As early as the nineteenth century, women in the West had fought for equality between the sexes. They desired equal opportunities in education, employment and property rights and demanded an end to the double standard of sexual morality practised by men. The movement for achieving goals has been based on the thoughts of eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers like Locke, Condorcet, Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and so on. These Western women formed organised movement to demand for their rights.

But the Indian women, shackled by religious beliefs and traditions, felt the need for such rights rather late. There had been no organised movements to fight for their cause in the nineteenth century or in the early part of the twentieth century. Of course, through the individual efforts of some male persons like Raja Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the nineteenth century, a lot had been done for the welfare of women in the Indian society. They emphasised on the improvement of women’s lot and urged the government to take necessary measures. They made specific and concrete demands like education for girls, an Act for Widow Remarriage, Abolition of Sati and so on. The British Government came forward to put a stop to the evil
practices like the sati in the year 1829. The Widow Remarriage Act too was passed in 1956. But the change in the social attitude towards the age-old custom and values was not that easy. For, society is a nebulous entity, and women too are a part of that society. The social evils are perpetrated by not only men but also women - those women who are old, conservative and unliberated.

Nevertheless there have been changes in the status of women in the Indian society too, slowly and steadily. I would like to study this slow change in their status over the ages. But I would study this in a branch of Indian literature, that is, in the Indian English novels. Since the novel is a branch of literature where society is reflected almost as it is unlike poetry or drama, I have chosen the novel to study the Indian society, vis-a-vis, the position of women. And I have chosen Indian English novels where we get an all-India picture better than in regional novels which generally reflect a picture of the concerned region. Writers in general have, through the ages, tried to mirror society for the greater consciousness of the masses to bring about a change towards improvement. Their subject is man-in-society, reflecting contemporary issues, social or political. And novelists, too, are no exception. Rather, they have a better advantage to be more direct and straightforward compared to the poets and dramatists, who are constrained by their formal
compulsions. And of course I shall study the Indian English novels from the feminist standpoint taking up those Indian English novels that deal with women's issues.

The status of women in India is undergoing changes and Indian consciousness about the need for change of the woman's status at home and in the society has also been changing. This can be detected in a careful study of the Indian English novels made from a feminist angle of vision.

About my study of the position of women in the Indian society as reflected in the Indian English novels, I would like to make at this stage certain explanatory statements about my scope and method. First of all, by the term Indian English novels, I mean those novels only which are originally written in English by Indians. And, here I have followed G.P. Sarma's apt definition of Indian English novels in the Introduction to his book, Nationalism in Indo Anglian Fiction (1978). Then the period of my study would be from 1930 to 1980. I have chosen 1930 as the beginning of my study because it is from this decade generally that the Indian novelist seem to have grown aware of the status of women in society with a consciousness about the lot of women. The earlier novelist, while reflecting the sad plight of women at home especially, were not very much conscious of the rightful position of women in the society. And I have chosen
1980 as the cut off year of my study because this distance of about twelve years from then till now has been considered necessary to view the publications with some amount of objectivity and detachment. Then by the term 'Fiction' in the title of my thesis I have meant only the novels. Though fiction also includes short stories, those are omitted from my purview because it will make my work unwieldy.

In my first chapter, 'The Woman Question', I have discussed in brief the position of woman in the West from the beginning of society and traced its development throughout the ages. From a respectable status in the matriarchal family women's status gradually lowered to one of humility and slavery. I have shown how over the years, women experienced discontent and frustration at this suppression. The gradual awareness of their position and the mental and emotional turmoil within them finally led to an open revolt against a system which denies them their rights as individuals. It is then shown how after a prolonged struggle, women come to attain for themselves a fair degree of freedom and opportunities within the family and in society. I cannot, however, claim any originality in these observations, all my views in this chapter being based on well-known feminist and sociological thinkers whose names and works are duly mentioned in proper places.
In chapter II, 'The Woman Question in India', I have discussed the development in the position of the Indian woman. As in the West, women initially enjoyed a better life in Indian society too, but with the influence of the Code of Manu, a drastic change occurred which affected women's position. They occasionally became almost slaves in the hands of men. But gradually, with the efforts of certain religious organisations like the Brahma-Samaj and the Arya Samaj, and with the individual efforts of some wise men and women with advanced ideas like Vidyasagar and Annie Besant, there appeared a ray of hope for the Indian women. It was during the Nationalist movement that women finally emerged from their homes to actively participate in the freedom of their country.

