ABSTRACT
The present thesis aims at analyzing two works of Manju Kapur—A Married Woman (2002), Difficult Daughters (1998) and two works of Anita Nair—The Better Man (1999) and Ladies Coupé (2001) in the light of feminist theories. Both writers portray women who are on the threshold of self-discovery and have suddenly decided to take their lives into their own hands. They are women who are searching for strength and independence and focus on the inner strength possessed by women as human beings. Their works encourage our understanding in terms of women who are each caught in a net of relationships that are partly made by them and partly made for them.

The purpose of this research is to examine how the narration of these struggles on the part of their female characters in relation to other characters in the novels might contribute to the general empowerment of women, in terms of achieving power in order to take part in decision making, designing their lives, influencing the social and political process. The key concept of this research is to investigate how “Othering” creates and sustains systems of patriarchy.

In order to connect the events of the novel to the empowerment of women, I assume that the novels enable some degree of transformation in their readers by providing examples of new ways of living in the world which are not available to many of their Indian female readers. I evaluate these new modes of living in terms of the concepts of patriarchy, subjectivity, gender inequality, marginality, and passivity. My main source of insight into these concepts as they relate to the struggles of women are the following six Western and Indian feminist writers. The first group includes Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86), Betty Friedan (1921-2006), Luce Irigaray (1937- ), Elaine
Showalter (1941- ) and the second group includes the Indian feminists—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942- ) and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. Each of these thinkers focuses on the main issues that I examine in my research, but to add support and clarity to my analysis of all the important episodes in the novels I have used some relevant ideas of other thinkers, such as Hegel, Indira J. Parikh and K. Garg, Frederick Engels, Kate Millett, Judith Butler, Leela Gandhi, Toril Moi, Carl Roger, and so on.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In chapter one, the introduction I discuss how women as a category of humanity are heterogeneous and their status differs from that of men, and how socio-cultural factors determine the status of women in a society. Later I present a short biography of both novelists and give a detailed account of the purpose of the research; explain the concepts around which the research revolves namely, "empowerment", "marginality," "new woman," "patriarchy," "subjectivity," "gender and sex;" and in the last section I summarize the chapters.

In Chapter Two titled Feminism, the six feminist thinkers named above are examined. Although our major concern is the Indian woman and feminism in India, I focus on Western’s feminist views to connect these concerns to the issues shared by women all over the world.

Chapter Three centers on Manju Kapur’s Works—Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman. This chapter discusses Simone de Beauvoir’s view of the cultural factors underlying the concept of woman; the notion of the *gendered subaltern*, and incomplete speech act, and the nature of the term marginality according to Spivak; and Sunder Rajan’s definition of women’s silence. The other issue I talk about in this
chapter is the mother-daughter relationship. I also survey the issue of education and its two different kinds in regards to feminism, one that trains girls to follow the rules of patriarchy without question and the other that encourages girls to ask questions about their condition.

In chapter four two works of Anita Nair—The Better Man and Ladies Coupé—are taken under consideration. The major issues I talk about are Irigaray’s view of the exchange of women in society, the process a male child goes through in achieving a position superior to that of women and how the stages of this process are executed as a kind of ritual, the slipperiness of the term marginality in relation to “age”, the variations of subjectivity according to the differences among women, Friedan’s view of gender inequality, superwoman, and superman, de Beauvoir’s definition of marriage and the term Other, and Irigaray’s use of the phrase “How am I to listen to you?” as a method for women to listen to each other.

Chapter Five, the conclusion, initially offers a brief review of chapters and later I juxtapose the analysis of novels. Then I talk about the themes of all four novels, and issues which are not dealt with in the novels the relation between the empowerment of the women’s character, and social and political liberty. Later I discuss in which areas I could use the thought of these feminist thinkers and which of them were more useful and why. In the end I conclude with my view of what all these women were generally in search of, and the important issues I believe feminists have to focus on to achieve emancipation.