CHAPTER-I
ECCLESIASTICAL FAITH vs. CONTEMPORARY CONVICTION

Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.¹ Proverbs14:1*

‘Woman’, the image of God, the feminine of man, in a way the fairest and finest of God’s creation, with her angelic and alluring being and female panacea dons a cardinal role in fostering man into the best or turning him into the worst of human beings. It is she who wards off all the ‘weeds of vices’ from his heart and instills confidence and faith to plow ‘pearls of virtues’ in his persona.

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. Though It is not gender specific, the holy book exclusively deals with the origin and nature of women.

The Bible traces the emergence or appearance of woman with the creation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. God deliberately shaped woman with His own hands and bestowed strength of her own. But
the women who have been imparted vigor and verve by God Himself have totally failed to notice the inborn power of being created as women. Like Eve, every woman is carefully crafted and intricately designed by God to fulfill what He views a crucial call in the big picture of life because even in practical life, it is argued by some, whether to build the house or to destroy the house is in the hands of a woman. Relationships in the contemporary society are mostly in trouble. They are generally governed by pure materialistic interests and the dearth of humanistic concerns is the prevalent social ailment. From this perspective, it is thought that there is a dire need to redefine the meaning of relationships and explore the spiritual treasure available in scriptures and literature. So the present research attempts a journey back to the basics to reclaim the pieces of self that countless women have lost in their struggle to validate their own sense of worth.

Basically the primary thought of creation of woman cropped up after completing the entire creation process by God. In the comprehensive story of creation, seven times it is stated that ‘God saw that it was good’. This is astonishing that it is only once God said, “It is not good”. This is evident from the following lines from the Bible:

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him. (Genesis 2:18)
But the whole creation was ‘not good’ devoid of the presence of woman.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (Genesis 2:21-22)

From this, it is clear that the whole process of the act of creation is completed only with the formation of a composite and rich personality, ‘Woman’. It is also apparent that the strength and beauty of woman was hiding deep inside of man. Thus “a world without woman is a world that is ‘not good’”. The very idea of creating a woman is explicable that she is wrought to be a helpmeet for man.

The register used in Hebrew, the original language of the Bible, for helpmeet is ‘ezer’. The Hebrew terminology is at variance with English. Each individual term in Hebrew language gives a more elaborative and in depth connotation than its corresponding word in English.

The Hebrew term ‘ezer’ is actually based on an ancient word ‘azar’. The Strongs Hebrew dictionary translates it as ‘to surround i.e. to protect or aid: -- help, succor’. 
This helpmeet was named woman because she was created of man. She is one of the ribs of man, his second half. The designed and proposed relationship between man-woman is well expressed by Mathew Henry in the book entitled, *All the Women of the Bible as*:

If man is the head, she (woman) is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was double-refined, one remove further from the earth….The woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.⁴

Thus woman is not to lord over man, not to be crushed by him but to be cared and loved by him. The Bible also pictures woman as ‘the glory of man’.

For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. *(I Corinthians 11:7)*

Thus the status of woman is specified in the Bible. Nevertheless she suffered subordinate position in the days of ancient Israel. Even in the days of Jesus also their condition was not improved. In Hindu society the stature of woman is not alike at all times, but sometimes
upgrading and at times degrading. The Hindu moral code was specified by the eminent law-giver, Manu, where he advocates:

To be mothers women were created and to be fathers men. The teacher is ten times more venerable than sub-teacher; the father a hundred times more than the teacher but a mother a thousand times more than a father.\(^5\)

Here the status of woman is celebrated and highlighted. But the same Manu also demeans her position by giving a contradictory perception:

Pita Rakshati Koumare
Bharta Rakshati Yauvane
Rakshanti Sthavire Putra
Na Stree Svatantra Marhati.\(^6\)

The above verse from Manusmrithi, an ancient classical work dealing with the laws, ethics and morality, denies woman’s individual existence. Accordingly, a woman should be subjected to her father in childhood, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead, to her children. And in the Khoran, woman is portrayed as a troublemaker.

A woman is described as ‘fitna’ one who tempts man and brings trouble.\(^7\)
Therefore, in Indian society there is a substantial ambiguity about the place of woman. The same woman who is the glory and grandeur of man is also regarded as the root of all evil. That is the reason why Swami Vivekananda was critical as regards to the Indian societal view of woman, saying:

All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which did not respect women has never become great, nor will ever in future. The principal reason why your race is so much degraded is that you had no respect for these living images of Shakti.8

As aptly viewed by Vivekananda, a woman is the incarnation of Shakti to bring goodness into society. But she is also equally responsible for bringing evil and in so doing, causing downfall of man. As such woman has the power to make or mar and thereby she is the one who builds or breaks her family into rubbles. So woman should not be incurred a substandard position in a family. Without woman the home is incomplete and implausible. It is true in the words of Dr. Amarnath, Professor of English in J.P. University, Bihar:

Both man and woman are complementary to each other. If a man is a flower, the woman is its fragrance. The woman is the black part of the eye, man, the white part. Without the black there is no vision and without white there is no protection.9
Thus both have their own significance and responsibilities in a family set up. The roles of a woman in a family are many viz., daughter (in-law), sister (in-law), wife, mother (in-law) etc. She performs all these duties enthusiastically, efficiently and earnestly. However, in spite of various duties, roles and images, which are the different facets of her personality she is the one and the same. All these roles are the varied faces of her being. The present study focuses on the image of wife in a family as a ‘home-maker’ or ‘home-breaker’ because the domestic harmony of the families forms the bedrock of society.

