 'New Woman' represented in the novels of Manju Kapur, is a great reservoir to extend intensive research activities. The pursuit of the women protagonists to achieve their self-identity as a 'New Woman' of Indian culture is analysed in the thesis of Minaben Jesangbhai Chaudhri titled "Novels of Manju Kapur a Study in Feministic Approach" (2014) in which the researcher discusses the social, political, and psychological perspectives that have an impact on the status of women in the patriarchal society. Priyanka Mahajan in 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" (2017) writes on the assertiveness of 'New Woman' to achieve physical and financial independence. The researcher discusses that education empowers women while marriage enslaves them to lead a dependent life and the women protagonists of Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Rupa Bajwa, and Shobha De wish to elude themselves from the oppression of men in their quest for self-reliance.

Gupta Anamika in the study entitled "Emergence Of The New Women In The Novels Of Manju Kapur A Feminist Perspective" (2018) substantiates the difficult journey of women towards the attainment of autonomy in the male-dominated society. The researcher emphasises on the intellectual thirst of women to acknowledge their identity and individuality. The women characters of Manju Kapur are not portrayed as rebellious, but they try to create their space and identity within the social ties to bring about a change in their lives. Alkesh Trivedi. P in the study entitled "Woman in Modern

India as Depicted in Manju Kapur's Novels" (2019) examines the traumatic experiences of frustration, depression, and alienation of the women protagonists in the novels, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody*. The study analyses the bitter experiences of Manju Kapur's women characters to overcome the psychological vacuum and establish their own identities.

The exploration of the changing image of women from their silence to self-expression is investigated in the research article of Manju Rani titled "Feminism in Manju Kapur's Novel – *Home*" (2016). The article records the trauma of women in their marital relationships and the patriarchal abuse and violence that exists in the joint family of Banwarilals. The research study of Deepti entitled "Shifting patterns of Women in Patriarchy A Study of the Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur" (2019) is a comparative study of women characters and their journey from suppression to liberation. The researcher tries to enunciate that the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur are the new modern women, who are on the search for better approaches and solutions to confront their problems rather than fleeing from them.

The theme of cultural displacement is examined in the research article of Dr. Nivedita Maitra and Dr. Dimple Dubey entitled "Reinventing Oneself: The Immigrant Dilemma in Manju Kapur's '*The Immigrant*' (2014). The authors attempt to trace the dilemma of the immigrant Indian woman and her constant interaction with the traditional culture of the native land and the culture of the land away from home. They portray the perpetual shift between the state of dislocation and relocation that problematises the sustainability of an individual. The study proves that Nina, the protagonist of the novel, *The Immigrant*, tries to bring about a change in the inherited

tradition and culture. Preeti Lodhi in the research study entitled “Portrayal of Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur” (2019) ascertains that women are brave enough to overcome the problems of survival by challenging and questioning the unjust practices of the society. The assessment of the novels of Manju Kapur offers a glimpse of Indian feminism and the traits of Indian womanhood.

Dr. Farzana S. Ali in the book, *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Critical Study* (2015) examines the novels of Manju Kapur to perceive the position of women in the male-controlled society and presents feminism to discover the rights of Indian women. The book is a collection of research papers and articles that assess and evaluate the novels, *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody* to represent the Indian cultural myths that restrain the potential of women in the domestic and social terrains. The author elucidates that the women protagonists of Manju Kapur fight against taboos, social and joint family restrictions, and constraints laid by the socio-cultural practices. The research papers provide new perceptions for women’s emancipation from economic, political, and social bondages, voicing the feminine sentiments in the novels of Manju Kapur. Prof. Ramesh V. Patil’s research article “A Feminist Approach to Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*” (2016) gives an insight into the clash between societal norms and individual desires. It explores the novel from a socialist feminist perspective and the evolution of women from suppression to empowerment. Seema Ashok Bagul in the thesis entitled “Contemporary Women Novelists: A Feminist Study Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, and Anita Nair” (2019) aims to bring about the changing images of Indian womanhood in the contemporary scenario. The study presents the trials and tribulations

of the women characters in the Indian society, who are torn between familial obligations and career.

Dr. Jitender Singh in the article titled “Reflections of Women’s Movements in Manju Kapur’s *Brothers*” (2018) depicts the issues like family disputes between the brothers, infidelity, and exploitation of women’s political rights. The purpose of this research paper is to trace the progress of women’s movements in India with reference to the advances made by the women characters in the novel. Sunalini Kondapally in the research article titled “Intersectionality and Matrix of Domination in Manju Kapur’s *Brothers*” (2019) portrays the unwritten silences of women and their staunch ambition to attain liberty. The researcher analyses the status of women to be mere slaves and child-rearing machines in the household of the Gaina family. The study presents the determination of the women protagonist, Tapti, to establish her identity in the professional and political arena. Savita Kale in the book, *Manju Kapur’s Novels* (2020) critically analyses the life experiences of Manju Kapur’s protagonists with specific emphasis on women’s issues like widowhood, motherhood, infertility, anguish, and aspirations of women in the male-dominant society and their struggle for existence.

