CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION
The emotional, sexual and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, “It is a girl”. (qtd. In Geetha: 33)

The hardest profession to take in life is being a girl child. Discrimination and discrepancy are two most important factors that hamper the journey of every female from the earliest stage of life. Starting from her presence into her mother’s womb to infancy, childhood and finally to adulthood, she is outnumbered by the male dominating society of the country. Gender is a social and cultural construct. Socialization plays an important role in the construction of gender. Socialization is a very influential method. It has enormous power in moulding a girl’s psyche. Its influence begins early in childhood. As in a report on “The State of The World’s Children” UNICEF has stated,

Gender, on the other hand is a social construct that describes what is feminine and what is masculine. Recognizing that gender roles are not inborn but rather learned, proponents of gender equality challenged stereotypes and pervasive discrimination that kept women and girls socially and economically disadvantaged. (UNICEF: 1)

In literature the girl children are depicted to contain, withhold, conceal and suppress their real self. In literature the plight of girl children is shown by presenting them as subordinated, exploited, oppressed and as the victims of different violence. They are presented as the caged birds, trapped in patriarchal cultural values and paradigms. Patriarchal forces do not begin to operate upon a grown up woman alone. The forces intensify at the onset of puberty, the recognition of the beginning of womanhood. Society prescribes new codes and forms of conduct for the
adolescence girl. The purpose behind this is to prepare her for her future role of a woman in a patriarchal society. The goal of these forces is to enforce traditional, stereotyped role of woman on a girl’s psyche from the very beginning of her life. These are the forces that actually build and form the psyche of a traditional woman. As Simone De Beauvoir has said,

Throughout her childhood, the little girl was bullied and mutilated; but she nonetheless grasped herself as an autonomous individual; in her relations with her family and friends, in her studies and games, she saw herself in the present as transcendence; her future passivity was something she only imagined. Once she enters puberty, the future not only moves closer: it settles into her body; it becomes the most concrete reality. (Beauvoir, 2011: 352)

A girl child is taught from her childhood that she is underprivileged in being a girl and that being born as a female is a handicap. This socialization of the girl child, carried out in traditional Indian families fails to compromise with the values of modern, educated girls. The socialization of the girl child is to ensure male domination and the stress of the entire process is on submission and passivity. As a part of socialization, inhibitions are imposed on the girl child. All these inhibitions crowd on her with the coming of womanhood. The immediate result is that the girl resents her womanhood. The child who is so free and unselfconscious finds restrictions all over and responds to them negatively.

In our Indian society that is essentially patriarchal, the female child is under the observant eye of the parents. She is constantly trained for her new
master. It is taught to her that she should find her acceptable according to his expectations. The girl is taught that marriage is her greatest ambition and the ultimate goal. Traditional feminine virtues are inculcated in a girl child to make her fit for the marriage market. The predominant aspiration of parents, especially mothers is to mould the daughters to that single purpose of pleasing a male. From the childhood, a girl’s life revolves around the tips of satisfying her husband. In this connection Simone De Beauvoir has said,

Marriage is not only an honourable and less strenuous career than many others; it alone enables woman to attain her complete social dignity and also to herself sexually as lover and mother. This is the role her entourage thus envisages for her future, as she envisages it herself. Everyone unanimously agrees that catching a husband- or a protector… is for her the most important of undertakings. (Beauvoir, 2011: 353)

Submissiveness of the wife is ensured with the help of socialization that begins in early childhood and extends well into adolescence and adulthood. Girl children are trained to think, speak, dress and behave in such a way as to give preference to males around them. When the girls grow and get educated, their new sense of identity and equality, clash with the internalized sense of submission and docility. In this connection Sarah Grimke has correctly said,

Man has subjected woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to
elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could
do to debase and enslave her mind… (Grimke: 56)

Patriarchy conditions certain ideas in women from childhood. Some of the
conditions are as a family is sacred, the woman is responsible for household duties
and she is just a wife at home. Society demands a woman to be docile, modest and
over flowing with love. Conditioning of female mind becomes necessary as she
interacts with the world through the institution called family and hence creating
certain psychological images in her is necessary. Such conditioning in the male
dominated society also screens her from understanding her subjugation.