The third chapter entitled 'The Novelists till 1930', I have traced in brief the history of the novels written till 1930. I have chosen to discuss very briefly the Indian English novels dealing with the woman's lot or role till 1930 in a chapter though the scope of my thesis has been only from 1930 onwards. This is in order to give some idea about how the woman was treated or looked upon in the novels before 1930; and what kind of change ultimately came from 1930 onwards. As the woman question was not very conspicuous in those early novels, the discussion of these novels have been brief and rather from a standpoint that is historical and
general. And only those novels are brought here where the woman gets a conspicuous role to play. An attempt has been made to find out the position of women at home and in the society of this period as reflected in these novels. These novels are discussed also to have an idea of the kinds of novels that existed in this branch of Indian literature before 1930.

In my fourth chapter, 'The Novelists from 1931 till 1950', I have discussed in detail selected works of those novelists who appeared in the literary scene in this period. Only those novels by them are selected that deal with the woman with some amount of consciousness, at least of the woman's lot or position in the society and at home. Although some of the works of the novelists of this period came out after 1950, they too have been included in this chapter itself, because such novels, though they appeared much later, reflect by and large the society, spirit and the technique of the period when their author first came to write. For example, the stalwarts of the Indian English novel like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao came to write novels in this period for the first time. Though they are still writing, their novels, whether of today or of this period, reflect an aura that is typical of the times of their youth and middle ages, that is, this period from 1931 to 1950. The gradual awareness of these novelists, their ability to analyse the
traditional role in society and the struggle to break through this constricting bounds of conventionality is discussed here. Some woman characters of the novels of this period are found to be able to break away from the passive role and emerge as rebels not only in the family like Ishvani in The Brocaded Sari (1946), but also in society at large as Daisy in The Guide (1958). Some women, however, are unable to break away from the rigid social bonds; although they are aware of their own inferior position within the family and in society, as Draupadi in Morning Face (1968). We can observe here a definite change in the attitude of women towards life in general. They are found to be no longer content within the family. They want something more out of life. This feeling of unrest and mental conflict is reflected in the works of the novelists from 1931 to 1950.

In 'The Woman in the Works of the Novelists from 1951 to 1980', which has been the title to my fifth chapter, I have shown how the woman characters have gradually evolved in this age into a new awareness. Here, I have taken 1951 as the dividing line because it is around this time that the novelists took to delving into the psyche of the women characters. Whereas in the novels of the period between 1931 to 1950, the women characters generally came into silent conflict with the family and society which resulted in their passive suffering; in this period we find the women characters in conflict within themselves, too, besides their
conflict with the family and the society. The focus has now shifted to the man-woman relationship. For the first time, their intimate and sexual life is explored in Indian English novels during this period. Relationship between the woman and her family too is given importance; for, woman now strives for an identity of her own in a world that is fast losing its age-old moral values. Here, we see these Indian New Women emerging strong and independent; they have the freedom now to lead the life they desire and refuse to be suppressed or dominated. But along with this new-found freedom, we find these characters faced with another problem, an unlooked for danger - that of mental breakdown, insanity, suicidal tendency - as in Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai's novels.

In my sixth chapter which has been the last, I have concluded my thesis by summing up my discussions of the previous chapters and highlighting my findings in them. In tracing the Woman Question, I have found the slow but steady progress of women in the Indian society in their struggle to achieve the position they have attained today.

My discussion of authors in this work has been chronological on the basis of seniority in respect of the publication of their first work of fiction. But while discussing their novels, only those novels which deal with the woman question have been selected for discussion - the others very often going unmentioned here, this being a
work with a specific theme, and not a general survey of all Indo-Anglian novels. And in case of those novelists who have more than one novel dealing with the women's problems, I have followed again the chronological order. Here I would also like to mention that I have chosen only those Indian or Indian-born writers who have written in an Indian context, and where the woman character can be studied with references to the traditional Indian background. It is for this reason that I have included writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Kamala Markandaya, who, though Indian by birth, are now no longer Indians by citizenship.

Regarding the spelling system of Indian names and terms, I have kept the spellings of the Indian words and names in my work, as they are in the original texts of my study. As such, I have written the same word or name in different spellings according to my references to the different authors or texts.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES