In literary theory, ‘Feminism’ means challenging the patriarchal canons, deconstructing the phallocentric creative and critical discourse, decoding gender as an organizing principles of experience and relating forms of feminine articulation to changing external circumstances and associations. It is a study of a structural inequality of women caused by systematic social injustice.

Post-Modern sensibility is reflected in Indian writing in English which is the product of new socio-cultural and political situation and circumstances that pushes the marginal or the extreme marginal to the center stage. Feminism is the product of such a sensibility. It derived from Latin word ‘Femina’ which means woman.

Feminism has sprouted up as the point of culmination of various movements for woman’s rights led by eminent thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Simone De Beaviour, Kate Millett, Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter. Their views on the actual gender discriminations and anxiety about the freedom and welfare of women have evolved eventually in the philosophy of feminism. It aims at establishing a balanced relationship between the sexes. It propounds the equality between them as ideal. This hypothesis has developed into a variety of the western forms of feminism.
Feminism, as a new way of life, came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s role in society. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. And at the same time women have difficulty in achieving their own inner equilibrium. They seem to be alienated, fragmented and broken. So they launch their quest for identity and they long to concretize their autonomy throwing away the socially constructed, prejudiced gender norms.

More than men, Indian women novelists turned towards the woman’s world with greater introspective intensity and authenticity. They launched an aesthetic voyage in order to explore the private consciousness of their women characters and measure the pressure of the inner weather. The latter part of the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a substantial growth in India English novels by a number of novelists which has enriched the Indian English literature.

Indian women novelists are gaining grounds worldwide and winning critical appraisal and international recognition. Now their work is no more considered as something derogatory, melodramatic or sub-stuff. The glaring cause of their success as novelist lies in the fact that they are born story-teller and they are endowed with the gift of delving deep into the workings of human mind and heart with sympathy, sensitivity and understanding. But there is also the common element of conflict of values and fighting between different ways of life. Among the prolific women novelists like Kamala Markandaya,
Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Jhumpa Lahiri; Manju Kapur is also a distinguished figure in the world of novels. In the light of feminist critical theory Manju Kapur’s novels become a powerful exponent of feminism.

Quest for identity and female self-assertiveness in contemporary Indian fiction in English is a bifocal subject. On the one hand, it directs its gaze towards philosophy and psychology and on the other hand, looks towards social sciences and literature.

The very expression ‘Quest for Identity’ has become a fashionable term in literary and other studies. Day in and Day out, newspapers reporting on several sections of society resort to the expression “search for identity”. Their stories reveals about national identity, regional identity, tribal identity, cultural identity, man’s identity, woman’s identity, Indian identity, European identity, group identity and hordes of other identities. At present, there are numerous identities prevailing in the country. It is pretty difficult to comprehend all those identities.

Then how to search for identity? Has it to do with the human mind or social mores or both? What are the identifiable elements that go to make an identity? Are we then talking about certain deep-seated characteristics of a person that go to shape his behaviour, his personality? Do we have any common ground where all can meet? The answer does not seem to be easy. “Identity” said Northrop Frye, “is the opposite of similarly or likeness, and total identity is not uniformity, but a unity of various things.”
Indian society has mainly been patriarchal in which women have been subjected to various kinds of physical, social and psychological harassment. They are pictured as sex symbols, as a pleasure giving commodity to man. A woman is expected to play the role of a mother, wife and so on. Apart from this she is not supposed to have an identity of her own. Against this conventional archetypal background there has been a shift in the Indian women’s sensibility mainly owing to the revolutionary processes taking place in the west in order to release women from the shackles of conventional taboos and customs.

The emancipation of women had started in the west. The pioneering works have been *The Second Sex* and *Sexual Politics*. Following them many novels have been written by women writers. Making fiction the medium of expression, they have protested against the wrong done to women and have fought for equality and identity of women. Defining a feminist writer, Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes:

> The feminist writers are those who write as women — they are self consciously producing women's literature, writing about women, their rights, their dreams, their problems, their sufferings. (92)

Feminism is essentially linked with cultural moorings and social taboos. Every country has its own cultural heritage. That is why, of late, feminism has assumed new names and shapes. At the International scene, it comes before us often as British feminism, American feminism or French feminism, Indian feminism too, has got wide popularity, for women novelists of modem times have
taken to themselves the responsibility of representing the problems of women in their own unique way. It has also been influenced by the advances of science and technology. As such, fiction is bound to be the mirror of the cultural heritage of a particular country. And, feminism has not only become a subject-matter of fiction but also a powerful force of socio-cultural transformation. According to a mush estimate, women constitute half the world’s population. So for reckoning a social transformation and also economic transformation, the women-force has to be fully harnessed into creative channels.

The women novelists of the modern milieu in India have depicted feminism as a life force: for, they have presented a positive view of the entire scenario. Woman’s feminine sensibility, instead of being suppressed, must be given free vent to develop into a life-force. This creative life-force is certainly a creative unity which should be reflected in feminist writing. Violence against women, whether physical, mental or emotional, is an issue that crosses all borders and all classes of women.