Gender identity is the primary identity any human being holds. It is the
first and the most permanent identity, which has influential implications. Gender is
a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations.
Human development, of course, does not occur in a vacuum. It occurs within
specific contexts. The family is implicitly given the centrality in most theories of
normal optimal child development. (www.simplypsychology.org) Parents are
considered the major influence on their children.

The patriarchal institutions with the social and communal sanction have
modeled women into feminine temperament as wives and mothers because of
which wifely role and motherhood has become synonymous with femininity. It is
necessary to understand that for women the capacities for role playing and abilities
to get gratification from it have become inescapable because of patriarchy.
Patriarchy strongly internalizes and psychologically enforces such behaviour in the
feminine psychic structure via childhood nurturing and it is not the inherent nature.
Psychologists are unanimous in stressing the influence of childhood experience and environment in the evolution of a neurotic personality. Dominating, overprotective, intimidating parents hinder a child’s free emotional growth and also curtail his/her sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Erikson’s (1959) theory of psychosocial development has eight distinct stages. Erikson assumes that a crisis occurs at each stage of development. For Erikson, these crises are of a psychological in nature because they involve psychological needs of the individual conflicting with the needs of society.

According to the theory, successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality and the acquisition of basic virtues. Basic virtues are characteristic strengths which the ego can use to resolve subsequent crises. Failure to successfully complete a stage can result in a reduced ability to complete further stages and therefore a more unhealthy personality and sense of self. (www.simplypsychology.org)

The innocent world of the child is often permanently damaged by the apathy and insensitivity of the adults. Due to the wounded young psyche of the child, he/she cannot mature into a wholesome character and all along he/she suffers as the possessor of the battered childhood. In his/ her mature years, he is incapable of facing the vagaries of life. M. Mani Metei says,

Childhood experience is of vital importance in the study of mind’s behaviour, for that lies embedded in the individual consciousness as latent content that appears and reappears as drives and urges in the individual’s unguarded moments. If the person is fully or partially
under control of this aberrant mental process, he is subject to neurosis or hysteria, according to the degree of the force of drama that is inside the mind. (76-77)

Apart from patriarchal codes and conduct imposed on them, the greatest crippling force on girl children is gender discrimination shown to them. As Simone De Beauvoir has said, “Because she is woman, the girl knows that the sea and the poles, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys are forbidden to her: she is born on the wrong side.” (Beauvoir, 2011: 322) Different types of discrimination are seen in the Indian society. This discrimination towards the girl is embedded in the Indian culture. In India preference is given to boys than girls. The girl child picks up parental values and integrates them into her personality. But when the girl grows and comes into contact with the outer world, through education and marriage, she comes to the painful awareness of discrimination and lack of identity. The gender becomes a major division between man and woman as the two different biological individuals, who become two social categories of men and women having the different social- psychological behaviour of their inherited gender. Thus gradually gender becomes a cultural construct, instead of biological distinction of men and women. And thus the characteristic features of behaviour are established in this belief of discrimination which is not acquired one, but inherited.

The lines of divisions are present in all cultures. Feminists have been systematically pointing out that all human societies till date are not only divided on the lines of gender roles, these roles have always been discriminatory, the attributes associated with male- gender roles have
been valorized whereas female- gender roles have been pejoratized.