The theme of marriage and man-woman relationship is as old as literature itself. The significance of marriage is immeasurably appreciated and accepted in all societies (though it is purely a personal affair) and so it cannot be underestimated and undermined. Marriage is considered to be a sacred bond globally. It is reckoned to be one of the most blissful, most enthralling relationships on the planet earth. It is of unsurpassed significance in the lives of Indians. The humankind, to exist in comfort and harmony marriage is imperative and to be celibate is bereft of emotional, familial and social commitments. The same notion has been reflected in the words of Alexander Walker, who has discussed philosophically the moral relations between man and woman:

History proves that marriage is essential to the well-being of human society, and that celibacy brings ruin upon states.\textsuperscript{10}
Marriage, according to “Dharmasastras”, is a “sacrament”\textsuperscript{11}. The institution of marriage is an eternal covenant between man and woman and has been valued and idealized. Simon De Beauvoir, a French philosopher and well-known writer succinctly articulates the idea that “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by the society”.\textsuperscript{12}

The same perception is observed by Dockery, Union President of the University faculty members of Christian studies at the Baptist-affiliated University, in his article \textit{Importance of Marriage to Society Underscored by Professors}:

Marriage is the most basic and significant social relationship among humankind. This relationship must be nurtured and maintained for the welfare of all. Without marriage, the breakdown of society is inevitable.\textsuperscript{13}

But this blessed and sanctified institution of marriage, “bringing conformity”, “maintaining solidarity”, and “promoting continuity of the well knit society”,\textsuperscript{14} seems to be at stake today not only in India but all over the world. As a result of various causes such as strained relationships, lack of commitment, trust and mutual understanding, sexual promiscuity, lack of adjustment, etc., there is an increased rate of divorce which is the sword that puts family to death and the greatest tool of the devil to destroy the plan of God. As such this blessed institution of marriage is nearly rocked and almost on the
verge of breaking up. Per se marriages are no longer considered to be made in heaven. Demetria Zinga, Editor and Publisher of Christian Ladies Connect Online Magazine, as well expresses the same view regarding marriage:

Today’s marriages are on the rocks.\textsuperscript{15}

The Bible is also lucid in exemplifying the major role and importance attributed to woman to safeguard her family, which is perceptible from the verse excerpted from the book of Proverbs, which has the backdrop of the expressions of the wisest man ever born, King Solomon:

Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands. (Proverbs 14:1)

The book of Proverbs is designed to be “striking”, “pointed” and very much “practical”. Proverbs are like the “bullets of wisdom” that “God shoots from His heavenly abode”.\textsuperscript{16} They say a lot about how one can acquire a successful life. They also show the pathway for each member in a family to find happiness by providing general principles and specific injunctions.

The above said statement divulges the influence of - ‘good’ or ‘bad’- a wife can exert within the household. A woman has for sure a
vital role in building up the family. This is perhaps the base or reason for the maxim in Tamil:

The home is made or marred by the woman.\textsuperscript{17}

Therefore it is the woman who is almost responsible for the success or failure of her family life. So she is either a “crown of pride” on her husband’s head or “rottenness in his bones”. (Proverbs 12:4) Thus the Sacred Scripture expounds the importance of a woman’s role in the home. Reverend. J. Francis Robinson of Halifax, views the relationship between good women, good homes, and good citizens in his article \textit{The Importance of Women’s Influence in All Religious and Benevolent Societies} as:

We could have no good citizens without good women....Every home has a woman in it, and some homes have good women in them.... We can have no good home without good women, and we can have no good citizens without good homes; therefore, good women are essential to good citizenship.\textsuperscript{18}

Owing to her importance in donning a major role in a family, the Bible presents a galore of exemplary women who were virtuous and so successful in building their families. The Bible is also candid in disclosing the truth that some women were vicious and failed in playing their role fruitfully and ultimately destroyed their families.
Thus the virtuous women and the vicious women selected from the Bible for the present study will offer a lucid perception of “home-makers” or “home-breakers” in a family structure.

One of the chief objectives of the study is to apply the Biblical perspective to some of the fictional works of Indian English literature. It is an undeniable fact that literature transcends life whether it is Indian or American. It is felt during the course of study that an analytical study of certain novels from the biblical point of view would certainly offer significant insights that really draw critical attention. This endeavor makes a sincere and modest attempt to examine the portrayal of women in the works singled out in the light of the biblical conception of women. In the fiction of modern times, which is considered to be the reflection of society, there is a significant ambiguity about the role of woman. Some texts give her an exalted status and others vilify her position as the source of vice and wickedness. These two contradictory images shed light on the verity that they may have virtuous or evil traits in them to build or destroy their families.