Dharaniswari. K in the study entitled “From Naivety to Prudence in the Novels of Manju Kapur” (2013) critically examines the existential crisis of Manju Kapur’s women characters with reference to the status of women in India. The researcher evaluates the social institution of marriage that entrap women in their social and personal lives to attain freedom. Yashika Chandana in the research paper titled “Quest for Identity in the novels of Manju Kapur – *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*” (2014) presents the revolt of Manju Kapur’s women characters against deep-rooted family values when their

existence goes unrecognised in the institution of marriage. The article explores the sufferings of women and their struggle to break themselves free from the social prejudices which project them to be the victims in a world dominated by men.

Dr. Swati Srivastava and Dr. Avneesh Kumar Singh in the article titled “Lesbian Feminism in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*” (2016) and Dr. Sanjay Kumar Swarnkar and Arti Gupta in the research article titled “The Theme of Lesbian Relationship in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*” (2016) portray the defiance of the women protagonists against male supremacy. They examine lesbian narrative strategies to illuminate women’s resistance to male subordination and establish the female gender and their sexual identity in an inextricable manner. Sharma Ram in the book entitled *Novels of Manju Kapur: Feminine Voices* (2021) focuses on the oppression of women and the marital incompatibility of man-woman relationship which affects the life of the protagonists of Manju Kapur. The book elaborates on the societal issues of women like marriage, education, and their plight for survival.

The review of literature and criticism related to the writings of Manju Kapur explore women’s empowerment to reveal the different facets of Indian feminism from socio-cultural and political perspectives. The present research justifies the research gap by analysing the parenting styles and its impact on the fostering of girl children in the novels of Manju Kapur. It analyses the experiences of the female children from childhood to adulthood, the multiple feminine roles in the marital relationships, and the workplace obligations of women in the novels of Manju Kapur.

Manju Kapur suggests that a change in the principles of the orthodox social system is necessary to achieve parity with men in the contemporary society. The

examination of the novels of Manju Kapur from *Difficult Daughters* (1998) to *Brothers* (2016) tends to prove that the writings of Manju Kapur are revolutionary to propagate the perspectives of feminism and proposes to justify the transition of women from passive societal roles to active agents of their own lives. The aim of the research is to create an insignia for women and construct a strong foundation to celebrate feminine independence.

The feminist ideologies of Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Rosalind Miles in *Who Cooked the Last Supper: The Women's History of the World* (1988), and Jean V. Matthews in *The Rise of New Woman* (2003) support the research study to understand the feministic elements in the novels of Manju Kapur. The parenting styles formulated by the famous psychologist, Diana Baumrind in the 1960s are applied to the novels of Manju Kapur to substantiate the parenting practices and nurturance of children in the Indian families. The research follows the methodology as recommended by *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* ninth edition, for documentation, quotation, end notes, and bibliography. The research study entitled “**Empowerment through Resistance: Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur**” examines the status of women in the contemporary society from confinement to liberation. The study of the novels of Manju Kapur intends to re-evaluate the significance of womanhood and redefine the identity of women. The research proposes to affirm that feminism helps women to eliminate their marginalisation and embolden them to revive their livelihood and existence in the tyrannical society.

Thesis Statement:

The writings of Manju Kapur attempt to formulate reformations in the prejudiced parenting, outrageous marital strategies, challenges in work environments, and irrational conventions of Indian society for the socio-cultural, economic, and political empowerment of women in the modern era of globalisation.

Objectives:

- Parental upbringing has an impact on the personality development and individuality of girl children.
- Exploration of the dilemmas of present-day urban educated middle-class Indian women, trapped in the patriarchal social set-up.
- Promote a dependent-free life for women in the Indian institution of marriage.
- Reformation of women from subservience to prominence.
- Provide better solutions for different kinds of challenges faced by the women characters in the professional sphere.