Therefore, gender does not simply symbolize difference, it also symbolizes discrimination. (Moitra: 8)

Discrimination against female children has been a topic of debate. It has been a subject of concern and sociological significance. This subject raises the cultural aspects about the role of a female child in society, what her human rights are and the number of other sensitive issues. The issue is important because there is a nearly universal need for gender equality. Gender based discrimination against female children is pervasive across the world. It is seen in all the strata of society and manifests in various forms. As per literature female child has been treated inferior to a male child and this is deeply engraved in the mind of a female child. According to R. S. Rajan,

It [the family]...is the major, if not primary site of women’s oppression. For it is within the family that girl children experience their first feeling of rejection or discrimination on account of their sex, where they may be required to perform domestic labour, denied the freedom to come and go, married off, frequently without their consent and on payment of dowry, and then subjected to vicissitudes of married life, which would include harassment by in-laws, marital discord, unwanted pregnancies, domestic drudgery and the continuing cycle of the burden of girl children of their own. (Rajan: 80)

Family is the chief institution of Patriarchy. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society. As the fundamental mechanism and the
foundation unit of patriarchal society, the family and its role are prototypical. It serves as an agent of the larger society. The family teaches its own members to adjust and obey the rules set by the society. As Harris says, “Families have the potential to be an important stabilizing influence in the development of adolescent sons’ and daughters’ identities.” (21) The chief contribution of the family in patriarchy is the socialization of the child into patriarchal dogma. It trains the child to behave according to its role in society as a girl and a boy. To take a simple example: expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to build up aggressive impulses, and the female to spoil her own or turn them inward. Allan G. Johnson, the author of Patriarchy states some very common stereotypes or qualities of men, “Control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure.” (160) Johnson lists some common stereotypes that society imposes on women as well, “inefficiency, cooperation, mutuality, sharing compassion, caring…emotional expressiveness.” (160) The result is that the male tends to have aggression reinforced in his behavior. The same process of reinforcement is apparent in producing the chief feminine virtue of passivity. In a traditional society women are groomed and educated for dependence, for wifehood and for motherhood. Simone De Beauvoir has said in this connection,

Whether ambitious, scatterbrained or shy, the young boy leaps toward an open future, he will be a sailor or an engineer…he will become rich, he feels free faced with a future where unexpected opportunities await him. The girl will be wife, mother, grandmother; she will take care of her house exactly as her mother does, she will take care of her children
as she was taken care of: she is twelve years old and her story is already written in the heavens; she will discover it day after day without shaping it; she is curious but frightened when she thinks about this life whose every step is planned in advance and towards which each day irrevocably moves her. (Beauvoir, 2011: 323)

In India due to its social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the combination of the parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, characters, interests, status, worth gesture and expression. What does seem decisive in assuring the maintenance of the temperamental differences between the sexes is the conditioning of childhood. Gender discrimination begins in the womb and it goes on till death. In the Indian context, motherhood is a must, something the girl child is forced and conditioned to accept as the end she is born for. Shashi Deshpande has very correctly said,

Gender is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in our lives. I also realized that in a world dominated by male values, while the caste and the class struggle are taken seriously, the gender is not. (qtd. In Clara: 31)

Girlhood is very relative term and concept. Girls in general are usually female children before adulthood. It’s this designation of adulthood for girls which draws the border culturally. Between wealthy and poor countries, the difference is luxury. Also within countries, the same applies. The wealthier a person’s
surroundings, the more female can take the privilege and ease of being a girl. A
girl if often treated as helpless person, always in need of male or adult aid and
invention. Girlhood is directly related to marriage and motherhood in some cases,
or either sex. Girls are made women by men through sexual intercourse or
marriage or girls transfer to a type of pseudo-womanhood through the elevation of
their reproductive capacities. Girlhood varies in different cultural contexts. In the
US, a white middle class female of 22 will still be considered a girl, if not married,
while her 16 years old counterpart in India may have already had a child and fears
dowry death from her in-laws. Girlhood is also tied to personal responsibilities.
Girlhood in the nineteenth century and earlier twentieth century extends from
childhood to the age of marriage; it represents a complex category encompassing
various life stages and kinds of femininity as well as differences on class and race.
Girls’ condition varies from country to country. There are certain common aspects
which form a prototype as far as treatment for girls is concerned. As Lipkin has
said,

