CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION
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1.1 Preliminaries

Women are an integral part of human civilization. Although the place of women in society has differed across cultures and through ages, yet one fact common among all societies is that in spite of having the same mental and moral power, and having contributed equally in the nation’s progress, women have never been considered equal to men. Rather, the term ‘woman’ has a pejorative connotation and is burdened with the weight of insignificance. For centuries together women have been denied justice in entirety—be it social, economic, political or constitutional and have been ignored as the ‘weaker sex’. Their status has been largely attributed to the simple biological fact of procreation thus restricting them within familial boundaries.

The question of the relative status of women in society has attracted the attention of many scholars all over the world. Modern women writers have portrayed their women as individuals rebelling against their traditional role, breaking the shackles of exploitation and oppression and awakening to a sense of identity to assert their individuality.

The present research titled -“Search for ‘Self’ of Female Protagonists in the Select Novels of Shobha De and Manju Kapur: A Comparative Study” endeavors to study the life and struggle of women in the selected novels of two popular post-colonial writers- De and Kapur. It seeks to compare their delineation of women, and throw light on the experiences, ordeals, humiliation and disappointments their protagonists undergo in their search for identity. Both these post-colonial writers have written women-centric novels revolving around various aspects of female subjugation and male dominance. Although issues pertaining to
family, society, man-woman relationships, gender-bias, have been the concern of both De and Kapur, it is observed that their protagonists belong to strikingly different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Chapter-I has been divided into two sections. The first section deals with the methodology of the research whereas the second section discusses the theoretical framework which serves as the background to the research. **Section-I** begins with the preliminaries and then goes on to deliberate upon the rationale and significance of the study. It broadly states the aim of the research and draws out the specific objectives of the study. The chapter then briefly speaks about the scope and limitations of the study and chooses to take a look at the life and works of the two novelists chosen for the present research. It then goes on to state the hypothesis of the study and the methodology adopted for research. The first section of Chapter-I ends with a detailed chapter-wise plan of the thesis. **Section-II** of Chapter-I devotes itself to a brief discussion on the secondary status of women, states the concept of feminism and its origin. It then tries to focus on the need for a feminist movement as voiced by some of the major feminists of the world and goes on to understand feminism in the Indian context which provides interesting insights for the present study. The ‘Conclusion’ finally sums up the points discussed in Chapter-I of the research.

**1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The present study seeks to explore the journey of women characters in search of ‘self’ in the select novels of Shobha De and Manju Kapur. Both these post-colonial writers have written women-centric novels revolving around various aspects of female subjugation and male dominance. The question of identity, individual space or ‘self’ has always been a cause of concern for the simple reason that women have been defined as marginalized creatures and viewed as appendages to men. Woman has since time immemorial shared a relational identity in a male-dominated society where she has been assigned the role of a wife, a
daughter, a mother, a sister and a home-maker. A woman’s individual ‘self’ has hardly any recognition in the patriarchal framework of society.

It has been noticed that very few research scholars have chosen to comment upon the need for identity among the female protagonists of women writers. As such, the present research attempts to address the burning issue of quest for ‘self’. The term ‘self’ refers to a person’s inner being, his persona, his innermost self, or his psyche. Many a times it is synonymous with one’s ego or his spirit. In case of a woman, it connotes her rightful place in an essentially sexualized world. Shobha De and Manju Kapur have strongly voiced the need for self-esteem, and autonomy of ‘self’ of women in their works. It is interesting to observe that though both these novelists were born at the same time and are referred to as the New Age novelists, yet they belong to distinctly different social planes. Hence this study looks forward to a comparative analysis of the delineation of their female protagonists who are seen trying to create a ‘room’ for themselves which they can call their own.

The lives women live and suffer under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society are seen to be reflected in the writings of both the novelists chosen for the present study. While Manju Kapur’s fiction stresses upon a woman’s need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality and self-actualization, Shobha De’s novels are characterized by their new wave of feminism, and a deep understanding of the psyche of urban women, who are frank, bold and assertive. The women in the novels of Shobha De and Manju Kapur are not passive entities. They rebel against the existing norms of society. Their search for ‘self’ is a voice against patriarchal hegemony and male dominance. A comparative analysis of the female protagonists in select novels of Shobha De and Manju Kapur portrays them as an amalgamation of tradition and modernity. It is observed that writings of Kapur and De successfully raze the docile and weak image of Indian women and bring them to the forefront as strong independent
individuals who break away from the barriers of subaltern status and build spaces for themselves in the highly competitive male world.

Shobha De’s novels speak about the perils and problems of urban women living in the metropolitan cities of India. It deals with the glamorous lives of sexually liberated and emancipated women who are seen craving for power in a male-dominated world. Kapur’s women are comparatively more subdued and domesticated. Though they crave for autonomy, they are firmly rooted in tradition and bound by familial ties. Kapur lays her thrust on empowering women through education.

Although the present research involves a study of literary texts, its significance lies in how different forces in society viz. social, economic, cultural, psychological and familial are juxtaposed to abort the growth of ‘self’ in contemporary Indian women and curb their individuality in the name of tradition. The study, therefore, intends to bring to light the attitudinal shift in women today, towards the institution of marriage, motherhood and economic independence. It also seeks to point out the path chosen by the protagonists in their journey towards self-discovery and the kind of resistance they are forced to put up with.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

One thing that gains prominence from the discussions held so far is that the ‘self’ in women has lost its way in the dark alleys of the power corridors of patriarchy. But the desire to know one’s identity in society or realize the importance of ‘self’, the passion to rise and shine, and struggle to find the essence of life has surfaced in the writings of post–independent women writers. The question of ‘self’ which has been at the pivot of issues related to personal identity, the body, sociality and agency has been addressed by women writers like Shobha De and Manju Kapur.
The aim of the present research is to study select novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De and trace the journey of their female protagonists from patriarchal oppression to emancipation of self. It seeks to analyze two novels of each of these writers and study their characters in a broad sense. It also attempts to understand the diverse backgrounds of the protagonists of De and Kapur as depicted in the select novels in order to know their ambitions, aspirations, frustrations and desires, and most importantly, their quest for identity in a male-dominated society against the backdrop of strong socio-economic, socio-political, traditional and cultural forces. Thus, the research focuses specifically on the following objectives:

1. To understand the status of women in India from its historical perspective
2. To briefly study the emergence of Indian English fiction as an independent genre of Indian writing
3. To record the literary endeavors and contribution of famous Indian women novelists and analyze their portrayal of women
4. To explore the causes that are responsible for protest and rebelliousness in women today
5. To examine the concept of transition from tradition to modernity in the works of Shobha De and Manju Kapur
6. To focus on inter-personal relationships between various characters in the novels for study
7. To study ‘self’ of female protagonists in the select novels of De and Kapur
8. To trace the journey of women characters in the novels of Kapur and De from patriarchal oppression to emancipation of ‘self’
9. To throw light on the changing attitude towards the institution of marriage, motherhood and need for education and economic freedom for modern Indian women
10. To study the diverse backgrounds of Manju Kapur and Shobha De’s women and their psyche
11. To compare and contrast the themes of female emancipation in select novels of Kapur and De and comment on the bold and unconventional expression of female sexuality

1.4 Scope and Limitations

Twentieth century has witnessed a plethora of women writers who flooded the literary scene in India. Their writings constitute a discourse on subversion that tends to topple the patriarchal notions governing their lives. Writing is a socio-cultural activity, and being realistic, bold, candid and matter-of-fact, goes a long way in accomplishing the task of establishing a better acquaintance with one’s true self. Women novelists in India have been quite articulate on issues of gender discrimination and secondary status of women in society. The aim of the present research is to understand the perils and problems of female protagonists who want to break free from the age-old shackles of tradition-bound orthodox Indian society in order to create a space of their own. Although women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and several others have done praise-worthy work on themes dealing with exploration of the self, identity crisis, male domination and the likes, this research intends to focus on the study of the selected novels of only two women novelists—Shobha De and Manju Kapur. Both these modern Indian women writers portray their female protagonists as women who have set forth on a journey of self-discovery. While one of them chooses to write about the glossy lives of the high society urban women, the other deals with the lives of middle-class women struggling to create her individual space in a society ridden with male ego.

