INTRODUCTION

There are so many dimensions to the study of women and society, that research in this area would always be productive, as it is imbued with the potential of generating a new perspective in theme or methodology. The present study takes into account the relation between a cultural product like the Indian English novel and women, besides substantiating the norms governing role and position of Indian women specifically in the near-Independent, Post-Independent period and also socio-cultural influences, which have made Indian women, (represented by the sample for empirical study) what they are today. The aim of the study is to evolve a structuralist, socio-cultural perspective for an understanding of women, an understanding of cultural literary forms and to identify factors which can generate a consciousness stimulating perceptual change.

The study is based on the hypothesis, that cultural literary representations of women are productively interactive with women's consciousness, and as such can have a bearing on social change.

This hypothesis has been tested through a sample which corroborates the view that women, who have for years,
survived through prescriptive cultural norms show, statistically a small, but qualitatively a radical change.

As the title suggests, this study is concerned with an inquiry into an entirely new phenomenon - The Indian English Novel - which, as a colonial product, has been used to provide a perspective to an understanding of the relation between women and society. The study is thus based on various dimensions or aspects of society, which can converge in order to enhance one's insights into social processes, cultural products and the status of women. This study aims also at analyzing and testing different ways in which one can approach a study of women and society and settle upon a perspective, which is appropriate to the understanding of the relation between Indian women and their society - delimiting the study, by and large, to urban, middle and upper class women, while investigating the emergence of a new literary genre, in which women, initially have had apparently, an insignificant role to play. The study discovers the dynamic significance of literary representations of the socio-cultural milieu, as they impinge upon the consciousness of women, affecting their social and self-perspectives.

The Significance of the Study is determined by the scope of the study, in that it seeks to establish any such
factors or inter-related aspects, which bring about a change in the consciousness of women. The study, thus, involves a survey of various models and methods established by feminist theories, which may be applied to a study of Indian women taking into account their cultural specificity, determined by the colonial impact, and its consequent urban English education. The basic premise of the study, is that the established variables have a direct role to play in determining the consciousness and status of women. A sociological survey of the position of women through different socio-historical junctures points out to the importance of class, caste and education as important determining factors. Over time, the role and impact of media were identified as important factors responsible for conditioning the consciousness of women and men. Writers drew their characters from real life and as such they became representations of the writers' own attitudes as also the social attitudes to women. This study analyzes the representations made especially by women writers and their role in influencing the viewpoints of women. The findings point out the need for delineation of social reality thorough women's perspective - a perspective which is different from that of male writers, when it comes to representing experience specific to women.
By focusing on the interaction between a cultural literary product like the Indian novel in English, written by women, and women readers, the study highlights the special place of women's studies and women's research in generating a process of consciousness raising.

The study focuses also on more relevant methodology, for research on women — methodology which has moved away from a conventional sociological approach to a less static approach involving the use of more than one method at a time.

METHODOLOGY

The results of any research work are determined by the methodology adopted. The most widely used and conventional tools of research include questionnaire, interview guide and participant observation. However, with an increase in research on women's studies, there has been a reformulation of research strategy, in order to use and study data from a broader perspective. Moreover, for studying gender and women, feminist methodology is a significant tool in itself which aims at capturing the essence of women's social and personal experiences. The methodology provides quantitative and qualitative data, and insights into life patterns and experiences of women.
The present study has adopted reformulated methodology which aims at reconstructing ways in which social reality impinges on the lives of women by virtue of gender differentials, reinforced by patriarchal family systems.

The most important aspect of the methodology is linked with identifying the problem to which the study has addressed itself. The problem was stated as part of the hypothesis that socialization determines the status quo, and whenever there is any deviation from the status quo, whether inherent or induced, it can be referred back to the patterns of socialization. Women have been socialized into accepting positions of secondary status, and as progenitors subserving the needs of patriarchal family systems. However, with changes in any of the established variables in the systems outside the family, changes are induced into the family impinging upon the consciousness of women and modifying their social and self perceptions.

Most sociological studies dealing with this aspect of change among women have identified class and modern education as two important factors responsible for change. This study has identified a cultural product, like women's Indian English novel as an important source for conditioning the consciousness of those women who are exposed to it. At
the same time, the study has taken up the issue of evolving a feminist perspective for the study of Indian women's social status, through models and paradigms, like the Gandhian model for change in women's status. The study has found that women who sought change were those who had attained a level of consciousness, which motivated them into transcending some of the gendered boundaries created by the perpetuation of patriarchal system.