Feminism and its crusade against a male dominated society are of special importance in the Indian context. The Indian women has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles –as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. A woman was and is expected to subordinate every wish and every desire to someone else -- a parent, a husband or a child. Marriage makes women dependent upon their
husbands. Even economic independence does not assist them to get themselves disentangled from the emotional dependence and attachment. Lack of emotions and spiritual oneness between husband and wife is highlighted in the novels. Marriage cannot bring happiness to both the spouses unless they surrender their ego and merge into each other.

But here the women novelists find that neither of the women protagonists is emotionally united with her husband as there is a difference in attitude towards life. The whole structure of the society is disorganized because the society in general and men in particular have not changed as such. Their attitude is also somewhat ambivalent. In their minds the picture of an ideal woman is more or less that of a traditional woman. At the same time, they do wish and expect their wives to be smart and cultured.

Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society. Feminism as an ideology and as a movement could not have left untouched in Indian English writings. Better education and employment opportunities have created a new awareness among Indian women. The Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future is the crux of feminism in India.

A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self-have become prime features of women in literature under the sway of feminism. This realization coupled with a shift of emphasis from the external to the internal world, has
resulted in an urge to deal with feminist issues by many Indian English novelists. Moreover, these concerns have lent to the works of modern novelists an intensity and depth which cannot leave the average reader untouched. Among modern women novelists, the most prominent are Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sagaral, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur.

The conflict created by the opposing forces of modernity and tradition was between romantic aspirations and the reality of life; personal fulfillment of desires and duty towards family. The Indian women writer’s pay attention to the problem that found in their novels where they are ultimately shown adjusting themselves to the reality. The conflict between emotion and reason becomes a very complex one. The girls are educated with a complete knowledge of their future but still they are tossed between the desire and submission to the parental authority. Thus, the problems of women regarding the adjustment have been the pre-occupation of most of the women novelists.

In the twentieth century, with the advent of western education and ideas, the horizon of the Indian woman has extended beyond the confines of her home and family. The wider spectrum of life has made the educated Indian woman, in particular, conscious of the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that regulate her life as a woman. She feels trapped in her role in the family and questions her socially-ordained subordinate status. Awakened to her individual potential she is loathing to return to her traditional position.
In India, feminism has been less of an “ism” and more of a social movement. It has a history of its own. During the Vedic period, woman enjoyed a privileged position and status almost equal to that of man. In the Manusmriti, it has been mentioned that where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased: but where they are dishonoured, there all religious acts become fruitless. The Vedic society, in fact, provided equal opportunities to women for their educational, mental and social growth. In The Mahanirvana Tantra, it has been mentioned that a girl should be brought up and educated with great effort and care. There is a common belief that some of the hymns of the Atharvana Veda were also composed by some women seers. Gargi, Chosha, Ghodha, Vishwavara, Apala, Maitreyi and Arundhati were illustrious Vedic women. Gradually, the status of a woman declined. (Mishra 10)

The personality of the typical Indian woman was swamped by the male-dominated and male-oriented culture. She was left with no mind and personality of her own. Moving towards education, work and politics was a traumatic struggle for her because suffering in silence has grown into her very being. She was gloried in her sufferings that were inflicted upon her by the wanton male. But during the sixties and the seventies of the present century, a feminine revolt took place the world over and it denounced all impositions on women in a patriarchal setup. Women, who were imprisoned by tradition, started to look upon her from a different angle and realised her own self. Instead of being moulded into the traditional image dictated by the society, she has taken the shape that reflects her true self.
Simone de Beauvior vehemently opposed all those institutions which worked against the betterment of the women. In an angry tone, she condemns marriage: for, marriage is the destiny offered to a woman by society. As long back as in 1792, a great feminist named Mary Wollstonecraft raised her voice of revolt against the patriarchal dominance on women. Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is a direct indictment of men for their exploitation of women. William Blackstone, an eminent Professor of Law at the Oxford University, also talked of providing equal legal rights to the women as long back as in 1758. John Stuart Mill was another famous supporter of the cause of women, who wrote *The Subjection of Women* (1869) to liberate women from the domestic slavery.

During the Victorian England, Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett and Charlotte Bronze voiced for women. In 1848, Queen’s College, the first Women’s College in England, was setup for imparting better education to girls. As such education enhanced necessary confidence in women and soon a large number of women entered many fields of social service like working for prison reforms, fighting alcoholism, cruelty to children and such other feminine causes. In 1833, Oberlin College in the USA was the first to admit women students. At Seneca Falls in New York in 1848, a huge congregation raised their protest against the impositions on women in the patriarchal setup of society. Elaine Showalter writes, The emphasis in each country falls somewhat differently: English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression;
American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All are struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority. (186)

Under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the task of women emancipation achieved laudable results. In *Woman Not a Weaker Sex* Gandhi says, “If I was born a woman. I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything” (Subramanian 38). In 1972, the *All Indian women Conference* was formed. There are at present more than 2500 independent agencies in the country working for women and children. In fact, from Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft, from Simone de Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, women have been demanding their rights in a male centric world.