This study is limited to a reading of the female protagonist’s search for ‘self’ in Shobha De’s Socialite Evenings and Second Thoughts and Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman by Manju Kapur. De made her foray into the world of fiction with Socialite Evenings and Kapur followed suit with Difficult Daughters. It is
surprising to note that there is a marked presence of an autobiographical strain in the debut novels of both these novelists. Thus, it is imperative that we undertake a study of the psyche and lives of the two writers, understand the socio-cultural factors that influenced them to take to writing and also examine the corpus of their work.

1.5 The Making of Shobha De

Born on 7 January 1948 in a Saraswat Brahmin family in Satara, Maharashtra, Shobha De nee Rajadhyaksha, has broken the shackles of a conservative community to prove that women can make it big even if they choose to take the path less travelled. Having grown to be a feisty and courageous person, she raises her eyebrows at the mention of her community and her prompt response “I was never into communities and I never will be.”\(^1\) (Dadlaney) at once speak of the significance of the words ‘liberty’ and ‘emancipation’ in the rigid framework of society to which she belonged.

Her father Justice Govind Hari Rajadhyaksha and her mother Indira Govind Rajadhyaksha were very humble, affectionate, benevolent, and supportive parents. Since her father’s job was transferable, Shobha had the chance of travelling to big cities as a child. She received her early education from Delhi Public School, Delhi and then graduated from St. Xavier’s College, Bombay with a second class degree in Psychology and Sociology. The youngest of four children, a determined young lass, Shobha De was never overawed by money or fame for she knew exactly what she wanted and at what stage of her life.

She was not very keen in academics, preparing for her examinations only a week or two before. She says:

> Studies did not interest me---that was that. There was a life outside the classroom that I vastly preferred. And I wanted to make the most of it\(^2\) (Selective Memory 33).
Though she was good in sports in her school days, and had attained state level recognition in athletics, Hockey and Basketball, her father did not let her participate at the National Meet held in Patiala. Strangely though, much at the same time, she continued to pursue her interest in modeling and basked in the glory of the independence and money it brought. But considering how orthodox Indian society must have been then and more so her community, one wonders what kind of resistance she must have put up with to make a foray into the world of modeling. She is reported to have said nonchalantly in an interview with Dadlaney:

Well, it sure as hell was difficult. My father resisted the idea of modeling in toto! I could have become what he wanted – some bureaucrat or a government secretary in the Ministry of Law but I didn’t want to. My brother became an engineer, one of my sisters became an ophthalmic surgeon and the other completed her M.A. in law (now in New York) so very naturally, my family expected me to follow a well-charted path of academics. My Dad was keen for me to get into the I.A.S but that was never an option for me. I could never, ever, dream of ending up as some Assistant Collector in Dhule! (www.yourstory.com).

Shobha De had all the requisite qualities - namely a slender frame, aquiline features, high-cheek bones, and not to forget the oodles of confidence necessary to make her a potential avant-garde model but speaking about her stint in modeling, she says:

It just happened. It always has. It’s always been others who have sensed talent, skills or what you may term it as, in me. Modeling too, just happened. I was with my Dad at the Taj – we had gone to meet someone - and I was spotted by an individual from the modeling fraternity. That’s it! .....My innate skills have always been identified by others more than myself being conscious about it (www.yourstory.com).
During her glorious days as a model, Shobha De endorsed the most celebrated brands like Khatau sarees, Taj Tea (what Zakir Hussain endorses today) Ponds, Bombay Dyeing, way back in the late sixties and she did that for almost six years until she was 22 years. However, she was not keen to make a career out of it. When asked about making a possible career in films she states:

*I did receive every conceivable offer to act in Bollywood, but acting per se never attracted me. I am a reticent individual and I enjoyed modeling not so much of ‘ramp’ though I did quite a few shows but ‘still’ photography was what I was most comfortable with. You have the photographer and a few individuals around you, that’s it and it’s like you are walled in. I could never be comfortable in films though I had been approached by the likes of both, Benegal and even Satyajit Ra* (www.yourstory.com).

Her candid reply on being quizzed by Dadlaney, if she was a rebel of sorts was:

*Yes, you can say that. I was too clear about what I wanted to do. I did my Mass Communication from Bhavans College and at the age of 22, I was an Editor* (www.yourstory.com).

Thus, the turning point in her life came when Nari Hira, a Sindhi businessman, introduced her to the field of writing through her friend Shilpa Shah who happened to ask her if she could write.

Shobha De confesses in her book *Selective Memory* that it was this casual but very vital question -

*Can you write?’ that changed my life for me, and gave me my future vocation* (89).

She further mentions that:

*Nari Hira was the right man at the right time in life. He gave me the opportunity to break loose from a life I had outgrown* (95).
Shobha De started off as a trainee copywriter at ‘Creative Unit’ which was NariHira’s advertising agency and then went on to become the editor of magazines like *Stardust, Society and Celebrity*. However, she goes on to add that “I didn’t choose modeling, it chose me. I didn’t choose writing, writing chose me" (76).

Thus began her foray into the world of journalism in 1970 with glossies like *Stardust, Society and Celebrity* of which she was both the founder as well as the editor. De is best known for her depiction of the socialites of the urban, metropolitan world. One cannot fail to miss her Features on the glitz and glamour of the celluloid world and the people inhabiting it, who according to her are heartless and artificial, completely devoid of ‘loyalty, friendship, caring’.

When asked by an interviewer whether these magazines were her babies entirely and replete with glamour quotient Shobha De says:

> It was pure people journalism. They were not frivolous and not devoid of content. They gave birth to the careers of many good journalists. *Stardust* and *Society* are very popular and successful magazines even today. I was the one driving these brands and of course there was immense support from NariHira, the founder of Magna Publishing. It was a joint effort and involvement because you can never fly solo" (Dadlaney).

As editor of one of the first ever magazines to cover the Indian film industry, Shobha De soon became a household name in India with *Stardust* gaining a cult following internationally. In the 1980s, she contributed to the *Sunday Magazine* section of *The Times of India*. In her columns, she used to explore the life of the socialites in Mumbai and the lifestyles of the celebrities. She has been a freelance writer and columnist for several newspapers and magazines and also written for several popular soaps on Indian television like *Shanti* and *Swabhimaan*. (Wikipedia)
As a result of her dynamic, unrestrained, upfront, unpretentious and no nonsensical type of personality, which is evident in her writings, Shobha De has been described by many epithets. A multifaceted personality, De has been - "many things to many people: super model, celebrity, journalist, and best-selling author; friend, rival, colleague and confidante." But---"Despite her commitment to work and the frantic pace of her life, Shobha De’s first priority in life has always been her family."  

Voted by Reader's Digest as one of 'India's Most Trusted People' and one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in India' by Time Magazine, Shobha Dé is one of India's highest selling authors and a popular social commentator. Her works comprising both fiction and non-fiction have been featured in Comparative Literature courses at universities abroad and in India. Her writing has been translated into many regional languages as well as French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. She is married to a Bengali business tycoon Dilip De, her second husband, and between them they have six children. She lives in Mumbai with her husband and children.

The non-conformist streak in Shobha De steered her away from familial tradition. For her, writing has always been a ‘vocation’ and not a ‘hobby’. She believes that “writing was and is an alter-ego” (Dadlaney) that helped her evolve from a journalist to a full-fledged author. With almost 16 novels to her credit, she is one of those best-selling writers who are gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss the most sensitive aspects of human life with tactful ease.