Girls’ lives differ widely from country to country, but some disturbing
truths form a pattern. Worldwide, and generally speaking, girls often
hold much lower status than boys and suffer from systematic
discrimination that devalues their lives, leaving them vulnerable to
sexual exploitation or physical abuse. Girls are more likely to deny
education. Concern about the global treatment of girls is a cause
gaining recognition with the realization that improving girls’ status has
often has wide rippling effects within a community. (196)
It is said that the literature of a country is the storehouse of the culture, land and sociological aspect of its people. Childhood is a very important period in the formation of character and for the emergence of a value structure in the life of a human being. But in literature, it has largely been ignored as an area of human experience, especially in the case of girl characters. As Jain says, “In traditional Indian literature girl characters were either absent or passive.” (Qtd. In Michelle: 38) This reflects both a fictional and a societal reality. Girls are a silent part of the family and society. What they think or feel about their social eclipse does not interest most writers or social thinkers. In Indian literature also it is not different and one can find the girl child as a marginalized figure. According to Jasbir Jain,

Women in fiction are cast in ready-made roles- of wives who need protection, of widows, who are rendered asexual- of women who stand in the shadows, who cook and sweep and cater to the male world. (79)

In literature, it is seen that the girl children step straight into adulthood. It appears that the Indian baby girl immediately graduates to adolescence, not even adolescence but the bashful young woman.

Indian English women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian English literature. Before the rise of novels; several women writers composed songs, short stories and small plays. It is still believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of the fables, storytelling and more. In the mid nineteenth century more women started to write in English language. With the passage of time Indian English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women
novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writings and it affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian English literature.

Traditionally, the work of Indian English women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space, and women’s perceptions of their experience within it. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with weightier themes. Additionally, Indian women writers in English are victims of second prejudice, vis-à-vis their regional counterpart. Since proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intellectual, affluent, educated classes, a frequent judgment is made that the writers and their works belong to a higher social strata, and are cut off from the reality of Indian life.

In the 20th century, women’s writing is considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writing of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who have money and are mostly Western educated. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their write- ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche which has no accessibility. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated women.

The realistic picture of Indian women is depicted by 21st century Indian women novelists. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equally
competent just like a man. The women of modern era think of different lines and that is what depicted in the novels of Indian English women novelists. Indian English women novelists explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood.

The most formative years of the woman’s life—when she is growing up remains by and large unexplored. The novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Kashmira Sheth believe that childhood experiences are lasting and that they have a crucial role to play in the formation of a healthy personality. Their novels reverberate with childhood imagery and experiences. A close study of their novels reveals that their girl characters had peculiar and uncommon childhood experiences. Through the girlhood of their girl characters these novelists show different facets of girlhood in India. Their childhood experiences with over indulgent, cruel or indifferent parent or societal discriminatory treatment obstructs the free use of their energies and self-reliance and put them on the path of neurotic conditions in their life. They grow with vague fears and apprehensions that create a feeling of isolation and helplessness in a world that is basically hostile.

The novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Kashmira Sheth are the few Indian English women writers who have portrayed the girl child with deliberation. These novelists have redeemed the gloomy situation by creating some memorable girl characters. Notable among them being Saroja and Lalitha in Kamala Markandaya’s Two Virgins, Raka in Anita Desai’s Fire on The Mountain, Leela in Kasmira Sheth’s Keeping Corner, Saru in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds no Terrors, Kalpana in Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine, Mira in
Kamala Markanaya’s *Some Inner Fury*, and Monisha in *Voices in the City*. There is a detailed examination of the girlhood of the protagonists.

Conventional feminine bound older generation imposes certain complexities for the younger generation girls. These conflicts could be identified as the residue of generation gap between the older generation who cling on to tradition and younger generation who thrust to shed away tradition clutches and is eager to welcome a new set of values. Certain self-imposed restrictions due to condition of gender and the absence of rapport and understanding between other female characters also pose certain problems for the protagonists, which can be identified as internal conflict and external conflict. These conflicts originate from the traditional patriarchal society lying unjustifiable restrictions on women alone. Women cannot be studied in isolation because it is reinstated in Indian society that at every stage Indian women are dependent. Customs and traditions are handed over from one generation to the next generation. Changes in tradition effected only after a chain of revolutions and protests. But the general aspect of all cultures globally is that girls are subordinated to boys in all aspects. Non-conformity always poses struggle for the girl protagonists of the above mentioned Indian English women novelists, who have turned self conscious about their individual identity and they reflect hatred towards wrong and biased conventionalities. Self-introspection about one’s individuality also mixed with certain fears about the approval of the society causes pain in such girls. Simone De Beauvoir has given the reason why growing as a girl is a difficult task. She says,