Feminism is, therefore, a protest movement for demanding equal rights by the women. In the beginning of the 20th century, the feminist movement expressed itself in the Suffrage movement providing sufficient material for women novelists to write about such things. In 1697, Mary Astell in her famous books entitled *Their True and Greatest Interest* (1694) and *A Serious Proposal* (1697) stressed the role of women’s education in removing their inferiority and insecurity. Much later, Virginia Woolf also insisted the need of women’s education, their professionalism and economic independence.

The contemporary milieu of the recent of the Indo-fiction has witnessed the emergence of a number of women novelists who have portrayed women’s consciousness in their novels in many ways. The long list of such women novelists
includes Kamala Das, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Shourie Danick, Meena Mukherjee, and Kamala Markandaya. Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nargis Dalai, Deena Mehra, Nayantara Sahgal, Jai Nimbkar, Toro Ali Baig, Dina Mehta, Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. All these women novelists have shown and depicted not only the women’s feminine sensibilities in their novels, but also have established feminism in India as a social, economic and cultural movement. The women novelists in Indian English literature deal with the theme of love, marriage, loneliness and search for identity. According to B. K. Das,

Apart from love sex and contemporary reality, Indian English novelists have written feminists novels. Women novelists assert the rights of women to live their life in their own way. (57)

Kamala Markandaya’s novels come under this stream that elevates the womanhood. Her *Nectar in a Sieve* (1958) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966) are her memorable masterpieces, because they study the impact of technology on social structure. *The Coffer Dams* (1969) and *Pleasure City* (1982) are her forceful tales that depict the silent upheaval of social and familial structures in the grip of westernization. *A Silence of Desire* (1960) and *Two Virgins* (1973) expose intercultural and personal relationships in their full hypocritical intents. *Possession* (1963) and *The Nowhere Man* (1972) are the portrayals of the disturbing effects of political milieu on the lives of individuals yearning for self-realization and self-identification. *Some Inner Fury* (1955) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) also deal with the problem of self-assertion and self-identification of women.
Anita Desai’s novels are a documentation of the radical female resistance against the patriarchal concept of normality. She reflects the woman’s dilemma that is caught between two varying cultures, which is in fact the dilemma of Anita Desai herself. Moreover she is open in dealing with the heroine’s sexual encounters and the sexual violence inflicted on the female by the male. Anita Desai’s *Cry*, the *Peacock* (1963) is, like wise, a tale of Maya’s struggle for self-identification. *Voices in the City* (2005) symbolizes through Manisha, the women’s struggle for liberation. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is a tale of Sita, who silently but intelligently defies all taboos and moorings, forced on her in a patriarchal set-up of society. *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is Anita’s powerful novel which throws sufficient light on the women’s emotional tensions. However, some critics have also found traces of spiritual evolution in *Fire on the Mountain*. Anita’s fiction defies social conventions and, *Clear light of day* (1980) and *The Village by the Sea* (1982) are other monumental novels of Anita Desai in which she has touched upon other problems related to the cause of women.

Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow* (1971) and *Rich Like Us* (1985) present feminism in new perspective. The protagonist in *An Autumn Leaf* (1976) is Charishma, who is a very strong-willed woman. She rebels against whatever is smug. She is prepared to oppose whatever she considers to be wrong or illogical. She treats economic independence as the greatest helping force to a woman. Tara in *Spring Returns* (1977) also symbolizes complete freedom and liberation.
Feminism, as a concept, has originated in the West; its universal significance and relevance remains intact nonetheless. The vast scope of feminism has provided women writers across the world with the vocabulary and framework to articulate their experiences of female oppression and feminist longings. Current western feminist literary criticism has mainly manifested itself in two distinct schools of thought. The French and the Anglo-American (Jones 80-112). French theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Monique Wittig attack language, which they look upon as a tool of male domination to subjugate and relegate women to a secondary position. They allege that the very structure of language is phallocentric. That is, it has the male (or the phallus) as the nucleus of consciousness and considers him the originator of meaning and thought. French feminists question this primacy of the male. They reject all existing language and literature as patriarchal and attempt to structure what they call a parler femme or a feminine language (80).

On the other hand, the Anglo-American feminist critics have since the seventies, been preoccupied with the idea that many women writers have been neglected, silenced and excluded from the mainstream of literature. Instead it tries to light these ‘lost’ writers into the existing ‘male’ literary canon. These feminist critics have tried to write a parallel literary history of woolen writers. Critics like Showalter, Gilbert, Gubar and Cheri Register are also of the view that since woman’s consciousness and world-view are different from that of man’s their expression ought to be studied not in comparison with that of the man but by its own standards. A great deal of work is being done currently to suggest that
women’s use of literary forms is distinct from men’s. Critics are looking at the use by women of folklore, diaries, letters and autobiographies to establish this difference.