Her vast corpus of work includes several novels besides other prose works. A controversial writer, De began her writing career as a successful editor of Stardust, Society and Celebrity serving sex and glamour of the Bollywood and of new-found society on a platter to readers looking for tantalizing scoops. She burst into the literary scene in the early nineties with her inimitable style of writing which
created a sensation by sending shock waves and invited extreme reactions. Her bold and realistic presentation of the urban elite on one hand, and the explicit details of sexual encounters on the other earned her the epithet of the ‘high priestess of gossip.’ As a result of her sexually charged fictional work which has socialites and celebrities for her protagonists, an indolent American journalist even called her the Jackie Collins of India.

Shobha De’s long list of works is cited below:

1. *Socialite Evenings* 1988
2. *Starry Nights* 1990
5. *Strange Obsession* 1994
7. *Small Betrayals* 1995
8. *Second Thoughts* 1996
10. *Selective Memory* 1998
11. *Speed Post* 1999
12. *Spouse* 2005
13. *Superstar India* 2006
15. *Sandhya’s Secret* 2009
16. *Shobhaa At Sixty* 2010
17. *Shethji* 2012
18. *Shobhaa: Never a Dull De* 2013

Known for her forthrightness and speak-my-mind attitude, Shobha De has been a source of inspiration to many women of her times. At a time when talking about
sex was a taboo and even a mere reference of the three-letter word embarrassed the ladies, India had its first female erotic author.

Responding vehemently to allegations of eroticism being the recipe of all her novels, she says…

_No, not at all. And even if some of them do, why should anyone raise eyebrows? Does anyone ask M.F. Hussain why he paints horses? Does anyone question male authors why they write on erotic stuff?_\(^{14}\) (Dadlaney)

Erotic, provocative and sometimes even thought-provoking, De’s writing style is signature, fierce, individualistic and unrestricted and rarely adheres to literary decorum. A high-flying socialite herself, like most of her female protagonists, she portrays a very realistic picture of modern metropolitan life, family, society and life-style which has often received a lot of flak from her critics. She has been talked of as ‘high priestess of gossip’, ‘soft porn queen’, ‘Vatsyayani’, ‘Pulp Pasha’ ‘Vamp –feminist’ and more.

Unperturbed by all such epithets hurled at her Shobha De, maintains that---

_I thrive on challenges and change. I like to innovate and attempt new things. I refuse to confirm my critic’s version of me----highly distorted one to begin with. I have always gone ahead and written what comes naturally to me. My books have always been one step ahead of the wave. But I make no conscious effort to re-invent myself. If I shift the goal-spots with each new book, it is because I have grown, changed or moved away. Each book has its own specific context and validity\(^{15}\) (Bhattacharya 1).

But, an article in a famous newspaper reports that Shobha De, the mother of “Hinglish”\(^{16}\) (10) has never been considered a serious writer, because she has always been “misquoted and misunderstood”\(^{17}\) (Sanghvi 2) by critics and readers
alike. However, not all critics consider her works frivolous. Shobha De in her novels has explored “the darker side of human nature, the squalor and the evil in society and in human relationships”\(^\text{18}\) (Barat 320) and in the last so many years “she’s built her life word by word, column by column, book by book the word factory”\(^\text{19}\) (Sanghvi 1).

About her stories, De says -

\[\text{Nothing I wrote was made up---somewhat exaggerated perhaps, but not fabricated...Subjects of my books are my own which I pick up from the people around me, my writing is based on ideas. I don’t write to harm society}^{\text{20}} \] (Shukla 1).

According to Sanghvi, each of De’s novels deals with “a strong woman protagonist.”\(^\text{21}\) (1) and she further quotes De who says, “I had always been gravitating towards women. I was a woman’s woman”\(^\text{22}\) (1) and “writing comes to me as naturally as breathing”\(^\text{23}\) (Guha 3).

She continues…

“I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the women’s situation”\(^\text{24}\) (Bhattacharya 3).

Speaking to NandiniGuha during an interview, De says, as a writer

“I write what is within me without any hesitation, fear or self-consciousness,”\(^\text{25}\) (3)

And she reiterates that in her novels, she prefers to deal with humanity at large. She hates bringing gender into her writings and adds that
“I don’t dislike men---I just feel sorry for them.”

Thus, it is observed that though Shobha De may not have written from a definite feminine perspective, she asserts the need for prominence in the lives of women. She treats men and women on an equal platform and speaking about it in her book *Shooting from the Hip* she says…

*Eventually, every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level. Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women’s destinies have been determined largely in that context alone. It is time they were made aware of their own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of overall human development. Men will have to come to terms with woman power*.

Although Shobha De refuses to be called a feminist, one cannot overlook her feminist concerns in her novels. She is aware of the sad state of women and never fails to express her concern for them…

*I fear for my generation of women---they really are like danglers, neither here nor there. They definitely don’t want to be like their mothers and they desperately want to switch places with their daughters*.

She thus upholds ‘identity crisis’ as the most crucial challenge before womankind. Freedom, empowerment, emancipation, and enlightenment in women are possible only through education and economic independence. De, who considers herself a middle class and traditional woman, is hungry for this experience. Forever at the helm of controversies, though her novels are classified as chick-lit or mere erotic literature, they present the many facets of a woman that are anything but pretty. In fact, her heroines are sensuous, beautiful and smart yet conniving, conspiracy-hatching women who are so driven by power and luxury that they are ready to do...
anything to fulfill their wants. Shobha De, in her novels, successfully depicts the tension arising as a consequence of the failure of the Indian women in countering situations that emerge from a clash between ideas of conservatism and liberalism. She also highlights certain issues such as the non-acceptance of the emancipated woman in the patriarchal framework of society in India.

From name-calling to accusation battles, the gutsy writer has taken much criticism in her stride to climb the ladder of success. Shobha De’s books are rarely appreciated and even rarely acknowledged. Unfortunately, critics highlight only the glamour aspect at the expense of more serious issues of women she deals with.

But, Narendra Kumar Neb in his article, “Shobha De: To Read or Not to Read” is seen to strongly defend De:

_The critics who reject De’s fiction for being popular fiction fail to understand the fact that popular fiction has its own value. It doesn’t remain limited to specific history of a particular period but forms a dynamic part of the history of that period. Popular fiction articulates the tensions and contradictions within the society giving them popular expression_ 29 (160).

One may argue that none of her works are considered to be of classic stature; however, in their own league the books set a benchmark of sorts. In this study, the researcher will analyze De’s two major novels from her vast corpus of fiction- _Socialite Evenings_ and _Second Thoughts_ and trace the journey of its female protagonists in their quest for identity. Although both the novels will be dealt with in detail in a separate chapter, a quick reading of its themes along with some of the other novels written by the most controversial and highly criticized novelist here is only too pertinent.
Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* describes the high society of Mumbai and explores the lives of bored, rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages, who are engaged in ill-fated extra-marital affairs, and smug selfish husbands who use their wives more for social respectability than for love. Karuna, the main protagonist and narrator is caught up in a drab, boring life that she seeks to escape by writing memoirs. Her memoirs are successful and she achieves a measure of fame and pride in herself as she becomes an active socialite and eventually uses her newfound prominence as a celebrity to get herself a position as an advertising copywriter and creator of a television series.

*Starry Nights*, De’s second novel deals with the protagonist Asha Rani’s life in Bollywood. De discloses the intimate lives of the stars in the glamour world. The novel also shows how the glittering world of celluloid can shatter the moral values of the people who are a part of it. It also depicts the modern woman’s search for identity in a male-dominated society.

