ABSTRACT

The dissertation attempts to study the importance attributed to woman in the domestic forefront based on the popular biblical notion, “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands”. (Proverbs 14:1) It presents the study of selected women from the galore of exemplary women of the Holy Bible who were virtuous and subsequently became successful in building their families in contrast with the vicious women who failed in discharging familial and filial responsibilities and ultimately ruining their families and thus offering a lucid perception of “home-makers” or “home-breakers” in a family structure.

This dissertation also presents certain parallels in the characteristic traits of the Biblical female figures and the women characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. Some of the fictional works of these novelists have been selected for critical scrutiny as they predominantly focus on women and their predicaments. Though life and society are dynamic, certain values are universal and eternal. The variations in contexts, age, milieu and culture do not deter a meaningful critique. Such an inquiry, it is felt, would reveal the commonalities of virtuous or vicious traits of women characters reflected in these works.

The study touches upon the biographies of selected biblical women by exploring the various meanings, explanations and
implications through an intense reading of the concerned text leading to a variety of interesting and motivating interpretations useful to present day women. In the wake of crisis in human, moral and family values, long cherished Christian beliefs assume a greater significance.

It is generally believed that the essence of any religion is universal goodness. Human civilization owes a lot to religion and spirituality as it prescribes the ways and means of pious living. Almost all the religions provide a sense of direction for a meaningful life and the religious values are deeper in any social context. The Holy Bible is no exception as it conspicuously presents a moral code for all the facets of life.

The study is formulated on the fact that the women are unsuccessful in their roles as wives owing to the reason that the role assigned is probably one of the most misunderstood roles in human history. In the contemporary world of materialism and commercialization, the sanctity of marital relationships is gradually dwindling. They are pursued on temporary basis. The attitudinal incompatibility, unfulfilled aspirations, perversion, spiritual malnourishment and temperamental problems often rock the marriages and pose a serious threat to the very institution. Precisely this is against the divine will and policy.

The aim of the study is to find the meaning and purpose of conjugal relationship, the concept of unity in marriage and the role of a woman in building or breaking her family. And also to bring
women to the forefront of biblical interpretation by reading and interpreting the biblical texts that involved virtuous and vicious women either as characters or as topics of discussion, in order to relate the traits to the women of the present day, besides tracing the similar virtuous or vicious traits in the women characters as projected in the selected novels from Indian Writing in English.

Hence an attempt is made to identify the female characters in the Bible and to deliberate their lives contextually besides relating virtues portrayed by the women of the Bible to the women of the modern society or bring out the weeds of vices exhibited by these biblical women and relate to the women of the present society by bringing parallels in the characters of the Bible and fiction, thus facilitating the present day women to ponder over the causes of their failures in their families and helping them to exterminate the weeds of vices for their successful married life. The study is not intended to be didactic or prescriptive but it is a holistic view on the current problems in marriage and possible remedies.

The work is conveniently divided into five chapters on the basis of thematic relevance and significance. **Chapter I** presents the Biblical account of the creation of woman in the beginning of the Universe, the rationale behind the idea to crop up, the purpose of her creation, the status attributed to woman according to the Bible, the stature of woman in the Hindu society, marriage and its significance, reasons for the failures in marriage, remedy wrought by the Holy Bible for the problem of marital disharmony in the modern scenario.
The dissertation proceeds to understand the importance attributed to marriage in bringing conformity, maintaining solidarity, and promoting continuity of the well knit society and also tries to bring out the reasons for the failures in marriage leading to separation.

The dissertation discusses the literary qualities of the Bible by taking into consideration the presence of repertoire of genres and subgenres, the subject matter which is the stuff of real life, the recurring presence of Archetypes, the presence of grandeur themes and the figurative language employed. It also expounds how ‘the stories of the past’ carry ‘lessons for the present’ bringing ‘hope for the future’. As such an attempt is made to focus on texts depicting women characters (virtuous or vicious) in the Bible to glean important lessons for the women of the modern society. From the repertoire of women biographies from the Bible dependable, devotional, devout and dedicated women like Ruth, Hannah, Elisabeth and Proverbs 31 Woman or The Virtuous woman, respectively are selected for the present study. And vicious women, who are disobedient, dangerous and destructive, and deceiving like Eve, Jezebel and Sapphira respectively, are also selected. In order to relate the characteristic traits of the virtuous and vicious women of the Bible to the women of the society certain women characters from some Indian fiction are selected.

The study proceeds to trace in brief, the genesis of women writing in India and also the emergence of Indian novel in English. From the
A galore of women writers, four women writers, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy and Shobha De, who have dexterously dealt with the theme of marriage and man-woman relationship, are selected and an assessment of their key thematic concerns has been made. The novels *A Silence of Desire* and *A Handful of Rice* by Markandaya, *Esmond in India* and *The Householder* by Jhabvala, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *Socialite Evenings* and *Second Thoughts* by Shobha De are selected from fiction. And the chapter ends with placing the selected writers and some of their works in the context besides justifying the rationale behind the choice of the study.

**Chapter II** analyses the Biblical concept of marriage and the Biblical reflection of status and role of a woman in a family structure, and deals with the portrayal of the image of ‘wife’ in the selected novels by throwing light on her realistic life. The Chapter begins with the idea of how the Bible explicitly presents the concept of marriage. The chapter also brings to light the importance ascribed to marriage in the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible.