Together, Anglo-American and French feminist literary critics have played an important role in the deconstructions of existing modes of sexism in literature. Their principal objective has been to expose patriarchal practices (Moi 14). They study the ways in which patriarchy manifests itself in literature: the representation of women characters by male and female writers, the numerous ways in which women writers have been suppressed down the ages and the methods employed to subvert the suppression. They also reveal the internalization of patriarchal values implicit in the works of some women writers. Thus, the primary concern of Western feminist critics has been to unearth the subterranean patriarchal ideology manifest in language and literature, and to establish a canon of works by women which were until recently neglected by mainstream literature. The ambit, however, has been confined to the text.

According to Indian tradition, a woman must defer to her husband in every possible respect. She must make the marital home pleasant for him. She must cook the meals, wash the dishes and take care of the children. She must never enquire about money and she must acquiesce to her husband’s every demand. But with growing opportunities of education and employment, urbanization and industrialization, Indian women have become aware of their self-worth, acquired self-confidence and assured themselves of independence and individuality. They have started revolting against the oppressive
patriarchy and have started redefining their roles in the society. Women are not required to find her total fulfillment in submissive domesticity, but can assert her identity in the world outside, widespread with countless opportunities of education and employment.

In the novels of men writers, the feelings of women are not shown as they are rarely experienced in real life. It is the women writers who give a picture of new emerging women. Women writers have given much more stress to the issue of women in India in its varying aspects both traditional and modern. The feminist literary criticism has developed as a component of the women’s movement and its impact has brought a revolution in literary studies.

Although Indian feminist criticism is contrast to Western feminist literary criticism, it has yet to evolve into a distinct strand, its current aim is activism beyond the text, the earlier “image of woman” kind of criticism, practiced by some Indian feminist critics, which was descriptive and formalistic rather than feminist. It did not place the representations of woman in a socio-cultural framework. There are critics such as Susie, Tharu who, like the Anglo- American feminist critics, have been advocating the need to create a women’s literary tradition in India, including Indian English and regional women writers. Thaw has argued that in India, unlike in the West, feminist scholarship must not limit itself to retrieving women’s writings. It should also try to place it within the relevant literary socio cultural ambience, so that the significance of women’s texts might emerge as might the meaning of their silences. The construction of reality in India and the West is different and incompatible. With its past of colonization, and factors like
religion, caste, class and language, social reality in India can never be viewed in quite the same way as in the West. In modifying the Western feminist framework for the analysis of Indian literary works, the various processes of socialization, myths and legends endemic to Indian society would have to be considered.

Indian sociologists echo similar sentiments. According to Suma Chitins, the historical circumstances and values render the women’s issue different in India (Jha, 138). Women in India gained equal status directly with the drawing up of the Constitution; while in the West women had to wage a long war. Again, in India the institution of marriage and family is still considered necessary because of the security and social status given to both men and women, who find it difficult and traumatic to break away. So what makes Indian women ‘feminists’ different is the fact that they raise their voice against the social injustice and oppression of women rather than ask for her freedom from the institution of marriage and family.

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian feminism has gone hand in hand with activism relevant to Indian society. Feminists have sought the liberation of woman by advocating a ban on certain social customs such as polygamy, child-marriage, sati and purdah and by demanding educational and legal rights for her. Contemporary Feminists who were working for the eradication of social evils such as dowry deaths, female feticide and infanticide, rape, wife-beating and desertion, while also fighting for education, equal wages and economic independence of the woman. The issue may have altered since the 1930s. But the nature of the battle against her oppression remains the same. Not surprisingly, issues like single motherhood or lesbianism, which form an integral
part of western feminist discussions does not attract Indian feminists much, this is because the Indian socio-cultural fabric does not accommodate such ideas easily.

While the basic underlying principles of feminism in the West and the East are similar to great extent (since both movements aim at bettering the women’s lot, and at annihilating her oppression), the differences in the two historical and social contexts, necessitates a socio-cultural specific feminist approach to women’s writing in India. If the full import of writers such as Kapur’s depiction of women’s problem is to be apprehended by the reader, then this difference has to be recognized. In this thesis, reading of Kapur’s fiction with in an Indian-culture-specific feminist framework, aided by available social science research on the subject that has been dealt in detail.

The reason for choosing Manju Kapur for the study is that she writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle-class woman. Though Kapur writes for women, presents their problems, lets the world know the problems that women of today are facing, yet she cannot be categorized among feminist writers She makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles. Rather her writing deals with the inner mind of the women.

Every country has its own cultural heritage. As such, fiction is bound to be the mirror of the cultural heritage of a particular country. That is why, of late, feminism has assumed new names and shapes. The Indian feminism, too, has got wide popularity for, women novelists of the modern times have taken to
themselves the responsibility of representing the problems of the women in their own unique way. It has also been influenced by the advances of science and technology. As such it has become not only a subject-matter of fiction but also a powerful force of socio-cultural transformation.