Once the problem to be addressed had been identified, the next step was to select the target group which could serve as a representative sample. Since the study aimed at defining and understanding the status of women through a globally new cultural product like the Indian English Novel, it became important to apply relevant criteria on the basis of which the sample could be drawn. Since modern education has created a new class of women, which is either instrumental in perpetuating victorian norms of patriarchy or seeks adjustments within existing patriarchal systems for equality of opportunity and greater freedom of expression. For this reason, a survey was first made and areas in which the sample was available were demarcated. These areas were given preference over others also because of their accessibility and relevance. The sample was, therefore drawn from areas in the vicinity of Delhi University, Jawaharlal
Nehru University and Jamia Milia University, comprising women undergraduates, post-graduate research scholars and college/university lecturers. The time involved in interacting with the respondents, making notes, and scanning questionnaires spread ever eighteen to twenty months, subsequent to the initial survey made in order to define the target group. The empirical study was based partly on the methodology conceived by Lillian Rubin, (1976) and it proved productive. The textual study which has two distinct dimensions, followed a different course. The analysis of sociological studies of the status of women was based on bibliographies cited in some outstanding data-based studies like the Report of the committee on the study of status of women, initiated by the Government of India in 1972. Apart from this data was gathered from the office of Manushi - a journal of women and society, launched by an Editorial collective in 1979. Material was also extracted from the library of the Centre for the Development of women's studies.

The findings corroborate the premise that the reinforcement of patriarchal norms has led to the secondary, status of women, which is exploitable and exploited. Another finding is that modern education became easily available to urban women but it did not change their
position in the society from being functional towards perpetuation of the patrilineal family into which they were married, more because of parental or social pressure, rather than from personal choice. Thus, the analysis reveals that lives of women, irrespective of being urban and educated, are essentially, marriage-cum-family centred, without any significant change in their social status. The second aspect of the textual study involving literary representations of women was confronted with the problem of approach or perspective. Since the study is concerned with the feminist dimension it became important to define and delimit areas to be taken up for study, as also the nature of investigation, i.e. what the study would be looking for in the texts. This necessitated a chapter on the approach to Cultural Literary studies based mainly on work undertaken by western scholars. This pointed out also to the dearth, almost an absence of any such work undertaken, by Indian Scholars till as late as 1989-1991. The need for more work in this field has become self-evident.

Another aspect of textual study of the status of women involved, a representation of the experiences of womanhood through women novelists who became part of the the new cult of Indian English writings. The problem, one faced in this connection related to the selection of novelists who would
provide a representative picture of the trends in the development of women novelists. Moreover, it was important to identify works on the basis of the significance they had with regard to the portrayals of women as functionary units of the Indian Society. The first step in this process was taken on the basis of the information provided by the respondents from the initial survey of the target sample. A study of the background of women novelists was undertaken and a pattern discerned. The writers' own life experiences and exposure sensitized them to various issues related specifically to women. A trend, common to all these novelists was the development also of literary techniques like introspective revelations, bringing to light the latent tendencies, responses, desires and reactions of women. A study of literary representations is important in that it provides an insight into experiential status of women, whereas the analysis of sociological studies brings to light the socio economic status of women.

The perspective through which the study gains its orientation is an important determinant for the kind of data generated by the investigations made. For this reason a detailed survey of various feminist schools of thought has been made a part of the work undertaken, in order to establish the importance of relevant modes of inquiry. An
understanding of the social position of women, would be facilitated by a perspective which focuses on women's articulation of their experience of gendered social reality.

The Research adopted the following course: The study thus begins with raising questions around the concept of feminism, tracing its development through various societies, each of which, however, is structured on patriarchy and concludes with putting forward the perspective appropriate to the study of Indian women.

Subsequently, the study concerns itself with evolving appropriate approaches to the study of cultural literary work concerned with delineating interrelations between society and representations of various dimensions of that society. This chapter proved especially useful because it also pointed to the importance of work in this field, which has been neglected.

Another chapter focuses on the development of a distinctly new genre with the purpose of examining the relation between women and the new literary phenomenon of the Indian English novel. This aspect uses the western source of orientation, based on the belief that there is a distinct affinity between gender and genre, a relation which has brought forth another dimension to the study of women.
A dimension which has been explored in Chapter five, under the title of Women Literature and society.

The chapter based on analysis of sociological investigations of women's status follows a conventional pattern of using secondary sources for gaining insights into social reality. A subsequent chapter on empirical study aims at identifying social variables which impinge upon the consciousness of women highlighting the important role of Indian English women novelists whose depictions and representations provide mimetic and alternate patterns of ideology and behaviour.

REFERENCES