This is why adolescence is such a difficult and decisive moment for woman. Until then she was an autonomous individual: she now has to renounce her sovereignty. Not only is she torn like her brothers, and
more acutely, between past and future, but in addition a conflict breaks out between her originary claim to be subject, activity and freedom on the one hand and, on the other her erotic tendencies and the social pressure to assume herself as a passive object. (Beauvoir, 2011: 359)

Girls face innumerable experiences. They are better tuned at this stage for better comprehension about their state and status in the patriarchal society. The protagonists’ awakening towards the double standard poses for them, the protagonists’ protest through non-conformity to comply with the hypocrisies is very clearly stated by the novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Kashmira Sheth. Parents and society have been nurturing certain virtues and codes of conduct, but the girls face the raw fact that the society does not reciprocate any such virtues and code of conduct towards them. In all the protagonists’ lives, the stark reality that there is so much discrepancy between their expectations and the practical affairs dawn upon them as double standards of the society, strikes them as a thunderbolt. However, the heroines do not perish under the impact or vanish, but recoup from the shock. Equipped with the newly gained self-confidence and individuality as weapons these novelists establish their young girls. All the novelists invest their young girl protagonists with individuality and constant striving in their quest for attaining self identity.

The young girls of today, no doubt, are becoming aware of the biased attitude of society. They have started asserting their individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. While the traditional minded girls accept their false condition into subordination and dependence without demur, the sensitive and aware girls realize the need for individuality and revolt against the established norms. Hence,
they defy the institution and break away from their destroyer to seek fulfillment. Awareness in a girl that she can live a different, but happy and purposeful life, asserts self-confidence in her. She emerges as “new girl”, though the process of awakening in her is quite slow and the revolt comes after much retrospection. However, these thoughtful and sensitive girls have to face a lot of opposition from the narrow minded and orthodox Indian society, which considers tolerance, patience and forbearance as essential virtues of girls. Krishnaswamy has pointed out the condition of women which is applicable to girls also,

In Western countries, the women’s issue is mostly one of identity, job equality and sexual roles. In India, for the majority, it is a question of stark survival. The few who have escaped the vicious existential circle through education and better opportunities also find themselves in a constant tussle with the inevitable social mores with the oppressive weight of tradition behind. (Qtd. In Michelle: 36)

Lipkin has tried to depict the situation of modern Indian girls by pointing out:

At a time when many people think that we’re ‘beyond gender restrictiveness’- that the glass ceiling has been shattered and girls can do anything- it’s important to look closely at how understanding of gender have been shaped, and whether they have shifted from traditional expectations into new definitions, or whether they are just slightly changed variations. (3)

In contemporary Indian English women novelist feminist ideology is observable in the widespread presence of girl characters and pursuit of gender
equality. Indian English women authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Kashmira Sheth, have begun to create novels with girls playing a central role in the novels. They are empowered and progressive, imagined through the lens of liberal feminism, they act to expand or even reject traditionally prescribed social roles for Indian girls by insisting that girls and boys are equally valued members of society and deserve equal opportunities particularly in relation to education and self-determination. Rejecting prescriptive traditional constructions of girls as passive, dependent, restricted to the domestic sphere, and less valuable than boys, contemporary Indian English women writers, both celebrate girls and imagine girlhood as an empowered state by positioning girls as part of powerful interconnected webs of family and community relationship. These novelists have also presented the gloomy picture of society that still believes that girls are objects to use for its convenience and pleasure. These novelists have portrayed the realistic picture of some unfortunate girls who cannot protest and raise their voice against the wrong done to them. They fail to assert their individuality. Contemporary Indian English women novelists show the plight of Indian girls who struggle at various levels in their lives.