According to a rough estimate, women constitute half the world’s population. So for reckoning a social and economic transformation, the woman force has to be fully harnessed into creative channels. The women novelists of the modern milieu in India have depicted feminism as a life hate: for, they have presented a positive view, of the entire scenario. Instead of suppressing women’s feminine sensibility, it must be given free vent to develop into a life force. This creative life force is certainly a creative unity which is found in the feminist writing. Focusing on the representation of women in Indian feminist writing Anita Myles observes:

Thus the Indian woman, as appropriately presented in the modern and post-modern fiction written in English by Indian women novelists behaves unlike her western counterpart in her evolution from the ‘feminine’ to the ‘female’. She is progressive and conscious of her rights like the contemporary western counterpart. But she quickly, compromises to the fact that a woman’s real position lies within the family-unit which she must sustain and protect and not ignore or neglect due to the false notion of being liberated. (130)
Industrial revolution is a form of the impact of science, which women novelists use in their novels. This scientific impact often comes up before the reader in the form of struggle for existence and survival. Veena Paintal’s *An Autumn Leaf* and *Spring Returns* are such fictional experiments. Much earlier, Charles Darwin postulated his monumental theory of the survival of the fittest. If characters from Veena Paintal’s novels, Charishma and Tam, have to exist, they have to be strong-willed women, or else they will not survive. This is of course a new dimension of the Indian feminism that follows the Darwinian principle “the survival of the fittest”.

Society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. Family life and the work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate and dependent on man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to protect her and keep her under his control. But in the pre-Aryan age women were free and equal to man. It was only in the middle ages down to the present one that the male-ordained moralist society raised four walls for her to prohibit her from the rights equal to man. The taboos were laid down to restrict woman’s life and her freedom. Her position in the family as well as in society kept on changing all through the ages and is almost invariably an inferior one. She is hardly given any freedom. She is treated as a creature who is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband’s family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral fire to be acclaimed as ‘Sati-Savitri’ as an immortal.
It was only in the early decades of the twentieth century that social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Jotiba Phule started new movements to reform the society and especially the condition of women in our country. When Gandhi directed the nation’s spiritual and moral strength to the non-violent struggle for freedom, there was a far reaching change in women and her position in the family as well as in the society. She no longer remained the dumb creature she was earlier.

Besides, the western influence, coming through liberal education, forced new values and norms of life upon women. It becomes a time of political, cultural and social change and though woman, most of the time, remained in the family, she became a part of the stirring movement. Though in India, legally speaking, she is given more rights than anywhere else, the dominance of male and the submissive nature of woman has been embedded so deeply into the Indian psyche that the opportunities and rights given to woman remain only in word. The male-dominated society does not want her to be equal to man. The male mentality is shaped in such a way that they cannot believe in woman being equal to them.

In spite of the educational opportunities and economic independence, women are surrounded by domestic injustice and the crude customs of our society. They wink outside as well as inside the home. They give birth to children and bring them up. Their own sons see them working outdoors and indoors: still they, in future want to treat their wives in the same manner. The writers of the contemporary world came out rapidly from historical romance and mythic stories and presented the realities of the life of women. As the image of woman, family
and society kept on changing all through the years, the writer’s views, too, were all changing resulting in a variety of realistic images.

Going back to the history of the emergence of women writers in Indian writing in English, we see that it was of great significance during the last quarter of the 19th century. As K.S. Ramamurti, in his book *Rise of the Indian Novel in English* (1987) supports the point by saying that though the “output was scanty, it was qualitatively superior to those of many others who wrote before and after them” (66). It was the same period when the well-known, reputed writers like Toru Dutt, Mrs Ghosal, Sorabji Carnella and Krupabai Sathianathan were on the scene.

The emergence of women writers writing in English in India is of great importance. It brings a new age of brightness for Indian women. Social reforms influenced by the great personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi and the foreign personalities like William Bentinck had its great impact on the status of women in Indian society and brought them out of the tyranny of the social evils. But the subordination still lingered long in the society and

The relief from dependency was still out of the reach of most women. So the battle for emancipation was taken over by a few educated women who, in their effort to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideas of social returns, turned writers (67).
The earlier writers presented the traditional Sita image, an object of pity, but later on as times changed, the realistic image of woman, her sense of frustration and alienation began to appear. The introduction of English education, which was instrumental in bringing significant changes in the middle-class lifestyle, started creating questions in the minds of the readers. Some girls after reading English novels got the idea of romantic love and they longed for it in their Indian surroundings which became the subject for the Indian writers, especially for women writers. In their writings, they began to portray women as facing the conflicts and problems of fusing tradition and modernity. The transition from the old to the new, the crisis of value adaptation strikes deeper in to the lives of our women than our men.

Given the number of exciting innovations in women’s writings in recent years, any critical observation have to be in the nature of an interim report. The stunning explosion of female talent has created a new wave of women writers, most of women are only beginning to realize their potential, and who will go further in directions as yet unimagined. There is also much work for women writers still to do in continuing to explore the intimate aspects of their lives as women, as daughters, as mothers, in sexual relations with men, and with each other, or as women alone, besides the ongoing challenge of mapping those areas of experience still under patriarchal taboo.