Thus the Bible, written in ancient days and the fiction of modern days present the same ideology about women’s role in the family and society. Almost 2000 years separate the present society from the biblical times. Though these literary works are separated from one another by their cultural backgrounds, the human nature has not
been changed. And it is also reckoned that the themes and concepts presented in the Bible are applicable for all ages owing to Its universal applicability.

The present study purports to find certain parallels in the characteristic traits of the Biblical female figures and the women characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy and Shobha De. A comparative reading of women characters of the Bible and Indian fiction, it is hoped, will reveal the commonalities of characteristic traits discussed in these works. Kamala Markandaya is said to be a highly talented woman novelist, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, a Booker Prize winner, is considered to be one of the most widely read Indian novelists in English, Arundhati Roy, obvious at the priority level, a Booker prize winner and Shobha De is reckoned to be one of the best known women novelists in India. An analytical study to bring parallels, needless to mention, has not received adequate attention. The study has its own limitations like varying social and cultural contexts, different milieus and the dynamics of life, which sometimes offer limited scope for discussion. However, the universality of meaningful religious values can be traced in literary works, irrespective of age, milieu, society and culture. Precisely, this endeavor is to discuss the selected works against the background of the issues of life reflected in the Bible.
Basing on the biblical insights, God’s original design for woman is explored bringing out the values portrayed by the virtuous women in contrast with the vicious women selected from the Bible and relating them to the women in the modern society, thus aiding the women to trace out their true source of value and power and enhancing God’s blue print or patterns of celestial behavior.

This research tries to examine the biographies of typical biblical women as portrayed in the Bible. An attempt is made to explore the various meanings, explanations and implications related to these Bible’s female figures through an intense reading of the biographies of the concerned women leading to a variety of interesting and motivating interpretations useful to present day women. In the wake of deterioration of human and moral values, long cherished Christian beliefs assume greater significance.

The primary source of study is based on the Holy Bible: the “Divine Book”,
“Book of God”, “the Good Book” and “the miscellany of documents”, from the point of view of tracing the traits of women biographies in the women characters of modern Indian fiction. The present study makes an attempt to trace some of these traits and nuances in the women characters portrayed in the novels, A Silence of Desire and A Handful of Rice by Kamala Markandaya, Esmond in India and The Householder by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy and Socialite
Evenings and Second Thoughts by Shobha De from Indian creative writing. Though the writers are not influenced by the Bible, and they have no intention of portraying women characters in their novels with streaks of characteristic traits of women of the Bible, an attempt is made to extract some similar qualities in the women characters from the creative writings of these four women novelists.

The importance of the Bible and Its influence on the literature is priceless which need not be accentuated. In the voluminous body of English and American literature, a great deal of the influence of the Bible is obviously noticed. Almost all the writers right from John Milton to John Steinbeck, have been fascinated and guided by the Bible which forms the bedrock of literature by providing subject matter, manner, characters, themes and plots. As Professor Moulton reminds in his article *The Influence of the King James Version on English Literature:*

The first and most notable fact regarding the influence of the Bible on English literature is the remarkable extent of that influence. It is literally everywhere. If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library. There are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them.23
This impact is apparent in the majority of the creative expressions, to name a few, Milton’s *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, Lycidas*, etc., John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Alexander Pope’s *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, John Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel*, etc. The influence is apparent even in the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, etc. The inventory of works with biblical influence is never-ending and all-inclusive. The amalgamation of biblical allusions and religious symbols is very much myriad, particularly, in the Western literature.

The Bible is acknowledged and applied by the Christian church as the “inspired record of God’s revelation of himself and of his will to mankind”. (II Tim 3:16-17) It is chosen principally for its universal applicability, its didactic purpose and its considerable and substantial impact in molding the lives of the people. Its scriptures are holy, its doctrines are ideal, its histories are factual, its spiritual issues are deep and illuminating, its truths are sacred, its codes are binding and its resolutions are immutable. From times immemorial the universal applicability of the Bible is demonstrated as follows:

The Bible is not too ancient to carry meaning for us today. It is a living book that speaks to people’s hearts in every time and place....The Bible teaches you the truth and demonstrates any lack in your life and faith. It brings order to your life and shows you what is right and good.²⁴
It is considered as the inspired revealed word of God, authored by the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It encompasses the mind of God, the state of man, the divine will of God for the people, the way of redemption, the doom of sinners and the life of believers after death. Rev. W. Trail, author of *The Christian Graces* and *Unseen Realities* envisages its importance, in his book entitled *Literary Characteristics and Achievements of the Bible* as:

"On every line,
Marked with the seal of high Divinity;
On every leaf, bedewed with drops of love
Divine, and with the eternal heraldry
And signature of God Almighty stamped,
From first to last."  