A girl can’t help but feel inferior when everything around her tells her that she is worth less than a boy. It is correctly said, “… living within a society that routinely devalues girls, girls often lack a sense of their own value, and may not be protected by their families.”(Lipkin: 198) Her identity is forged as soon as her family and society limit her opportunities and declare her to be second-rate. The status of girls is central to the health of a society. If one part suffers, so does the whole. As Simone De Beauvoir has correctly said,
…for a woman there is, from the start, a conflict between her autonomous existence and her ‘being-other’; she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll and freedom is denied her; thus a vicious circle is closed; for the less she experience her freedom to understand, grasp and discover the world around her, the less she will find its resources, and the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject; if she were encouraged, she could show the same vibrant exuberance, the same curiosity, the same spirit of initiative, and the same intrepidness as the boy…But customs oppose treating girls exactly like boys. (Beauvoir, 2011: 305)

This gender sensitivity can be observed in the novels of Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Kashmira Sheth. The role of girls is significant in the human world from the ancient time not only as a human being but also as an inseparable entity to take the mankind ahead with the time. She contributes to make progress in the family, society as well as a country through her active participation same as the male counterpart. As Lipkin has said:

…keeping a girl from school has long ranging impact on her ability to provide for her present and future family, on the economic growth of her society and even country, on gender balancing as girls move into more positions of power and influence, and on her sense of self worth. (198)
The girls are suppressed into lower status compared to the male power and position in the society intentionally, even after her great contribution in reality. How does the patriarchal society suppress the girls? How is the patriarchal ideology dominating the grand-narrative as well as moulding the notion of girl’s psychology? In what ways, the voice of girls is controlled and represented with manipulative hegemony in unconstructive words? How is the girl fight against the psychic violence to construct herself?

The plan of my research is to find out the answers to the above questions. This research focuses on the depiction of different facets of girlhood in post-independence Indian English Women novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya and Kashmira Sheth. Through the literature survey it has been found that much work has already been done on the works of above novelists, except Kashmira Sheth. It is surprising to know that the work done till now focuses only on the portrayal of women in these novelists. The researchers till now have worked on the condition of women depicted by these novelists. It has been noticed that girlhood, which is the very important period of forming a woman’s psyche is totally ignored. The condition of a woman today is dependent on how her girlhood is spent. In India, a girl from the very beginning of her life is treated to be a woman. There are certain attributes imposed on the girl by the male dominated society. Family, society and culture play an important part in it. The present psyche of a woman is formed, intentionally in her girlhood only. In a patriarchal society like India, this psyche of a woman is formed according to patriarchal norms and customs. Researchers till now have ignored the period of a
woman’s identity formation, that is the girlhood. This research focuses on how the
girl characters are depicted in the novels of selected novelists. In this research an
effort has been made to find out the various factors that affect the healthy growth
of a girl child in India.

The above discussion eventually leads me towards the following basic
aims and objectives:

- To evaluate the depiction of girlhood in selected post-independence Indian
  English women novelists.
- To examine various facets of girlhood presented in the novels.
- To analyse the roles girls play in the novels.
- To access the contribution of the selected novelists in presenting the
  realistic picture of girlhood in India.
- To concentrate on the factors affecting the mental growth and forming a
  psyche of a girl.
- To analyse a girl’s journey from girlhood to womanhood.

I have some basic assumptions in my mind with which I will direct my
study. These will form the hypothesis for my thesis. They are mentioned below:
● All the novelists have girls as their protagonists. Their attitude is to portray the picture of different problems that girls face in Indian traditional and patriarchal society.

● Through the girl characters in their novels the novelists project how class, caste, gender discrimination, home, community, parents’ mentality affect the mental growth of a girl and how after growing up she reacts to it.

● The novelists present different evils prevailing in Indian society to suppress the helpless girls.