The conflict created by the opposing forces of modernity and tradition was between romantic aspirations and the reality of life: personal fulfillment of desires and duty towards family. A writer’s attention to the problem is found in the novels
where her heroines are ultimately shown adjusting themselves to the reality. The conflict between emotion and reason becomes a very complex one. The girls are educated with a complete knowledge of their future but still they are tossed between the desire and submission to the parental authority. For example, Kamala Markandaya in her novel *Two Virgins* explores the problems of the growth of a girl’s awareness, the change in her as she gets caught up in the events around her and returns to the family fold and the code of conduct but without her childhood innocence.

In fact, the images, whether they are of men or women, are not constructed in a vacuum. The social context has a great deal to do with the perspectives from which we observe the society. A woman may be seen and understood by her father in one way, her husband in another way, her son and daughter in some other ways, and by herself in yet another way. The opinion of each of the perceivers depends on his/her interaction with her in different situations. So, the writers, especially women writers, having experienced different phases of women in different roles, have reflected the same in their fiction resulting in a feminine form.

Sociologists find that woman suffers due to her emotional attachment with home. She does not want to bear the pain of being away from home as a wife and mother. But since her sense of individuality has matured by the introduction of education, she does not want to lead a passive married life of a sacrificial and shadowy creature. She expects a measure of satisfaction. An Indian woman has to perform many roles at a time. Promilla Kapur, a sociologist, thinks that the husband is mainly responsible for the tensions:
They like wives to take up jobs but dislike them to change at all as
tar as their attitude towards their roles and statuses at home is
concerned and dislike their traditional responsibilities being
neglected which results from their pre-occupation with out-of-home
vocation. Their altitude towards their wives being employed is
found to be ambivalent (366)

Education and economic conditions have changed the attitudes and have
created a need to work. The working wife has to face the problems of marital
adjustment. She experiences a conflict of values. She is not able to combine the
two roles thrust upon her, those of the woman in the family and the woman as a
worker. She just cannot avoid disturbing the harmony of the family and thus
ultimately wants to submit. Promilla Kapur gives the reason for woman being
submissive: “Centuries of tradition have made the Indian woman the most patient
woman in the world, whose pride is suffering” (366). As India is a country that has
faced many changes in her past and all the time has tried to adapt herself to the
situation, so is the woman of India, who is always adjustable to the situation and
so is the literature winch keeps reflecting the changing images of life.

In olden days, the voice of women used to go unheard and unsung in the
patriarchal world. Though the world today is still patriarchal and male-ordained,
the women have gained legal as well as social liberty to voice their problems and
to protest against injustices done to them. It was sometime in the 60s that the
women’s liberation started. The women came to the forefront and tried very
enthusiastically to over throw all the taboos ordained by male-dominated society.
But unfortunately their enthusiasm could not continue for a long time. Issues like individual freedom and equality with men to longer exist and now the question is how far women have succeeded in getting rights for which they fought.

Feminism in the Indian context for Manju Kapur does not mean taking the militant anti-men and anti-marriage stance. It means, instead, concerted action by men and women towards the making of a more mature and balance gender relationship. Every relationship has its share of problems; there can be no generalizes solution. Everybody has to work out her/his own strategy to overcome problems. At present, the woman bears the burden of making the effort to free her from the oppressive patriarchal stereotypes that society has imposed on her. However, egalitarian society will emerge only when everybody realizes that she is an Independent human being. In the meanwhile, in Kapur’s vision, women must insist and they must not succumb to the pressures of patriarchy, particularly in the domestic arena, because they are educated. In a rendezvous with Pathak etc., Kapur says,

I write about what I see, in particular about the lives of the women. I see the adjustments… happen to all around me, the class of the women doesn’t matter. (115)

Manju Kapur, in her works, defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong, glorified female heroes, and has presented the Indian woman as facing the very real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. Manju Kapur bears the subtle processes of oppression
and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male-centered Indian society at large. Kapur’s feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include religious and cultural elements (such as myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies) and social and psychological factors (such as woman’s subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality). The protagonists of Manju Kapur’s novels are modern, educated, independent women, roughly between the age of thirty and thirty five. Their search for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme.

Woman in Manju Kapur’s novels is initially an unconventional one, but death is not the way out of her. She willingly submits herself to the tradition, perhaps realizing the wisdom of the traditional ways at this stirring moment of the transitional phase of society. Ultimately, she is an appendage to man or family. Though economically independent, she is emotionally dependent on her husband. She occupies a central place in Kapur’s novels. The novelist presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phases, underlying reasons and to some extent, to suggest a way out of it. It becomes more interesting to analyze the image of woman in the novels when it is portrayed by a woman. Woman, today, plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. Still there is something that provokes conflict in her mind and makes her restless. The endeavor here would be to see how far Manju Kapur has succeeded in presenting a realistic picture of this woman who is presented in her novels in the
family set up as well as outside the family. She presents the struggle of the Indian woman at the cross-roads. According to Sunita Sinha,

Manju Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. Striking a balance between a neutral coexistence and unfettered freedom and space on the other, Kapur’s eloquent narration of women’s issues is nevertheless, both Indian and universal.