God has directly revealed His plan, policy and purpose for the humankind through the Bible. To stress the importance of the Bible in the words of Rev. Dr. John Trigilio, President of the Confraternity of Catholic Clergy and also Rev. Dr. Kenneth Brighenti, Managing Editor of Sapienta Magazine:

The best-selling book of all time isn't some John Grisham thriller. It’s the Bible....and its importance throughout history can't be underestimated. Many world religions regard it as the inspired, inerrant, and revealed Word of God."
The essence of the Bible is an unfathomable treasure. It holds a wealth of precious human values, novel thoughts, and luminous and lofty ideals. It is a living legacy. It is like the shepherd’s staff, the soldier’s sword, the sailor’s compass, the traveler’s map and the Christian’s charter. It is a testimony of scholarship and loved for its devotional quality and literary form. Shedding light on the literary qualities of the Bible, Leland Ryken, a literary scholar says:

The idea of the Bible as literature began with the Bible itself. To view the Bible as literature does not undermine its factuality. God trusted literature to teach truth. The Bible is a beautiful work of literature, and our understanding and enjoyment of it is enhanced when we see it as such.

Because of the intense sacredness and highly admired literary characteristics of the Bible, Christianity is considered to be the literary religious conviction. Wilma Mc Clarty, Professor of English, confirms this notion saying, “Christianity is the most literary religion in the world, the best evidence being the Bible”.

Thus the Bible has its own literary implications. There by a student of literature cannot really understand the message conveyed through the Bible unless it is examined from literary perspective. According to Ryken:
Three primary modes of writing converge in the Bible: theological, historical and literary. Overwhelmingly, theology and history are embodied in literary form.\textsuperscript{30}

The Bible is not a single book but a collection of books. “It is a library of sixty-six books that were written over a period of more than 1,500 years by many different authors”.\textsuperscript{31} Accordingly, taken as a whole, the literary form of the Bible is considered as an anthology of writings, with “multiple authorship”, and “diverse genres”. And “even the word Bible (Greek ‘biblia’, meaning “little books”) hints”.\textsuperscript{32}

The Bible consists of two parts, the Old and the New Testaments. Although it was written by forty different men representing all planes of societal life, under all sorts of conditions, an entirety unity of thought is in stored in this entire magnificent conglomeration. Thus it outlines a complete comprehensive coherent whole. The lofty literary value of many parts of the Bible has been almost universally recognized and accepted. The literary qualities are accounted for, partly by the prevalence of literary genres, partly by the themes, which are grandeur, partly by the subject matter, partly by the archetypes and motifs, and partly by the character of the language used and partly by the literary dexterity displayed by the writers.

A piece of writing is considered as literature primarily by means of its literary forms or genres which “have their own methods of
procedure and rules of interpretation” and literature is defined in the “most customary way” by means of the “external genres” through which the “content is expressed”.33 The Bible is interpreted as literature by its repository of genres where the number “readily exceeds one hundred”.34 Content and meaning is conveyed effectively through the “form” of a text.

The genres and subgenres noticeable in the Bible are narrative/history (Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, etc.), poetry (Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, etc.), wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, etc.), law (Leviticus and Deuteronomy), prophecy (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, etc.), apocalyptic (Revelation, Daniel, etc.), short stories (Abraham, Noah, Isaac, Joseph, Ruth, Esther, etc.), gospel (Mathew, Mark, Luke and John), doctrinal books (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, etc.), epistles (Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, etc.), proverbs (Book of Proverbs). All these diversified literary devices not only exemplify the human experience but also transmit truth. So to instruct the truth, God relied on literature. Accordingly, the prevalence of all these genres attributes the literary quality to the Bible.

Bible is viewed as literature by its subject matter as well. The fundamental quality of the Bible is that every piece of writing expresses a subject not only in the form of expository discourse but
also through the actions of the characters in the settings, which are absolutely concrete. As different literatures are identified by their subject matters, the Bible has its identity by its informational writings such as Hebrew’s history taking into account, the origins of the world, the story of creation of Adam and Eve, their disobedience, the calling of Abraham and making his progeny His chosen nation, bondage under the Egyptians, deliverance through prophet Moses, punishment for serving pagan gods, rescued by Judges, ruled by great kings, languished in exile, homecoming and their loyalty to God, Christ’s arrival, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, spreading of gospel through the disciples, encouraging the children of faith by the hope of life after death, and about New Paradise and New Earth.

Literature presents “concrete human experience” which is over and over again described by the literary authors as, “the stuff of real life”. The Bible also presents the experience of humankind in the most realistic way. The characters portrayed are typical men and women, Israelites, like people in most cultures of the present day world, experiencing obstacles in their lives in achieving their goals, showing disobedience, receiving punishment, rectifying their evil doings, restoring their peace. Some are heroes, some are deep friends, some are practical, some are studious symbols of the world to come and almost all the biographical sketches starting from the first man Adam to the believers in the new church are realistic
images of today’s society and as such every person in the modern society can identify herself or himself with these figures. The themes of the Bible are among the greatest that literature can treat: God, humanity, fall of man, rise of man, the eternal providence of God, rebellion, repentance, faithfulness, integrity, God’s protection, the happenings of believers, love, death, resurrection, sacrifice, etc. Akin to literature, the Bible deals with the problems of human existence like problems of morality, relationships of human beings, idolatry, etc., and ultimate human destinations are treated with an intensity and vigor seldom matched in world literature.