The story of De’s third novel *Sisters* was inspired by a single riveting incident which the novelist happens to see in the foyer of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in the erstwhile Bombay. It is the story of a confident, beautiful, glamorous and career-oriented girl Mikki and her half-sister Alisha. It depicts the conspiratorial corporate world which thrusts the protagonist Mikki into the abysses of deceit, double-standards, opportunism and exploitation.

De’s *Strange Obsession* is the story of the gorgeous young super-model Amrita Agarwal. Within months of her arrival in Bombay, she is the envy of its beautiful people. Then, one day, she attracts the attention of a mysterious woman called Minx. As the months pass and the demands of her unwelcome suitor grow, Amrita's life turns nightmarish. The novel deals with sexual obsession and its calamitous consequences.
Sultry Days by De is slightly different in the sense it is both a woman’s novel as well as a man’s. It is the story of Deb and Nisha. The novel is studded with characters from different walks of life. The novel Snapshots projects an urban society where men stand on the periphery and women battle for power and supremacy. Like Sultry Days, Snapshots is a novel about the seize of power which is considered to be a male prerogative.

Second Thoughts by Shobha De is a love story about Maya, a pretty girl who is eager to escape her dull, middle-class home in Calcutta for the glamour of Mumbai, where she moves after marriage to Ranjan, a handsome, ambitious man who has an American university degree and a wealthy family background. Maya is determined to be the ideal wife, but finds herself trapped and stifled by the confines of her arranged marriage to a man that she discovers, is rigidly conservative and completely indifferent to her desires. She begins to experience great loneliness in suburban Mumbai. She strikes up a friendship with Nikhil, her charming, college-going neighbor, leading to love and betrayal.

Having mapped the literary journey of Shobha De, one of the most controversial woman writers in India, an attempt is made here to examine briefly the life and works of yet another post-colonial woman writer, Manju Kapur.

1.6 The Making of Manju Kapur

Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar shortly after independence in 1948. She graduated from the Miranda House College for Women, New Delhi, which was followed by a Postgraduate degree from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. She later obtained her M.Phil from Delhi University and worked as a Professor of English Literature at her alma mater Miranda House College for almost 30 years. Daughter of a bureaucrat, Manju Kapur is married to her right-across-the -road
neighbor Gun Nidhi Dalmia and they have three children. She currently lives with her family in Lutyens Garden, New Delhi. Kapur unlike Shobha De, started her writing career pretty late. She began work on her first novel at the age of 40 soon after the birth of her third daughter. She reminisces how she would be busy working on her drafts during teaching days and then rework on them during her holidays. But in order to concentrate on writing seriously, Manju Kapur gave up her full time job as a professor in Miranda House. Speaking about ‘writing’ in one of her interviews with Saudamini Jain says,

*It’s almost never easy to write. Because writing is not merely describing series of events, it is conveying a world view; it aims to persuade, to convince to move. Obviously it is easier if you attempt to do all this with something you know, especially since fiction writing is more effective if done from the inside.*

Drawing on her years of study in Halifax she tells another interviewer Arundhati Basu, *“When you are writing, you write about yourself. You write about the times you have gone through.”* A committed writer that she is, Kapur confesses, *“It’s so tough writing and working. Behind writing two hours every day, goes ten hours of space for one to mull.”*

An avid reader who spent more than half of her life in teaching English literature, her writings stand to mirror her experiences and observations drawn from real life incidents, situations, events and people. Hailed as ‘the archivist of modern times’ and ‘chronicler of the Indian middle class,’ Manju Kapur became a writer by accident. All the while she was busy nurturing young minds; there was this nascent desire in her to take to writing which she could see materializing only in her 40s. Speaking to Nidhi Sethi she says…
I was a mother, teacher, wife and a bad homemaker. Death was staring at me and I was dissatisfied. I had people writing around me and I thought if they could write, so could I. I felt I had not said everything I wanted to. So I started writing when I was 41.

An unassuming person, her no-frills, no-nonsense writing, she admits, suits her personality and temperament all too perfectly. In her interview for The Telegraph she confesses …

In the ‘90s when I started, I used to write differently. I experimented with magic realism. After all, we all like to think of ourselves as Rushdie’s heirs. Then along the way I realized that it didn’t work for me. I started writing simply, so that it wasn’t attention seeking.

Having spent a lifetime balancing her country's traditions with the demands of its ever-changing present, Kapur’s is, perhaps, one of the most appropriate voice to comment on the seismic shifts shaping India. She is happy to write in English, but admits that the choice remains fraught. Speaking to a Correspondent of The Independent, she avers…

Writing in English is still a charged issue! My goodness!” she exclaims. "I am a total post-colonial. I studied in English. I read in English. My Hindi is quite bad.

ManjuKapur, the Jane Austen of modern Anglo-Indian literature is a unique mix of tradition and modernity, convention and individuality. Speaking about the challenges encountered in balancing an academic career, a family and a literary career, Kapur who sounds like the consummate non-conformist notes: “I followed my own dream. I do what I like and say what I like.”
Being a working woman she is very well aware how women have to negotiate the demands of a family. Her initial years of marriage into a traditional Marwari family were turbulent but today she elaborates on the enormous benefits of living in a joint family. According to Manju Kapur, “Joint families create extra-ordinary ways of coping with every possible situation; it is a very good school for living.”  

However, Kapur also feels that a woman should not ignore her individual yearnings and ambitions for the sake of the demands of her loved-ones and her family. She believes…

“Your commitment to yourself should be strong. You need to have self-respect because nobody is going to give it to you”  

(The Hindu).

The focal point in all the novels of Manju Kapur is the woman. She is seen discussing how a woman negotiates with the outside world. Deeply influenced by feminist thinking, she prefers to call herself a feminist as well.

“I believe it is impossible to live in the world today as a thinking person and not be one, and this applies to both men and women. I don’t set out with a conscious Feminist agenda, but in describing the relationships between men and women a Feminist perspective is often inevitable…”  

(The Hindustan Times)

Manju Kapur’s works centre around the middle class and her readers are often stunned by her sharply-etched characters and emotional settings. Her themes almost always are women-centric and revolve around the issues of home and family. She confesses in a candid chat with Nidhi Sethi…
I have been forever interested in the lives of women, whether in the professional arena or in domestic spaces. One of the pre-occupations in all my books is how women manage both and what sacrifices they have to make in order to keep the home fires burning and sanity in personal lives (The Asian Age).

In many ways, Kapur’s novels seem to be auto-biographical in tone. In an honest confession to Nidhi Sethi she recalls:

I felt homesick when I was a student in Canada. I felt alienated and nostalgic, so I wanted to write about the whole experience. Moreover, I write about things I know well, though I set them in an imaginative mould. But I did make an exception when I drew some of the details from my mother’s life for my first novel.

ManjuKapur’s foray into the literary scene was quite a ruthless experience of sorts. She had taken almost three years to complete her first novel which was rejected eight times. But determined that she is she edited and rewrote it as many times before it finally saw the light of the day. Kapur is a post-colonial writer who intuitively perceives the position of women in a patriarchal society and deals with the problems of women. Till date she has written five novels - Difficult Daughters (1998), A Married Woman (2002), Home (2006), The Immigrant (2008) and Custody (2011). Her first novel Difficult Daughters won the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 1999 and was a number one bestseller in India. The Immigrant was shortlisted for DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2011. The novel Custody has been adapted into a daily soap titled ‘Yeh Hain Mohabbatein’ by Ekta Kapoor.

The female characters in Manju Kapur’s novels are caught in the continuous dichotomy between the personal needs and the institutional and social obligations and responsibilities. They challenge the male domination and patriarchal
mechanisms of surveillance and control over women’s body. The researcher plans
to undertake a detailed analysis of only two of her novels viz. Difficult Daughters
and A Married Woman in the present study. However, a brief outline and themes
of all the five novels need to be discussed here.