● These novels depict how the old traditional customs made by patriarchal society become a hindrance in the healthy growth of girls.

● The novels present the various ways in which girls protest and rebel against traditional society.

● The novelists depict the girl’s dilemma to choose between traditional and modern values in front of them in the contemporary modern world.

Thus, the aim of this research is to examine how Indian English women novelists like Anita Desai, Kashmira Sheth, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande depict the picture of girlhood in Indian context. The intention is to find out how a girl’s life is shown in these novelists’ works, which are the problems that a girl faces in a patriarchal society. The plan is to find out how these novelists try to reveal the obstacles the girls face and the disadvantages they have just because they are girls. The present research is restricted to the selected novels of these novelists. The selection of the novels is done on the basis of different facets of girls’ life shown in the novels. The novels who share the same story are not
selected to avoid repetition of the same idea. The novels chosen are from different decades covering the period from the post independence to the modern period.

Chapterization of the proposed work runs thus:

**Chapter 1: - Introduction**

This chapter will give a general idea of girlhood in Indian society. It will discuss the ways girls are treated in Indian male made society. It will evaluate how girls are trained in a patriarchal society like India to be typical women. It will also discuss in brief the role of childhood in forming one’s personality. It will analyse in brief the girl characters portrayed in post- independence Indian English women novelists.

**Chapter 2: - Victims of Oppression**

This chapter will evaluate Shashi Deshpande’s depiction of girlhood in her novel *The Binding Vine*. Shashi Deshpande, in this novel represents the status of a girl from the low caste group or low social economic status. The girl in the novel is portrayed as deficient and reliant on someone else to rescue her. This shows the poor plight of oppressed girlhood. *The Binding Vine* is a story of a girl Kalpana. Kalpana is a rape victim. She is raped by her uncle only. This chapter will discuss how the rape victimized girl becomes double victimized due to a societal set of mind. The chapter will evaluate the shattering physical and psychological effects on rape victims.
Chapter 3: Assimilation and Insurrection

This chapter will show submissive and revolting aspects of girlhood presented in Kamala Markandaya’s *Two Virgins* and Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain*.

*Two Virgins* is the story of two sisters Lalitha and Saroja. Lalitha loves a life of glamour and Saroja is a simple girl. Saroja is portrayed as a contrast to Lalitha. Lalitha’s strong desire for modern ways of life ruins her. Saroja resists all temptations that ruin her sister. She symbolizes the conflict between reason and feeling, between tradition and modernity. Saroja represents the ideal Indian girlhood in her willing submission to the traditional roles in the family. So *Two Virgins* is a poignant tale of two girls growing up in the changing ethos of Indian life that tends to subvert traditional attitudes and is assertive of the freedom of girls.

In *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai projects the inner turmoil of a small girl, Raka who is haunted by a sense of futility. Raka’s love for isolation is the result of her traumatic experience of her childhood; she is devoid of parental love and care. Lack of love between her parents, her father’s excessive drinking habit, and her father’s cruel behaviour towards her mother, make her turn against all human connections. Rakha has not been a recluse. She is the victim of a broken home. Raka has witnessed enough of the ambiguity of life in her eight years of existence. Her grandmother Asha is worried about Raka’s mother’s relationship with her husband. Raka’s father has no time to look after the well being of his child. Consequently Raka’s traumatic experiences deprive her of a child’s innocent
trust and feeling of joy in the company of others. Like other normal children, she is not interested in the stories about people, about relations.