The Bible imparts truth by exemplifying human experience in spite of the fact that its content is diversified into various genres. As human activities are rendered concretely it is implicit that it is applicable to all ages because the subject of the Biblical literature eschews some of the literary documentations besides rendering the human experiences concretely and these experiences emerge to have the advantage of universal applicability because it is pointed by Ryken that:

...history and daily news tell us what happened, literature tells us what happens- what is true for all people in all places and times. 36
In the entire expository writings of the Bible the existence of human element is touching. The literary parts of the Bible have human race’s testimony. The Scriptures of the Bible speak concrete facts with examples, which have historical backing. For example the arrival of Christ himself divided the time into AD (Latin Anno Domini) and BC (Before Christ).

The literary quality of a piece of writing is also identifiable by the presence of archetypes because they are said to be the “building blocks of literature”. According to Oxford Advanced Learners Compass, archetype means “the most typical or perfect example of a particular kind of person or thing”. Ryken, in his article Reading the Bible as Literature says:

An archetype is a plot motif (such as initiation or quest), character type (such as the villain or trickster), or image (such as light or water) that recurs throughout literature and life. 

The initiation of Moses is to leave the pleasures of palace in order to serve the true God.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; (Hebrews 11: 24-25)
For negative instigation Judah’s life is the best example because his initiation betrayed Jesus. Almost all the characters like, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samson, Esther, Ruth, Jezebel, etc., are the heroes and heroines, standing as positive or negative examples of life. The quest of Jesus is to save sinners and teach truth. The quest of the disciples of Jesus is to find the way to heaven.

The Bible is richly abounding with images. It begins and ends with the image of water and in the Bible, this image is recurrent 719 times and water represents a “sign of God’s providence” and “a means of purification”, and “refreshment, sustenance and life”. Jesus also used some images in His teachings like, “Ye are the salt of the earth:”, “Ye are the light of the world”, etc. (Mathew 5:13 & 14) Thus a chock full of images are spotted in the Bible. Hence because of the repository of archetypes, Bible has become a primeval and universal book thus attributing literary acceptance.

Language is the medium through which expression is rendered to the subject. Biblical writings are equipped with an ingenious and emotional richness by the characteristic feature of the language, which is wealthy of concrete words and phrases. Presence of characteristic resources like images and figures of speech augment
the language of literature. The figurative language of the Bible includes hyperbole, metaphor, simile, symbol, personification, etc.

Hyperbole, an intentional exaggeration to bring effect, is so prevalent in biblical writings. For example Jesus said, “...I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”. (Mathew 19:24). Bible is replete with a number of metaphors. Referring to himself Jesus said, “I am the bread of life:” (John 6:35), “I am the light of the world:” (John 8:12), and to people he said “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Mathew 5:13) “Ye are the light of the world”, (Mathew 5:14) etc. Examples of simile applied are specified as, “He (blessed man) shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water....The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind drives away”. (Psalms 1:3&4)

Undeniably, the parable is the most prominent literary form prevalent in the gospels. The Gospel according to Mark makes known that “But without a parable spake he not unto them:” (Mark 4:34). Jesus used this indirect narrative technique of parables to communicate his message to make the illiterate fishermen and ignorant people understand the concept and content. An example parable from the New Testament is enumerated below:

Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of
the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Mark 4:3-9)

Some striking and special effect of personification is observed in the Book of Psalms. For example, “Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together”. (Psalms 96:12) Thus the whole realm of figurative language looms large in consideration of the Bible as literature. The beauty of expression, verbal virtuosity, and skilful craftsmanship is rewarding in the Bible.

Thus in the words of Ryken, “virtually every page of the Bible is replete with literary technique”. And accordingly, it becomes difficult to understand the passages of the scripture without the knowledge of the literary features used in order to convey the word of the Lord to humankind effectively.

As the Bible possesses all the features of literature, it envisages and encourages readers to share their own experiences, which are
akin or dissimilar in their lives. Hence the very purpose or goal of literary book, the Bible is fulfilled. Accordingly the beauty of language, the presence of genres and the content of the Bible remain unsurpassed to consider this matchless legacy as literature and reckoning It to become part of the literary canon.