The research study is divided into five chapters and each chapter examines the novels of Manju Kapur on the aspects of feminism and ends to suggest the means of acquiring favourable social and family environments that empower women in the male-dominant world. Chapter One “**Introduction**” presents the women-centric issues depicted in the novels of Indian English women writers. The women writings of Indian English literature mark the emergence of feminism in India. The women writers believe that the goals of feminist literary theory can be achieved through the consolidated efforts of literary writers, critics, and sociologists. They represent the social evils like gender discrimination and oppression in the patriarchal social set-up which create an opportunity

for the women populace to voice forth their unheard aspirations and desires. The chapter identifies the remarkable characteristics of the writings of Manju Kapur, her contribution to Indian English literature, and the phenomenal portrayal of Indian women in her novels. The review of literature on the works of Manju Kapur and the outline of the research design of the present study are illustrated.

Chapter Two “**Parenting: The Nexus of Human Life**” analyses the parenting practices on raising girl children with reference to Diana Baumrind’s parenting styles. The impact of parental fostering on the personality of the women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina, underlines the significance of parental guidance and cultural values in shaping their individuality. The parent-child relationship is established on interdependence, but in the novels, the relationship of the daughters with their parents is distorted due to prejudiced parenting practices. The novelist argues that discrimination based on gender starts within the family from the day a girl child is born. The women protagonists try to create an amicable family environment, free of gender bias insisting on the elimination of differential treatment of parents, who favour sons over daughters.

Chapter Three “**The Myths and Discourse of Matrimony**” depicts the family situations and marital relationships that prevail in the present Indian society. The chapter interprets that the bourgeois attitude of men draws limitations to women’s rights and choices in the marital bond. Marriage demands women to perform their duties in the name of ‘wife service’ and ‘mother service’ where they toil without any recognition for the multifaceted roles they play in the family. Manju Kapur highlights that the emotional trauma of being unrecognised for the sacrifices made to their families make the women

protagonists to be caged birds. They attempt to unravel their state of dejection and strive to evade their feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. The novels advocate for a paradigm shift in the Indian institution of marriage, stimulate women to question the unjust patriarchal norms and encourage them to overcome marital enslavement.

Chapter Four “**Work Environment: Challenges for Women**” reveals the predicaments of women in the workplace. Manju Kapur highlights diverse challenges and hurdles faced by women in their profession and chronicles the need to ascertain female rights to liberate women from workplace harassment. The protagonists undergo a process that involves a gradual transition of their psyche from silence, oppression, and marginality to self-expression, self-assertion, and redefinition of their identity. They are caught between the dichotomy of domesticity and professional obligations when they prefer to be economically independent. They do not wish to be the silent sufferers of tradition, but desire to rebuild the status of women in modern society as they strive to carve their self-identity in the male-dominated professional world. They realise the need for social transformation to uplift the status of women and ensure their economic participation in the society.

Chapter Five “**Conclusion**” discusses Manju Kapur as a feminist writer and novelist, who represents the lives of women in India to redefine their position, status, and standards positively. The fictional narratives of Manju Kapur vividly portray the ambivalence of urban educated middle-class Indian women, who navigate between social expectations and personal choices. The novelist advocates for a change in the contemporary scenario to emancipate women from the clutches of social restrictions to establish their identity. She investigates the pivotal issues related to women like

motherhood, identity crisis, economic freedom, self-reliance, workplace obligations, and ultimately women's independence. The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina wish to reach new horizons towards liberation as they try to find a way to overcome the dilemma of disparity. The ambition of women to lead a self-designed life of freedom is not an easy-going process in India. The reputation and integrity of women should be preserved to motivate their unwavering determination to achieve the desired life goals.

The women protagonists of Manju Kapur try to maintain a balance between traditional and modern gender roles. The novelist has strongly portrayed the needs, desires, and aspirations of women to establish their identity in the family as well as in the society. She primarily focuses on freedom, justice, and the rights of women, for which her protagonists are strong-willed to break the barriers that restrain their determination to achieve it. The sufferings of the women protagonists have made them strong and they dissent to set themselves free from the shackles of patriarchy and gender prejudices. The intellectual writings of Manju Kapur explore the ways in which women can resist and negotiate the numerous challenges they encounter in the family, workplace, and society.

The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina are the spokespersons to emphasise the significance of emancipation and try to create a humanistic attitude towards women in the Indian society. Manju Kapur, through the transformation of female protagonists, acknowledges women's self-hood and assertiveness in their journey towards empowerment. She has touched upon a variety of subjects through her feminist approach which is of great contribution to create awareness worldwide for the issues concerning women to unmask their sanctity and sublimity. She

differs significantly from her contemporaries in the portrayal of her women characters, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina, who are the new women with democratic spirit to promote the rights to equality and freedom in the male-chauvinistic society. The research offers hope to empower the women folk of India, who have the power to uplift not only individuals, but also their families, future generations, and ultimately the entire society.