The picture gained from this study is one which helps us understand and perceive the real dilemma of middle-class educated women. Kapur has tried to make her women characters stronger than they are in real life. She has exposed their anxiety and confusion. As we witness in this transitional era the educated women demand more sexual freedom and independence but are not very sure about what they should do with the same, which leads them to a bitter confusion, anxiety and tension. Their psychology is still wedded to tradition. They have started recognizing the need for change, but at the same time they continue to cling to the old values as they have been brought up with them. This picture of women has found place in Manju Kapur’s novels.

The main themes that have found expression in Manju Kapur’s novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, parent-child relationship, and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a great fascination for Manju Kapur. She deals with the inner working of the female psyche. The writer has tried to convey to the society that the need of the time, in this transitional phase, is not a total revolt but a gradual change in the society for which everyone has to put some
effort to bridge the gap between the old and the new generation. Kapur’s technique fuses the methods of the modernist, the postmodern and the traditional storyteller.

Manju Kapur, being the author of 90s, understands the women well, and has tried to project a realistic picture of the middle-class educated woman who is financially independent. Initially, she wanted to bring forth in her novels the changed society, but she was so much fascinated by her women characters that she laid more emphasis on women. She herself says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. The predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on woman caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught which arise in such a transitional world.

The reasons for Manju Kapur choosing the middle-class woman might be: (a) her own background as she hails from a middle-class family, (b) She is pre-occupied with the social forces at work in society: the clash between the old and the new; between idealism and pragmatism: and (c) the middle class woman represents a larger part of the contemporary Indian society. The woman she portrays is undeniably a fore runner of the doomed female of modem India. The portrayal is quite unique. She neither represents the old, orthodox image, nor a modern westernized woman, but presents every woman of the Indian middle-class society, who tries hard to rise above tradition but is involuntarily adapted into it.

Though Indian woman who is educated and employed is economically independent, financial freedom is not enough. Family marriage and social norms
bind her completely. Even the political laws, which guarantee her the quantum of civic and political rights, remain on paper only. The ideal man-woman relationship in the Indian context (as the dominant man and the submissive woman) is so prominent that even the most brilliant and so-called forward male is incapable of looking at woman in terms of equality. This is exactly what Kapur has tried to show: the women, even after resisting the social taboos want to submit themselves to their conventional roles.

In a personal interview with Shashi Deshpande she justifies her views:

What are these cultural valves? I find it very hard to answer that question. The way I see it is that the world is changing. Forget the rest of the world; India is itself changing very fast today. Certain things have to change. It is not because we want to change but because there is no choice. For example, those women have to go to work today. It is not a matter of choice for many but it is a necessity. That we are not living as a joint family ---it is also not a matter of choice. It is a necessity because people live in small families in the cities, their parents live elsewhere, and their children have jobs elsewhere. All these things are coming out of circumstances and everything is not as chosen. So we cannot say whether women are going to be won over by cultural values. It is a predicament common to both men and women. We are all holding certain things that we may call culture. For me the word culture is a very vague word. In fact, I don’t like the word at all. It means many
things; most often it means stupid things. Like holding on to what
used to be done many years before. That is tradition--not culture.
And again tradition has to be given up because life compels us. I
think that Indian women are adapting to changing times better than
Indian men are. This is the way I look at it. Because one thing is
clear---that Indian women are undergoing a huge change in their
lives. Nowadays it is common that a woman has to undergo
education, to go for a job. The only question for each is: should I or
should I not .What is not changing is the role inside the family. So I
see the conflict there. I see that the conflict of men is also there.
Because it is hard for men to give up their old rules. It is a very
difficult thing for a man I am not blaming anybody here. But the
role a man has been assuming for centuries---today you ask him to
give it up and tell him that he is not the head of the family, that he
and his wife are equals. This is very hard. So this is while I see the
conflict. This need not be mixed-up with cultural values.

(Personal Interview)

In Manju Kapur’s novels, we observe a change corresponding to the
change in the contemporary society. We notice that the plot begins with an
unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems, adjustment and
conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists, and ultimately then endeavor to
submit to the traditional roles. Generally, there are two types or roles played by
women characters in Indian fiction. One is conventional and the other is
unconventional. Both the types suffer in one way or the other. Woman in Manju Kapur’s novels is initially an unconventional one, but death is not the way out for her. The endeavor here would be to see how far Manju Kapur has succeeded in presenting a realistic picture of this woman who is presented in her novels in the family set up as well as outside the family.

Thus, Manju Kapur’s concern for women which is deeply rooted in the line of social-moral fiction is reflected in her fiction. Social problems, especially those of the middle-class Indian woman, are evident in her novels. Rooted in the culture in which she (the middle class woman) lives, is tuned to accept the problems in her life. Since Manju’s fiction is women-centered, the feminine consciousness becomes the protagonist of her novels. Her women are placed between two poles, tradition and modernity, between family and profession, and between culture and nature. Manju mixes feminism and humanism in her novels. So her vision of Indian women tends to be optimistic. She aspires to reach a stage when she can write about human beings and not about men or women. Human relationships - like that between a mother and a daughter, a father and a daughter, a husband and a wife - figure in Manju’s fiction. In all these relationships, the centre-stage is occupied by women and the narration is sighted through Manju’s feminist consciousness.