Manju Kapur’s first novel Difficult Daughters is a tale of the protagonist’s
struggle for career and identity against the dominant ideology of domesticity. Set
around the turbulent years of World War II and the partition of India, she
realistically depicts women of three generations focusing on Virmati, the difficult
daughter of the second generation. The novel is the story of a woman torn between
family duty, the desire for education and illicit love. The search for control over
one’s destiny is the key theme. While India fights for freedom from the British
Raj, Virmati fights for the freedom to live life on her terms. The novelist has
portrayed her protagonists as women caught between the passion of the flesh and a
yearning to be part of political and intellectual movements.

A Married Woman explores Astha’s longing for a purpose in her life other than
being a wife and mother against a vividly realized backdrop of Indian sectarian
politics. It presents an interesting collage of the problems, insecurities and unrest
faced by a middle class woman and a nation both on the verge of transition. The
author presents a lesbian relationship between Astha and Pipeelika but in the end
regularity norms are set to play to confine women’s sexuality within the
framework of hetero-normativity - i.e. relationship that are monogamous, within
marriage and often with opposite sex.

The novel Home exposes the still prevalent parochial attitudes towards the
upbringing of the girl child in India. Manju Kapur traces the painful voyage of the
heroine Nisha from childhood to adulthood, the likes of a bildungsroman. Home
details Nisha’s search for a home i.e. search for a place of shelter and security.
Unfortunately for women in India, home is not a place of comfort and relaxation and it does not ensure them any emotional security, or for that matter even physical security. The novel unravels the story of the life of an ordinary middle class joint family set in Delhi.

In the novel *The Immigrant*, Kapur explores the special challenges facing immigrant wives, the way a young woman’s life already under pressure in professional and reproductive terms becomes an even more impossible balancing act within a foreign culture. Nina finds she is not only ill-prepared for the cultural gulf she encounters but also the gaping distances (intellectual, emotional and physical) in her barren relationship. Sexual inadequacy turns into security and then infidelity. Kapur explores the adjustments and frustrations of a modern marriage.

Manju Kapur’s fifth novel *Custody* is not just a social commentary, but a novel that is true to the universal angst of modern marriage, with its burden of individualism. It is set in the thriving, upper middle class colonies of Delhi in the mid-nineties, against the backdrop of the initial surge of foreign investment in India. Shagun is a modern woman who fulfills her individual dreams instead of familial fulfillment. She is an ambitious woman who is over-ridden by individualism and her own well-being. The novel charters the life of a changing woman in the backdrop of increased globalization. It chronicles the various intricacies around the dissolution of marriage and a family in modern India. The novel shows that a childless marriage is despised. The blame is attributed to the female. Female infertility is recognized as a ground for divorce.

### 1.7 Hypothesis

Both Shobha De and Manju Kapur present their female protagonists as conscientious women in search of ‘self’ against the backdrop of ruthless practices of patriarchy in post-colonial India. The protagonists of both these novelists belong to different classes, as a consequence, their experiences with respect to
their lives vis-à-vis family and society are found to be poles apart. Their journey in
pursuit of their ‘self’ would also differ. Since De deals with the lives and problems
of high society urban women and Kapur focuses her stories on the lives and
desires of middle-class women hailing from small towns, a comparative study of
the two novelists and the portrayal of women in their writings would offer
interesting insights into their journey of self-discovery.

1.8 Methodology

The present study is comparative in nature. Hence, an attempt is made to
thoroughly study the primary sources i.e. the selected novels by Shobha De and
Manju Kapur. Preliminary study of literature available on women’s writings in
India will be best suited for an understanding of the society that afflicted the
protagonists of the novels to rebel and seek a special place for themselves.
Although the research is based on textual examination of the said novels, the
researcher extensively taps the library and web resources to understand feminist
theories, concepts and ideas and apply the same to the novels under consideration.

1.9 Plan of Research

The thesis has been divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter-I titled ‘Introduction’ is divided into two sections.

Section-I attempts to deliberate in detail upon the need for a research focusing on
the topic of quest for ‘self’ which is also synonymous with woman emancipation.
This calls for some insightful discussions on the patriarchal frame-work of society
with its emphasis on male-dominance leading to female servitude. The chapter
also reflects upon the political and socio-cultural factors which through times
immemorial have supported women subjugation. Since the study chooses to
undertake a comparative analysis of the protagonists in the novels of two
prominent post-colonial women novelists, an attempt has been made here to
throw light on the biographical journey of the concerned writers- Shobha De and Manju Kapur, besides listing out their works and the themes. This is followed by a discussion on the rationale and significance of the study, the aims and objectives as well as the scope and limitations of the research.

**Section-II** deals with the theoretical framework which forms the background of this study. Notwithstanding the oppressive status of women, many feminists voiced their angst and displeasure; hence, a reading of some of the prominent feminists and principles related to feminism is naturally unavoidable in this preamble.

**Chapter-2** This chapter is devoted exclusively to an understanding of the novels written by post-colonial women novelists. The thrust is on the portrayal of women and man-woman relationships in the novels written by some prominent women writers in India. This sets the stage for a detailed study of the theme of the present research in the chapters that follow.

**Chapter-3** This chapter concentrates on the search for ‘self’ of female protagonists in the two select novels of Shobha De - *Socialite Evenings* and *Second Thoughts*.

**Chapter-4** This chapter focuses on the search for ‘self’ of female protagonists in the two select novels of Manju Kapur - *Difficult Daughters*, and *A Married Woman*.

**Chapter-5** The last chapter of the study is titled ‘Conclusion’. This chapter takes into its fold a comparative study of the female protagonists of De and Kapur based on their social milieu, lifestyle and factors like class, education, familial, professional and economic background etc. in order to understand their attitude and behavior towards patriarchal oppression and gender discrimination. The chapter also records the attitude of women in search of ‘self’ towards life and men in society. It then goes on to summarize the major findings of the research.
In addition to this, the concluding chapter states the pedagogical implications of the study and suggests ways for further research in the related area.
Section-II Theoretical Framework

1.10 Preliminaries

This section of Chapter-I seeks to examine the causes underlying the secondary status of women and the socio-political and psychological unrest that gave rise to a worldwide movement with a desire to secure equal rights to women. It tries to understand the concept of feminism and enumerate the major voices who figure at the helm of this movement. Since the present study attempts to analyze the works of two Indian novelists, it also briefly discusses feminism in the Indian context.

1.11 Secondary Status of Women

Throughout history, women have been identified either as pale reflections of men or as their opposite, and characterized as the ‘weaker sex’. Males oppressed females and accorded them a secondary status in a society dominated by traditional conventions of patriarchy. Right from the beginning, men have enjoyed every advantage with respect to position, power and status in society. The reasons for such oppression are many. Firstly, women are totally invisible to their oppressors. Secondly, women have been trained through centuries to see through the eyes of their oppressors and hence, they are invisible to themselves too. Lastly, these oppressors exercise their power not only as male heads of the states, male capitalists and male militarists but also as fathers, sons, brothers, husbands and lovers. As a result of this, women were expected to silently sacrifice, surrender and submit themselves to the demands of patriarchy. Thus, man has autogenously prescribed a secondary position to woman in society with the intention of ruling over her. It was the man who imposed the limits on her and subjected her to peripheral existence in the social order.

Different religions of the world have endorsed subjugation of women thus perpetuating the myth of female servitude. In scriptures and myths too, a woman is depicted either as Goddess or a sub-human creature, never as a complete human
being. The Bible stresses the superiority of men over women and maintains that man is the master who rules over and controls every object on this earth including woman. St. Paul, who assigns a secondary status to women, says:

“A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; But woman is the glory of man” 42 (I Corinthians, 11:7).