Greater details of a lot more stories of men than of women are embodied in the Bible. Because of the minor details given about biblical women majority of women stay behind as invisible and imperceptible per se remain as mysteries. According to Lisa Wilson Davison, a Professor of First Testament at Lexington Theological Seminary:

Together, the First and New Testaments contain approximately 3,100 different proper names. Only around 170 of those are women’s names.... Many more female characters are present but they are nameless.42

Nevertheless women played major and critical roles in the stories of faith in the Bible. As such a study of these biblical figures is most captivating, however briefly their lives and deeds are documented in the Sacred Scriptures. The varied, influential and significant roles they donned inside and outside the family at different levels of society are remarkable. In the corpus of women described, some are prominent and powerful using their capabilities and gifts for good
and others are notorious and powerless using their talents for evil. In the words of Dr. Herbert Lockyer, a clergy of Leeds Road Baptist Church:

What is striking is the fact that whether the women were queens or commoners, chaste or bad, their lives are frankly portrayed, proving the Bible to be a faithful biography of humanity. 43

The biographies of biblical women represent a “patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal” society where women were deemed or conjectured not as persons but as possession or property. The history of Israelites reveals that, “They were purchased with a dowry, they had to have total obedience to the will of their husbands”. 45 And “In the Old Testament times, although the position of the women of Israel was subordinate, they enjoyed a higher status in society than their counterparts in other countries around them”. 46

Though women are outnumbered by men, the Bible gives a very lofty proposition of women and doesn’t bypass their worth and influence and the valued contribution they have made. The importance of women is envisaged by Rev John Trigilo, and Rev. Dr. Kenneth Brighenti as:

The Bible shows from the very beginning of creation that women are not incidental but instead essential to the main stories being told- in spite of the patriarchal system in which
they lived....The Bible explains how humans were created with the same rights, and its tales describe many women who, united with their men, made quite a difference in the history of the world.  

The New Testament also highlights the importance of women characters. It was a woman who first saw the resurrected Christ; (John 20:15-18) Jesus Christ traveled all the way to Samaria to save a woman, which shows his concern for women and she became the first missionary of the gospel; (John 4) The first European who accepted Christ as her savior was a woman; (Acts 16:14) and Christ’s imminent death was first understood by a woman. (Mark 14:8) These actions reveal that women had their own position in the cultures of New Testament era. Thus both the Testaments offer a glimpse into the treatment given to women in their times in the Hebrew and Christian traditions. To explain how Bible lauds women John Mac Arthur, Best Selling Author of Twelve Ordinary Men elucidates in his book Twelve Extraordinary Women:

One of the unique features of the Bible is the way it exalts women. Far from ever demeaning or belittling women, Scripture often seems to go out of the way to pay homage to them, to ennoble their roles in society and family, and to acknowledge the importance of their influence...
The study of these women characters in the present day world is important because though they are the ‘Stories from the past’ they carry ‘Lessons for the present’ and enhance ‘Hope for the future’. This importance is accentuated by Anita Gutschick, a skillful dramatist who weaves the true-life portrayals of Women of the Bible:

Long before it was ever written, the Bible was lived and experienced by real people, with real lives. The stories not only capture a particular time and place, they deliver strong messages that reverberate across the generations to challenge and empower us in our daily lives....But whatever the circumstances, and however long ago they lived, these women carry messages of love, hope and redemption that resonate in today’s hearts and minds.

These women stories filled with power and crafted with a purpose, in difficult times, rose to the occasion with passion. Some could meet the challenges by executing their faith and courage and became successful but others enfeebled and faltered.

The women portrayed are mostly typical Israelite women who enjoyed status within the home but occasionally they asserted themselves by playing prominent roles even outside the home. These biographical sketches made a mark in the history of their time by making sagacious decisions, executing them dexterously and
swimming against the strong currents of patriarchy, to be remembered by the subsequent generations as more than conquerors of their period. Some of them stand as symbols of this world by being practical like Eve and Sapphira and some are contemplative and studious symbols of the world to come like Hannah and Elizabeth. Every present day woman can identify herself with these figures.

The importance of the study of these women traits is also highlighted by Edith Deen, the best selling author of *All of the Women of the Bible*, in her work *Women of the Bible*:

Great the heritage they left us,
Great the conquests to be won;
Armed hosts to meet and conquer,
Scatter larger duties they nobly taught us;
Round the world wide, let it ring. 51

As such an attempt is made to focus on texts depicting women characters in the Bible to glean imp lessons for the women of the modern society. As the Bible is fundamentally a non-fictional work, the delineated sketches are not “figments of the authors’ imaginations” but are factual figures that had to triumph over “real weaknesses and shortcomings”.52 Because of the universal applicability, it is believed that the Bible though ancient in form,
does carry messages for the people of modern times pointing to their hearts at all places and in all times.

From the repertoire of women biographies from the Bible quiet a few are selected for the present study. The virtuous women culled for focus are devotional, devout and dedicated and dutiful women like Hannah, Elisabeth, Proverbs 31 Woman or Virtuous Woman, Ruth, respectively, in contrast with the vicious women who are disobedient, dangerous and destructive, and deceiving like Eve, Jezebel and Sapphira respectively.

The study examines to bring out the commonalities of the biblical virtuous and vicious women in the women characters of Indian fiction such as, Saroja from A Silence of Desire, Nalini from A Handful of Rice, Indu from The Householder, Indira from Esmond in India, Ammu, from The God of Small Things, Anjali and Karuna from Socialite Evenings and Maya from Second Thoughts, to relate the virtues portrayed by the Biblical sketches to the women of the modern society, thus aiding them to discover their true source of value and power and enhancing God’s blue print for celestial behaviour. And also to bring out the weeds of vices exhibited by the women of the Bible and relate them to the women of the present society thus aiding them to understand the causes of their failures in their families and helping them to exterminate these weeds of vices for their successful marital life.
Before placing the works in the context, an attempt to trace the genesis of women writing in India would be more insightful.