Manju Kapur having important novels to her credit has emerged as one of the mainstream women writers in India today. Her work is comparable to that of the established writers Anita Desai and Nayantara Shagal, her contemporaries, who have also registered their protest against patriarchal oppression in their
writing. Manju Kapur’s work has drawn critical attention because of her detailed, sensitive and realistic representations of the Indian middle-class woman in the domestic sphere. Her concern for women and their oppression is reflected strongly in all her writing. In ‘Random Reads Interview’ when Kapur is asked about her characters, she says:

These are the lives I observe around me. Women’s lives – at least here – I can’t really speak with authority about other places – are complicated and a source of endless interest. In India women are often caught between the traditional and modern, caught between the family and their individual desires. As a novelist this is where I place my stories.

Her novels depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian woman caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence for the woman on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the woman to full fill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. She has examined a variety of common domestic crises, which trigger off the search. Kapur’s concern and sympathy are primarily for the woman.

While revealing the woman’s struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity for herself, the author subtly bears the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society. This stance of Kapur’s makes her a feminist writer. Kapur says that her novels are written from the inside, as it were. Just as a woman cannot get deeply under a man’s skin, so
too a man cannot fully appreciate the feminine experience. Such writing necessitates a feminist reading. What makes her an especially interesting author to study is her ability to depict situations, characters, dilemmas straight out of everyday domestic life.

Manju Kapur’s novels primarily explore experience of oppression of Indian women in the domestic set-up. The experiences which are rooted in the presumption that a woman is an inferior being, the one who carries the burden of being an unwanted female child, who has to battle an ingrained, deeply entrenched patriarchal system - gives rise to the problems specific to their sex. It is among the middle-classes that the stereotypical values attached to social roles are inculcated in the girl child. The causes of conflict and oppression of the women originate within the family. Interpersonal relationships are laden with fiction at emotional, intellectual and sexual levels.

What happens in Kapur’s fiction is: the woman’s western education awakes in her a desire for freedom and individuality which is resisted in a traditional society and this leaves her alienated and discontented. The marital relationship too has its share of overt manifestations of oppression. Both wit and women are socialized into accepting the male’s superiority. Strange as it may seem, the day-to-day strife on the domestic front is the most intangible part of the Indian woman’s existence and contributes in good measure to her suffering.

Manju Kapur attempts to deconstruct the numerous levels of patriarchal and sexist bias employed towards girls and women in Indian middle class society, particularly in a marriage or within the family set-up. She is a feminist who shows
perception and awareness of the dilemma facing the woman in a society which is predominantly patriarchal. She does not recommend militancy because she feels that in the Indian context aggressive feminism does not ring true. For Manju Kapur, feminism means an improved relationship between man and woman, an erasure of gender discrimination and all oppressive practices against a woman from female foeticide and unequal pay to dowry and rape.

Most of her characters and situations are rooted in the values and mores of the Indian middle-class. Her feminism sometimes seems a little uncertain because it is not radical or anti-male. However, she is firm in her conviction that in India, particularly, feminism cannot be ‘anti male’ since both man and woman have to communicate and work towards a better, more meaningful, companionable relationship. Therefore, although the feminist framework employed to analyze her work is conceptually a Western framework, it has been substantially adapted to the Indian socio-cultural milieu to read and analyze Kapur’s fictional depictions.

The predicament of Kapur’s protagonists is peculiarly Indian as experienced and endorsed by many a Western-educated Indian leader. Therefore, factors like the milieu in which the Indian woman exists, her socialization, her roles as daughter or wife or mother, the myths that guide and motivate her since childhood and the impress of Western education on her have been examined with the help of social science research on the subject.

The characters in Kapur’s fiction have been placed within the Indian socio-cultural context and a study made of the manner in which Kapur suggests a balance between the traditional respect for the family as an institution and the
Western idea of self-identity and expression, as a working philosophy for the Indian woman. In doing so, Kapur belongs not only among the Indian English novelists but also among the regional writers such as *Ashapurna Devi*, *Balainani Anima* and *Ismat Chugiai* who have similarly created the details of a woman’s world with loving care and depicted the nuances of her consciousness with the empathy of insiders while advocating her liberation. Manju Kapur writes that the new woman is assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her inner self; in these years, as class-oriented fiction has emerged, the woman still suffers, but not in silence, as she used to be.

Thus the thesis is an attempt to discuss feminist rage and evolution of womanhood in Manju Kapur’s novels. Towards the end of the twentieth century, feminism as a core concept recognizes world realities in relation to human relationship, more specifically to man-woman relationship. Sahgal points out: “Feminism in India is making a tremendous impact with less noise and drama than in the west”. The main focus of the Indian feminists has gone beyond treating women as useful members of society and a right to parity, but also having the power to decide the course of their personal lives and the right of self-determination.

In Kapur’s fiction, we can analyse the position of ‘woman’ from an Indian standpoint which is rather inclusive drawing on the insights and precision of radical socialism, women-centred psychology and Western-Indian feminist literary theories.