Asserting upon the secondary status of women, he reiterates further:

Women should be silent during the church meetings. They are not to take part in the church discussion, for they are subordinate to men as the scriptures also declare. If they have any questions to ask, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to express their opinion in church meetings 43 (I Corinthians, 14: 34-35)

The Koran also endorses the superiority of men over women. A woman’s role in life is to provide her man sexual gratification and progeny. The Koran says:

Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other... Virtuous women are obedient, careful during the husband’s absence because God hath on them been careful 44 (Quoted by Rodwell 415).

Buddhism too did not accord a high position to women. Although Lord Buddha did not discriminate between a man and a woman with regards to attainment of spiritual ends, yet in the monastic order, the place given to nuns was lower than those occupied by monks. While on one hand, she has been described as an object of reverence or worship, on the other hand, she is treated like an object of sexual gratification and considered to be man’s property. According to Buddhists, the company of a woman was considered to be a hindrance in the path of a man’s development of his higher faculties. The Buddha tells his disciple:
Women are soon angered, Ananda, Women are full of passion, Ananda, Women are envious, Ananda, Women are stupid, Ananda, That is the reason, Ananda, that is the cause why women have no place in public assemblies, do not carry on business, and do not earn their living by any profession⁴５ (Baig 57).

This indicates that for centuries together, ‘religion’ has been used as a tool in the hands of men in society to accord women a dominant status. But noted writer and feminist Taslima Nasreen contends that the word ‘religion’ should be replaced by the word ‘humanity’ because it is the so called religion which has chained women and reduced them to slaves. Even lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers and scholars have gone to great lengths to prove that women’s subordinate position was willed in heaven and made profitable on earth.

In Indian classical literature a woman has always been accorded with a relational identity as an ideal daughter, a devoted wife, a caring sister and so on. Her image is synonymous with ‘goodness’ and in her endeavor to prove her virtuosity she is almost reduced to a puppet in the hands of the men in society, thereby losing the identity of her own ‘self’. The ideal woman according to Hindu mythology is one who bears the image of Sita or Savitri. Her position in society might have been glorified as that of Sita, Savitri, Gandhari or Damyanti. But unfortunately, one fails to notice that these epic or mythological characters are too idealistic and way behind, and, cut off from the reality of the trials and tribulations of modern world.

For both men and women in Hindu society, the ideal woman has been traditionally personified by Sita who is portrayed in the Ramayana as the quintessence of wifely devotion⁴⁶ (Chakravarthi 70).

Although the image of Mata-Sita glorifies her as a mother, the irony is that as a wife she is expected to be at the mercy of the whims and fancies of her husband. The legend of Ramayana shows how Sita is abandoned by her husband Sri Ram
simply on the basis of derogatory remarks made by a commoner. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

*The Draupadi image has been overshadowed by the Sita image. Though a complex epic like the Mahabharata uninhibitedly presents a spirited woman like Draupadi, it is the Sita image as wife which is pervasive in the consciousness of the race*\(^{47}\) (Mukherjee 15).

One can deduce from these perceptions how different religions of the world and the Indian mythology have sanctioned women-subordination in the hands of men thus relegating women to the walls. It is therefore evident that there has been a great difference between the idealized image of women in Indian myths and scriptures and her status in actual life. Modern day women simply cannot fit into the frame of these surrealistic portraits of women.

However, critical commentaries on status of women during the ancient Vedic period states that women enjoyed equal rights with men and there were even feminist law-makers like Gargi and Maitreyi. Some critics also believe that some of the hymns of the *Atharva Veda* were composed by women seers. Women were free to choose their husbands and *Gandharva Vivah* was not uncommon. Women shared equal opportunities in education and were eligible for *Upanayana* or initiation and *Brahmacharya* or study of source of knowledge. Thus it is evident that - “*The Veda distinguishes itself from all other Indian literature by the high regard in which it holds women*”\(^{48}\) (Bose 12).

But the later Vedic period polarized the sexes. Men oppressed women and treated them as ‘other’ or even treated them as low caste. Since women have been cast as lesser forms of the masculine individual, the paradigm of the ‘self’ began to gain ascendancy. It is clearly evident that patriarchal institutions and societal norms are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women’s human rights also. Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres.
Feminists have often used the term ‘patriarchy’ to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root cause of women’s subordination. Speaking about women’s position in a male-centric society, Women’s Rights Activist and American Feminist Andrea Dworkin observed:

\[ \text{No other people are so entirely captured, so destitute of any memory of freedom, so dreadfully robbed of identity and culture, so absolutely slandered of a group, so demeaned and humiliated}^{49} \] (70).

Women, being engulfed in this vicious circle of ignored status, called for a conscious, intelligent and concerted effort to free herself from the fetters of tradition. An increasing awareness of injustice done to them made women raise their voice against inequality and oppression. It became necessary for her to empower herself socially, politically, economically, and legally. She no longer wished to play the ‘Angel in the house.’ She had a mind of her own and several desires too. Her rising self-consciousness sought to break the shackles of tradition and establish her own identity. Thus emerged a worldwide movement to secure women’s rights on the one hand and accord her love, respect and dignity in society on the other.

1.12 Concept of Feminism

The term ‘feminism’ has its origin in the Latin word \textit{femina} meaning ‘woman’. According to \textit{Random House Dictionary}, feminism is defined as “the doctrine of advocating social and political rights of women equal to those of men.” It associates itself with the advocacy of women’s rights, status and power in order to bring them at par with the men based on equality of sexes.

Feminism gained momentum as an organized movement from the nineteenth century as people increasingly came to believe that women were being treated unfairly. A multipronged movement, Feminism underscores the belief that men have controlled and created history, politics and culture and in doing so, in the
The words of Catherine Stimpson, “relegated women, as women, to the margins of culture, if not to silence and invisibility”\(^{50}\) (qtd. by Benstock 147) Traditional role of women as mother, daughter, wife, and sister-wholly dependent on the men in their lives gradually became an anachronism. The goal of feminism was to enable women to achieve self-realization, self-actualization, self-definition, self-fulfillment, self-emancipation by having a freedom of choice to live their life on their own.

Feminism is a socio-political movement that is used to champion the cause of woman’s equality. It has manifested across centuries and continents through various movements, campaigns, currents and ideologies. Feminists have often argued, debated and differed on issues pertaining to inequality, how to attain equality and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned or critiqued. As it is with any ideology, political movement or philosophy, there is no single universal form of feminism. Feminism is thus a social movement, largely sparked off by the growing discontent and experiences of women with regards to social, political, and economic inequality between men and women. Deeply rooted in the belief of identity for women, feminism laid its thrust on subjugation of women in history as the main cause for all kinds of psychological maladies in society.

According to Janet Richards,

*The essence of feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism*\(^{51}\) (3)

Feminism is thus a movement against the atrocities inflicted upon women by men. It has been observed across civilizations how the identity of women have been distorted and reduced to nothingness. The status of a woman has been reduced to
that of an ‘inferior’ being in an egocentric male-dominated society in the name of religion, philosophy, morality, psychology or politics. Women have perpetually been victims of subjugation and subordination. They had absolutely no place in creative and literary spheres. Coming down heavily on the subservient position of women in society, Jane Austen rightly pointed out,

Men have had every advantage...in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree, and worst of all, the pen has been in their hands\textsuperscript{52}

Feminism is thus, a socio-political movement that is used to champion the cause of woman’s equality. Feminism takes into its fold, political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" began to gain momentum only in the 1970s, they were already being used in the public parlance much earlier.