Indian English literature has got its own lion’s share in world literature, gaining wide spread of interest, earning many accolades and laurels and sustaining its niche both in India and abroad. Fiction, in Indian English Literature, obviously turns out to be the most powerful form of creative and ingenious expression. Being the most influential and distinctive form of artistic expression today, it has occupied a prominent segment in Indo-English literature though it is of recent birth undeniably. Though the novel has taken its roots in India only a little more than a century back, it is considered to be the most flourishing and dominant form of literary expression in the twentieth century.

In the history of English literature, the initial effort, to bring out a novel in English, has been made by Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The publication of his novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* in 1864 marks the gateway of the rise of novel in India and paved the way for the victorious advancement of the Indo-Anglian novel. The novels of late eighteenth century mostly dealt with the social problems. After the world war there is a considerable change in the trend. Accordingly:

After the World War I the Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealized. The Indo-English
novelists until the thirties wrote the nationalists orientation everywhere partook of social and radical movements which certainly came for creative attention in Indian fiction and also in Indo English fiction.53

Whereas the contemporary social milieu was the principal concern of the novels produced between the two World Wars and also they were profoundly influenced by the Gandhian philosophy. During this phase the luminaries, The Big Three- Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand strived hard to give new life and identity in order to shape the destiny of Indo English fiction. Novelists of 1960’s focused their attention on social and economic oppression, quest for freedom, quest for identity and also familial and social relationships. Whereas in the 1980’s the fiction focused on personal relationships, marginalization of women, emancipation of women, quest for freedom man-woman compatibility, etc.

Thus Indian English Fiction giving a new shape, vision and color, gained a rewarding identity and unceasing admiration in the world fiction during the recent decades. The creative works following indigenous literary pattern, are absolutely original, and deeply Indian in theme as well as spirit. The works of these writers have left their indelible impression on the pages of literary history, which cannot be erased with ease.
Attaining national and international fame and receiving fabulous royalties by bagging many prestigious awards like Booker Prize, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and many other novelists proved their worth in their creative capability in the international limelight.

Salman Rushdie praises Indian Writing in English in his well-known article, *Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You*, saying:

The prose writing- both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen “recognized” languages of India, the so-called “vernacular languages”, during the same time, and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, “Indo-Anglian” literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution in India has yet made to the world of books.54

Indian women writers also established their own identity by producing fiction, which represents a major segment in Indian English Literature. These women writers by dint of their flair in creativity and imagination and acknowledging their novelty, uniqueness, inventiveness and resourcefulness by spilling much ink in bringing to light the various untouched and unnoticed facets of life and the indigenous aroma of the soil to their work, have made
landmark contribution to literature and remained as fountains of stimulation and inspiration for the subsequent generations. As R. K. Mishra, a literary scholar observes:

In the galaxy of Indian novelists in English, Indian women writers too shine luminously like their male counterparts by their significant contribution to enrichment of Indian English novels.55

These women novelists heralded a new era during the last years of the nineteenth century and made their mark on the English literary scene. The early women novelists focused almost on social reformation and regeneration locating on the problems women faced in a male chauvinistic society. It is only after independence that they concentrated more on tradition and modernity, marital problems, domestic issues, and feministic outbursts. But the modern Indian women writers are concerned about the various forms of oppression experienced by women in a patriarchal society dealing with the indispensable problem of survival and existence. The novelists like, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, to name a few, contributed a valid and convincing treatment of the problems of marriage, marital discord, man-woman relationship, etc. Thus Indian novel in English today exhibits a
thematic abundance and variety. In the hands of these second phase writers the novel has acquired thematic maturity and technical skill.

The natural gift of these women novelists is to expose the problems of women more insightfully with a humane touch. Relegating the needs of the present society the novelists, being women have touched upon the various aspects of woman in a family, her conjugal life, her marital disharmony, her relationship with her husband, etc. Consequently marriage and man-woman relationship has assumed greater significance in their fiction.

Of all the novelists who have shown considerable talent in portraying man-woman relationship and the role of a woman in a family, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy and Shobha De deserve particular attention because they have eked out their own identity in the oeuvre of Indian novelists. Almost in all the novels of these novelists, women have significant place. Some are traditional and others are modern. Yet they have their own assigned roles in a family set up because all the women culled from these novels are married women. Of all the relationships on the globe, man-woman relationship occupies a pinnacle position. As it is observed by D. H. Lawrence, a literary critic:

The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman.56
All the four novelists have dexterously dealt with this popular theme, providing insights, repertoire of implications, treasure of understanding and a basis for discussion.