Chapter  4: - Girlhood: Identity Formation of Womanhood

This chapter will analyse the theme of growing up from girlhood to womanhood in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City*. It will analyse how the childhood of a girl affects her womanhood. It will show the role of girlhood in shaping a girl’s mentality and the way she reacts to the anxieties of the womanhood.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the story of a doctor Sarita, who is disappointed as a daughter. She has a disastrous childhood. She becomes a victim of gender bias that her mother shown towards her. She understands that what she is to become is going to give her the identity that she is searching for. She realizes that becoming is productivity which means making life feasible and pleasant, and comfortable for others, and so she selects the avenue of medicine. She is a child with a lot of curiosity which is reflected in her playfulness, visiting friends and outdoor games. It is strong as a curiosity in her childhood and later develops into quest for identity, when she grows and understands life around. The initial experiences in her girlhood days influenced Saru heavily that she wanted to become a powerful dominant person in her life. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* reveals the protagonist Saru’s life, showing how her disturbed childhood has contributed largely to her inability to establish and maintain personal relationships in later life.
Voices in the City is a story based on the life of the middle class intellectuals of Calcutta. This is an unforgettable story of a brother Nirode and his two sisters Monisha and Amla, caught in the counter currents of changing social values. In many ways the story reflects a vivid picture of India’s social transition. Monisha is the girl who is married against her will into a joint family of rich middle class philistines and is haunted by morbid musings about death. She too lacks parental love and care. She does not get love from her husband Jiban, and is unable to establish any rapport with him. She morbidly laments the futility of married life. Monisha commits suicide, unable to stand the strain of living in her husband’s house. Monisha’s childhood was spent without parental love and care. This childhood experience makes her feebler to face the challenges of womanhood.

Chapter: 5 The Awakening Of New Consciousness

This chapter will analyse how the novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Kashmira Sheth, rejecting prescriptive traditional constrains of girls as passive, dependent, restricted to the domestic sphere, and less valuable than boys, celebrate girls and imagine girlhood as an empowered state by positioning girls as part of powerful interconnected webs of family and community relationship. These girl characters unanimously succeed in achieving transformation by acting with agency to improve their own lives, the lives of people about whom they care and well being of their communities. This chapter will evaluate the girlhood depicted in Kamala Markandaya’s Some Inner Fury and Kashmira Sheth’s Keeping Corner.

In Some Inner Fury the heroine-narrator Mira is sophisticated and westernized. Mira represents the clash between passion and patriotism and inner
fury of passion is symbolic of Indian passion for independence. The novel ends with a note of patriotism as Mira sacrifices her personal pleasure for the sake of a great national cause. She joins the mob defending Govind against the false allegation of murdering Kit. There is a quest for self discovery. When she makes her final decision to depart from Richard, whom she loves, and join the crowd of demonstrators, she has certainly d her roots. Her wounded self is discernable when the external fury of the crowd demanding Govind’s release suppresses her emotional inner fury. As a grown up girl she is to decide her course of action.

Kashmira Sheth’s *Keeping Corner* provides a particularly clear example of the approach in which it refutes the traditional belief that girls belong constrained within the family home by addressing an extreme of this scenario, the case of a Brahmin child widow in the pre-independence India. The protagonist Leela is compelled by traditional doctrine to “keep corner” by remaining inside her home for a year after she is widowed at the age of twelve. Even after the year ends, her subsequent life, as dictated by tradition, will remain a segregated subsistence. She will be socially outcast and considered a burden by her family. But Sheth imagines a positive resolution of Leela, who refuses to be constrained by traditional social restrictions on Hindu widows and protest against this unfair treatment. Instead of remaining housebound and dependent, Leela completes her education, supports herself by becoming a teacher, and influences others to see girls and women as capable of providing valuable contributions to society. She later becomes active in Gandhi’s freedom movement.
Chapter 6: - Conclusion

After studying various facets of girlhood presented in Indian women novelists the concluding chapter will analyse the toes and ebbs of Indian traditional and modern society in relation to its treatment of girls. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Kashmira Sheth are the novelists who have emerged as writers possessing deep insight into the female psyche, focussing on the marital relation they seek to expose the tradition by which a girl is trained to play her subservient role in the family. This chapter will analyse the factors affecting the healthy growth of a girl’s personality. It will evaluate how these novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian girls in being a part of them. It will project how their young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. It will analyse how a girl child’s particular position, social reality and identity and psychological growth determine her personality. This chapter will peep into the problems girls face in Indian traditional and patriarchal society.

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