The Chapter also delineates the design and picture of Biblical marriage as specified by Apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Ephesus: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; …”, thus executing her role as ‘helpmeet’ and explicates the truth that a woman who is virtuous can build her house with her good qualities and becomes a
successful wife and the woman with her vices breaks her own home and becomes unsuccessful in her marital relationships. And the chapter also takes a comprehensive look at the theme of marriage as presented by the novelists singled out for study.

The chapter sheds light on how the novel *A Silence of Desire*, portrays the life journey of a loving middle class family of Sarojini and Dandekar and the role of Sarojini, a religious person, in her family. The novel *A Handful of Rice* presents the conjugal relationship of Ravi and Nalini. *In Esmond in India* the married life of Indira and Amrit is presented. Through the character of Indira, the relationship between the husband and the wife is well portrayed in the novel. *The Householder* circles round the conjugal life of the newly married couple Prem and Indu and describes the role of Indu in moulding her husband and safeguarding her family.

The plot of the novel *Socialite Evenings* is woven around the couples whose marital relationships form the major concern in the novel. The novel is all about the rift caused in the conjugal relationship of Karuna and her husband, and Anjali and Abe. Maya in *Second Thoughts* is an exemplar of a traditional woman who craves for freedom in the traditional Indian marriage system but learns to live with the stark realities of life, not snapping the pious chord of marriage. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* portrays the marital relationship of the central character Ammu with her husband.
The chapter attempts a brief survey of the literary careers and achievements of selected novelists and undertakes an elaborate discussion on the delineation of the theme of marriage as presented in the Bible and selected novels.

Chapter III, in tune with the theme of the study, discusses in detail the biographies of Ruth, Hannah, Elisabeth and Proverbs 31 Woman, the successful biblical women with virtuous traits, and explores the various meanings, explanations and implications useful to present day women with a focus to trace the similar characteristic traits in the women characters of the selected Indian creative writings of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.

The chapter presents The Virtuous Woman or Proverbs 31 Woman who stands as an ultimate example of how a woman should lead her life today as a noble wife and a model mother by displaying good traits, how Ruth, with her integrity, faithfulness, kindness, meekness, loyalty, responsibility, and womanly sweetness, catches admiration from the people of Israel as an ideal daughter-in-law, wife and mother. Hannah is another character who deserves sufficient attention. The analysis of her character presents a plethora of virtues. Her character is a touchstone to judge the current values which are under serious threat. The character of Elisabeth displays certain ideal qualities. The study of her character emanates a surfeit of virtues, which are to be followed by women of all ages.

The chapter proceeds to delve on the women characters from selected fiction. In A Silence of Desire, Sarojini, a deeply religious
person in her family, with her spiritual strength dons her role efficiently to become a successful wife. In *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini is virtuous, who transforms the errant life of her husband. She is responsible for a drastic change in him and because of Nalini’s devoted character the story ends in a memorable climax. In *Esmond in India* through the character of Indira, the successful role of a wife in building her family by her virtuous traits is well portrayed. Though the story of *The Householder* starts with dissonance in their matrimonial relationship, because of the virtuous traits exhibited by Indu it ends with marital consummation, which makes the bond of wedding more invincible. The virtuous qualities displayed by the women of the Bible are traced in these women characters of the fiction.

**Chapter IV** endeavours to take into account the profiles of nefarious femme fatales, Eve, Jezebel and Sapphira from the Bible and presents how their negative and harmful characteristic traits stamped them as the vicious women of the Bible, and how their setbacks in their conjugal relationship teach what women are not supposed to do in their marriage and how not to handle the challenging situations of life in order to avoid the tragic and catastrophic mistakes. Besides undertaking a close examination of the evil women of the Bible, it also brings into context similar figures identified from the selected literary offspring of Shobha De and Arundhati Roy.
The chapter also focuses on biblical vicious characters like, Eve, who had been made as a helper to her husband to bring blessing upon her family, failed in her role with her vicious qualities and became the root cause of destruction, and Jezebel who happened to be the cause for the destruction of all the members of his family also faced the tragic end because of her evil deeds and finally Sapphira, who had been a failure in her family by her deceitfulness and unsuccessful role as a wife.

The chapter further proceeds to deliberate on the women characters from selected fiction. The plot of *Second Thoughts* goes very close to the story of Eve. The protagonist Maya with all the similar vicious qualities can be compared to Eve’s character where almost all the traits, which are apparent in her character, are visible in Maya. In *Socialite Evenings* the life of the protagonist, Karuna, and Anjali display certain characters similar to Eve, Sapphira and Jezebel and ultimately they become failures in their families like the women of the Bible. In *The God of Small Things* the central character Ammu also demonstrates certain vicious traits like biblical women and takes decisions in her life, which prove fatal to herself and her family.

**Chapter V** focuses on the present scenario of marital dissonance and the successes and failures of the present day women from the selected novels, and how the problems can be solved and setbacks can be corrected systematically by turning to religion and Indian tradition. It also presents how the qualities of sterling biblical
characters will help sensitize women to the importance of identifying and adapting the merits outlined in scriptures for being virtuous and not vicious and to follow the guidelines documented in the Bible, revealed through the selected women characters good or bad, the marital relationships would be much more improved and marriages far more successful.

Literature transcends life and no rigid framework can accommodate varied facets of life. The work understands the biblical notions of marriage and the perception of the same by certain Indian novelists from a broader perspective. It is hoped that this study would provide useful insights for researchers in general and women of modern society in particular to improve their understanding of conjugal relationships and their delineation in the Bible and some selected novels.