1.13 Genesis of Feminism

Although the roots of Feminism may be traced back to ancient Greece, most people associate the Movement with the three waves of Feminism. The First Wave Feminism associates itself with a period of feminist activity that took place during the nineteenth and early twentieth century across the world. Its thrust was majorly on legal issues and of course on gaining woman’s suffrage or right to vote. This wave of feminism lasted from 1860 to 1920 and focused on attainment of franchise for women under the Women’s Liberation Movement. The Second Wave Feminism added a more radical dimension to the otherwise liberal first wave feminism. Contrary to the liberal feminists, the radical feminists not only demanded equal rights but also asserted superiority of women over men. The period of feminist activity which began in the early 1960s in the United States of America and eventually spread to other parts of the world emerged as a more
intense debate on various issues like sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. This movement also focused on battle against domestic violence. The early 1990s marked the beginnings of the Third Wave Feminism. Generally perceived as a continuation of the second wave feminism, it destabilized constructs from second-wave feminism while trying to expand the topic of feminism to include a diverse group of women with a diverse set of identities. Their focus was less on political changes when compared to individualistic identities.

1.14 Feminist Voices

The first major feminist manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) was written by Mary Wollstonecraft who demanded equal opportunities for women in the field of education, economics and politics.

In its introductory chapter Wollstonecraft demands for women to be treated as human beings:

*Dismissing, then, those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristic of the weaker Vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone*\(^{53}\) (82).

She strongly condemns the religious attitude which is responsible for attributing a secondary status to women. She points out that:

*Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison*\(^{54}\) (131).
Although women’s position in society has been different with changing time and across different cultures, men have spoken derogatorily about them in all ages. In a show of masculine gallantry they have kept her insulated from the external world but depriving her of some of her basic rights, viz. education.

This is evident from Rousseau’s views on the meaning of education for women:

“The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them- these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy”\(^{55}\) (Quoted by Millet 74).

However, one of Wollstonecraft’s main arguments in *Rights of Woman* also stresses upon the logic that women should be educated rationally so that they get the opportunity to contribute to society. Wollstonecraft, along with other crusaders for women like Catherine Macaulay and Hester Capone, maintained that women were indeed capable of rational thought and deserved to be educated. Fiercely attacking the educational and political theorists of the eighteenth century, who denied women education, she states in the Preface to her book *A Vindication of Rights of Woman*:

\[\text{My main argument is built on this simple principle, that if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue: for truth must be common to all}^{56}\] (Preface).

John Stuart Mill, another crusader for women’s cause in his treatise ‘*The Subjection of Women*’ (1869) expressed serious concern over some of the issues raised by Wollstonecraft. Advocating the need of improved education among women, he opined that the power of earning is very essential to the dignity of
women. Referring to women’s suppression as ‘domestic slavery’, he opined that the main obstacle in progress of humanity is the legal subordination of one sex to the other. Mill observed that:

> No one can safely pronounce that if women’s nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men’s and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the condition of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves"57 (40).

Many articles were written by women writers in England during the Victorian era. Harriet Martineau (1802-76), a contemporary of Elizabeth Barrett and Charlotte Bronte were feminist writers whose writings were published in magazines, newspapers and periodicals. She appealed for education for girls in Society in America (1837) and Household Education (1849). She wrote extensively on issues of working women, discrimination against women in workplace, problems of women prisoner etc.

The Women’s Movement which was rather passive from early nineteenth century to the 1950s, gained momentum in 1953 with the advent of the English translation of a French writer, Simone de Beauvoir’s book titled Lee Deuxieme Sexe (1949). A radical feminist, in the book The Second Sex, Beauvoir comes down heavily on issues related to girls’ education, female sexuality, marriage, prostitution, and household chores which she refers to as unrewarding drudgery. The position of women is changing steadily, and women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the man’s world, yet it is “still a world that belongs to men”58 (21). Women’s subjugation continues and therefore “we are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women.”59 (20).
This secondary position that women have been forced to embrace in relation to men in a patriarchal set-up, rues the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, is in many ways similar to that of the racial minorities. Surprisingly, this secondary position does not owe itself to her natural ‘feminine’ characteristics but is an offshoot of strong environmental forces characterized by social traditions, religious preaching and education, which have been under the control of men. In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that man considers himself the subject and absolute and the woman is the ‘other’.

*She is called “the sex”, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex--- Absolute sex, no less..., she is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute, she is the other* 60 (16).

Simone de Beauvoir's provocative declaration, “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other,” thus signals the central importance of the ‘Self’. It has been observed that in the past, a woman sought her identity in the relationships she shared or the roles she played as a wife, mother or daughter - an identity she accepted all too gladly. But with changing times a woman began to look beyond this relational identity. She seems to have understood the duplicity of this identity that has rather been imposed upon her by society in order to restrain her growth as an individual. The ‘self” has remained pivotal to questions about personal identity, the body, sociality, and agency that most women writers have chosen to address. The subordinate status accorded to women in society is thus, not a biological fact but a created one. The social position and roles assigned to women through civilizations have placed them in an inferior position to that of men. Women have been looked at as the property of the father, husband and son. To be the ‘other’ is to be reduced to an ‘object’ or a mere body.

Beauvoir’s book has had significant influence on feminist literature with bold and frank discourses on sexual pleasures being equally important in case of both men
and women. Beauvoir asserts that the bond between man and woman should be based on love and consent and concludes that women should be freed from the bonds of slavery.

However, the book that created a revolution in the women’s movement was Betty Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’ (1963). The Feminine Mystique ignited the contemporary women's movement in 1963 and created a furor so much so that it permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world. Feminism as it is perceived today, dates back to the publication of this book which took the American society by storm with its challenges on the popular belief that a woman’s place is her home; that she should seek fulfillment in motherhood and domesticity alone thus abiding by the demands of age old religious beliefs.

Speaking about the ‘feminine mystique’ or the ‘incommunicable quality’, Friedan writes in the preface:

“There was a strange discrepancy between the realities of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique” (9).

Yet another prominent voice of the twentieth century is Kate Millet who in her book titled Sexual Politics (1969) maintains that the relation between the sexes is fundamentally political. It is an arrangement “where by one group of person is controlled by another” (23). She argues further that patriarchy has accorded a demeaning status to women and believes that freeing them from this “immemorial subordination” (363) is the only way to bring them closer to humanity.

A major voice of Feminism, Australian born Germaine Greer in her book The Female Eunuch (1970) suggests that “women ought not to enter into socially sanctioned relationship, like marriage” (18) because “if women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to
marry". According to Greer, woman’s struggle was not to seek equality with men. Rather "Women's liberation," she wrote in *The Whole Woman* (1999) means embracing sex differences in a positive fashion - a struggle for the freedom of women to "define their own values, order their own priorities and decide their own fate." (Wikipedia)

It is to be noted here that joining the crusade against women subjugation, there emerged a group of radical feminists in the 1970s who strongly advocated their theories on equality. It was during this period, that works like Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Mitchell’s *Women’s Estate* (1971), and Ann Oakley’s *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), *The Sociology of Housework* (1974) and *Housewife* (1976) appeared. These feminists unanimously opposed any kind of discrimination on the basis of sex or gender and declared in the epigraph of one of the books on the subject:

*The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces but in our institutions - Woman is made, not born* (Gornick and Barbara K. Moran 135).

It is, therefore, very pertinent to recall here, the fact that long before the advent of women’s liberation movement, many writers expressed their concerns on the oppressed status of women in the familial structures in society which stand on the strong foundations of patriarchy. It was during the nineteenth century specially, that brought to the forefront great writers like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Dorothy Richardson, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Margaret Drabble whose works, with their emphasis on the realities of women’s lives reveal the subservient position of women and explore gender issues or man and woman power. Twentieth century presents a more conscious and articulate attempt by women to speak about their own experiences using their own images, symbols, form and syntax.
At this juncture, Virginia Woolf’s contribution to literature from the feminist perspective is immensely significant. She believes that literature is a product of culture and it can be challenged to open up new possibilities for women to voice their feelings. Voicing her opinion regarding the difference in male and female experience and its expression in literature she says:

*There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself*\(^6\) (26).

Moving in search of ‘feminine identity’, Woolf desired a feminine prose or a woman sentence free from the restrictions of punctuation and grammar - a style which is mobile, flexible and apt to express female experience.