Chronologically Kamala Markandaya occupies the first position. She shot upon the Indian literary scene as a literary maestro, with her debut novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, which has become a best seller in the U.S.A. In most of her novels the chief protagonists are women only. She uses her novels to project the image of woman as a wife. In the words of Sudheer Kumar Arora, the poet who wrote *A Thirsty Cloud Cries*:

Through her female protagonists, Kamala Markandaya reveals the virtues and potentialities of woman by providing that a woman is not inferior to man in any way. She stresses the need to believe in the moral superiority of woman in upholding the sanctity of the family.57

Thus Kamala Markandaya also stresses the impact of woman in a family in safeguarding the serenity and bliss of a family. The novels selected for the study are *A Silence of Desire*, “Markandaya’s most achieved and characteristic work”58 and “a domestic tale of the relation of husband and wife”59 and *A Handful of Rice*, “an extremely fascinating work of art”,60 “a classic example of characterizing all the
essential traits of people today, with all the emotions that affect people”, and a novel which depicts the victory of a wife in reforming her husband.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, a Booker Prize-winning novelist has become a successful screenwriter by winning Academy Awards. The inauguration of her literary career has commenced with the publication of her debut work To Whom She Will in 1955. She has carved out a niche for herself as an exceptional Indian woman novelist in English in the literary arena.

Though she is German by birth, English by education and Indian by marriage, she deftly describes the subtle nuances, the mores and morals of Indian life, the life of her adopted land and deserves to be reckoned as one of the leading novelists with international reputation.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has the talent to portray the character in such a way that the reader can see the character before his mind’s eye. Though dealt with multifarious themes, her major concern is to portray man-woman relationship. As Ralph Crane aptly remarks, “Jhabvala’s focus is entirely on the bonds of family”.

In her creative works some women are portrayed as traditional and some as modern. The two novels selected for the study are
Esmond in India and The Householder, which are said to be the “deft domestic dramas”.63

Arundhati Roy, a bright luminous star in the literary firmament, becomes the first non-expatriate Indian woman who bagged the coveted Booker Prize in 1997 with her debut, ground-breaking novel The God of Small Things which has become an instant hit internationally and fetched her laurels.

The novel portrays four principal women characters who get repetitively beaten when grappled with problems of life. These women assert to take decisions as per their choices, which ultimately prove disastrous. Emotional urge of the individual is perpetually in conflict with familial ethics and moral values and traditions dwindle into triviality. Their ruinous decisions result in splintering of their families.

Similar to other women novelists refer to, man-woman relationship forms the major premise in Arundhati Roy’s creative work also. As R. K. Dhawan, Reader in English, University of Delhi, has fittingly viewed:

The primary concern of the book is human relationship particularly man-woman relationship.64
Shobha De who has carved out a niche for herself in the magnum opus of literary dome because of the wide readership, has dealt with different themes in her creative works. The relation between man and woman is one of the cardinal themes that is exemplified perceptibly in her creative works. She discusses this theme in almost all of her novels in an objective mode.

Human relationships form the predominant premise for her fictional endeavors. De dexterously presents the subtleties of the relationships. She writes with amazing ease in intelligible language, and her novels are rich in content. It is with these traits she has become a popular storyteller. Believing in truthful unfolding of incidents and situations she narrates with abundance of openness.

Thus the theme of marriage and man woman relationship and the role of woman in the unit of family are very deftly dealt by all the writers culled, in their literary offspring. Being women novelists, all of them by and large have brought women characters into their works. They have created flesh and blood women protagonists with identifiable credentials. Almost all the women in their novels are married women. As all the novelists chosen are women, they have obviously focused on issues related to women in their creative works. The purpose of this study is to explore the unexplained silences of the texts.
The present study which is concerned with the theme of man-woman relationship and the role of woman in a family in maintaining this relationship as portrayed in the Bible and the novels of Markandaya, Jhabvala, Roy and De will examine the extent to which the theme is perceived creatively in the innovative works. They have championed the cause of women and adroitly presented the successes and failures of women in the family and society. To get a broader perspective of the image of woman as a home-maker or home-breaker, the research purports to study the women characters in the novels selected. In actual fact a comparative analysis of the characters of the Bible and Indian novels is quiet stimulating and captivating. They vividly demonstrate the role of a woman virtuous or vicious, as a home-maker or home-breaker in the contemporary chaos produced by the crumbling values.

The biographies of the biblical women highlight their presence, stimulate imaginations about their lives and strengthen commitment to the values they represent. These biblical characters filtered out of the ruck have general appeal to the Indian masses. They are the mouthpieces of women voices in India. Each character has multidimensional, as they have multifarious themes. A humble attempt is made to unravel the values delineated in the biographies, examining the issues of women reflected through the Bible and alerting the modern woman to the power of these stories to shape their lives, through the identification that they make with the culled characters.
The study is also an effort to explore the selected novels with streaks of Biblical values in the women characters besides relating the Biblical issues to stress-ridden, strife-torn and moralistic poverty stricken modern society. Not that the issues are confined to the selected works but they are found more relevant for critical examination. Having brought into context the Bible, the writers and their selected works, besides discussing the rationale behind the choice of the study, an analysis of the Biblical concept of marriage and the status and role of a woman in a family structure, and the portrayal of the image of ‘wife’ in the selected novels throwing light on her realistic life will be undertaken in the subsequent chapter.
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