According to famous feminist critic Elaine Showalter, woman writers should develop a “vocabulary for the body” in order to describe the female sexual behavior uninhibitedly. This will, in turn, provide an alternative to the misogynistic male sexual rhetoric. Frowning upon the cultural hegemony of patriarchy, American poet and feminist Katha Pollitt observes:

*Woman as sharer and carer, woman as earth mother, woman as guardian of all the small rituals that knit together a family and a community, woman as beneath, above or beyond such manly concerns as law, reason, abstract ideas- these images are as old as time. Defenders of male supremacy have always used them to declare women inferior to men; covert ones use them to place women on a pedestal as too good for this naughty world.*\(^6\)

A Feminist critique of patriarchy cannot be deliberated upon without trying to understand the fundamental difference between the terms feminism, feminity and femaleness. These are vital and instrumental in subverting the position of women. Feminine and masculine are social constructs modeled on the cultural and social
ideologies. Thus, if feminine represents nurture, then female, nature. Feminism may be viewed as a political position, femaleness as a matter of biology and feminity as set of culturally defined characteristics.

Feminism advocates complete equality for women and is a woman’s assertive resistance to exploitation of any kind. All kinds of efforts on the part of women to find their own subject matter, their own emotions and experiences, their own responses to the world in their own style are meant to ascertain their position in society. While there is the liberal feminist that aims at legal equality and equal opportunity with men, the radical feminist aims at uprooting and replacing all existing social and political institutions which are responsible for subjugation of women.

Women desire a humanist and unprejudiced attitude from society. Although, feminism has different strands of meaning woven around it, all of them see women as the oppressed social group. Their outlook towards women’s issues is essentially the same. Feminism, thus, in its broader sense aims at breaking down the male and female stereotypes and bestowing equal status to women.

1.15 Feminism in Indian Context

In childhood a woman should be under her father’s control, in youth under her husband’s and when her husband is dead, under the sons, she should not have independence…(The Laws of Manu, 5.148)

Since times immemorial, all over the world, especially in the Asian countries and particularly in India, man has been at the helm of affairs of the society with respect to its practices, customs and creeds. The woman in Indian society has been the butt of foul indictments, emotional abuse, sentimental sacrilege submission and subjugation. Indian sacred texts like Vedas, Smritis, Samhitas and Puranas present numerous instances of gender-bias in society. A prayer in Atharva-Veda says,
“Let a female child be born somewhere else; here let a male child be born.”69 (vi.2.3). The child marriage of a girl carried complete sanction of Manu:

A man aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who please him, or a man of twenty four a girl of eight years of age; if his duties would otherwise be impeded, he must marry sooner70 (ix.94).

A widow was deprived of the right to eat, dress or lead the life of a normal person. To stay chaste or to immolate herself in her husband’s pyre were the sanctioned options available for her. It is thus very obvious how traditional Indian society extolled woman’s sufferings.

Again there are some scholars who are of the view that women and men enjoyed equal status in all spheres of life in ancient Hindu society. In fact right from the early Vedic period to 300 BC, women were held in high esteem. One can also deduce from the writings of the ancient grammarians Patanjali and Katyayana that women were highly educated in the Vedic period and participated in the cultural, social, economic, philosophical and political activities. The Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads are evidences to the fact that there were a number of women scholars, poets, and philosophers in ancient India. These Sanskrit texts extol the virtues of women and stress upon the divine stature of Mother.

It was however, during the period 500 BC To 500 AD, the Age of Sutras and Epics that indicated depravity in the status of women. It is believed that during this time the birth of a daughter was considered ominous in the family. They were not encouraged to acquire complete knowledge of Vedic studies. Also, it was the son’s prerogative alone to perform rituals and ceremonies for their ancestors. In other words, sons became an absolute necessity for the family and most desired, whereas girls were grossly under-valued. Gradually the women were declared unfit for education and thus could not enjoy religious privileges. By AD 700 their
deteriorating status in society was further compounded as a result of foreign invasions and various political conditions. This trend continued till AD 1800. Apparently though, the arrival of the British brought about a change in the status of women in India.

During the colonial rule in India, the nation witnessed a growing need for women’s education. As a result, several missionary schools and colleges for girls were introduced in different parts of the country. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought against social issues like child marriage, sati, ill-treatment of widows and illiteracy of women. The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi gave further impetus to the cause of women emancipation in India in the twentieth century by involving them in the struggle for political freedom. Gandhiji vehemently criticized the customs of temple prostitution, purdah, and prohibition of widow remarriage. He urged women to participate in various national movements. Inspired and encouraged by men, a host of women also organized themselves under noted personalities like Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade and Anandibai Joshi for the betterment of their kind.

Feminism is a woman’s search for identity, space and freedom. It encompasses theories and philosophies, concerned with issues of gender differences that advocate equality for women and is a campaign for women’s rights and interests. The rise of feminist movement in India brought to light many Indian writers with an abundance of talent. Indian English writers like R.K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya were precursors who presented life and its problems from a woman’s perspective. Indian women novelists also strongly articulated their struggle for liberation and self-assertion through their inherent art of story-telling. With inborn qualities of love, tolerance and compassion, they were able to perceive the world from a female perspective and express their feelings in a more subtle and sensitive manner. While the earlier writings of Indian
women project the traditional image of women, a major preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. The typical feminine sensibility has become more and more prominent in the writings of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Nayantara Sehgal to pave way for Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Shobha De, Nina Sibal, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Nair and Manju Kapur among others.

The image of women in Indian fiction has undergone a great change. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of suffering and self-sacrificing women so as to paint realistic pictures of conflicted female characters in search of identity, and no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. A most distinguishing feature of Indian feminist fiction is the presence of a perfect blend of activist and intellectual ideologies in it. It presents the western concept of feminism in its specific Indian socio-cultural context. Commenting upon the Indian fiction writers Bharati Patnaik observes,

Their approach is three dimensional: They look into the past and learn from it, they glare at the present and analyze it, they look into the future and constitute a solid framework. In this sense their fiction is a unique blending of tradition, modernity and transgression71 (12).

In other words, Indian women novelists have tried to redefine the position of women through a number of resolutions, “from solipsist withdrawal to accommodation to outright rejection”72 (Roy 20). They aim at capturing woman’s challenging struggle for existence in their entirety - in terms of her feelings, emotions and intellect.

1.16 Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this chapter to present an overview of this research which involves the study of selected novels by two eminent post-colonial women
novelists. Woman’s subservient position in society has been a serious matter and interestingly both Shobha De and Manju Kapur have expressed their concern on the burning issue of women subjugation through their female protagonists’ journey towards discovery of their ‘self’. The present study has taken into its fold examination of various social, political, cultural, familial and traditional forces that thwart the burgeoning of a woman’s self, thereby relegating her to the margins. The aim of the study has been to understand the female protagonists’ struggle to establish their identity in a society rid with male ego as seen in the writings of the two novelists. It has been interesting to note that the question of male dominance and repressive or oppressive attitude towards women has affected every woman irrespective of their social milieu, class, status, community or culture. While De’s protagonists are high class urban socialites, Kapur’s women belong to the middle class and are rooted in domesticity. However, both their protagonists are victims of identity crisis. The researcher has thus undertaken a comparative study of their female protagonists search for ‘self’ which will help in gaining interesting insights into the psyche of women. This will also open up new vistas for readers who are keen to understand the works of these novelists from psychological, socio-cultural, intellectual and economic perspectives besides the most dominant feminist one.
Works Cited


12. *Ibid.* (Blurb)


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26. *Ibid., p.3*


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41. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 14:34-35 Holy Bible
54. Ibid. p.131


59. Ibid. p.20

60. Ibid. p.16


63. Ibid. p.363


65. Ibid. p.31


69. Atharva Veda, vi. 2.3

