J S Mill in his "The Subjugation of Women", (1969) wrote,

"Who can understand a woman better than a woman herself"

This inspired the researcher to take up the topic "Muslim Woman in Indian English Fiction" for the purpose of research. Also, after reading Indian English fiction for quite sometime, she felt that some inner urge was compelling her to write about Muslim Womanhood in general and the Indian Muslim Woman in particular.

Was it anger or protest, or was it passion or compassion or else was it blind adherence to a particular point of view or compromise with it, that drove to undertake this task? None! On the contrary, she feels she has made a sincere effort to pluck some pages from the early history of Islam, as an evidence, for what Islam holds for the welfare of the Woman and against that backdrop study the Muslim Woman as portrayed in Indian fiction in English.

An in-depth study of Islam and Muslims in India had to be undertaken for that purpose. Different aspects and attitudes of the life of Muslims in India, as reflected in Indian English fiction, with special emphasis on the life of Muslim women, has been the major concern of this study.

While doing so, the researcher had endeavoured to critically analyse the contents of the novels and short stories and tried to show how the Muslim Woman has been underrepresented or misrepresented in some cases. This feeling of being treated wrongly and the need to bring the reality to light, for future guidance, made her to undertake the present task. This is the urge that drove her to set the record straight. Bhavabhuti expresses the same idea when he writes:

(Some inner purpose brings things together)
Also, an inadequate and to some extent improper presentation of the Muslim Woman in Indian English fiction, prompted the researcher to mend the outlook of the reading public, about the Muslim Woman. Here, by "inadequate presentation" is meant that only stereotypes of the Muslim Women have been created by most of the fiction writers. There is no variety, no separate identity of the characters. Therefore, most Muslim Women characters in India English fiction, prior to Indian Independence, look rather similar.

Again, "improper representation" refers to the imposition of ethnic and racial prejudices on the Muslim Women characters. They are generally shown as poor, dull-witted, backward, reactionary, engaged in lowly work and in flesh trading. The reasons for "inadequate" and "improper" depiction of the Muslim Women have been discussed elsewhere in the body of the thesis.

However, one doubt that needs to be set at rest is, this entire work is not inspired by the sole intention of righting the wrong done to the Muslim Women, nor is it an angry protest, but an unbiased, critical analysis of the fictional portrayal of the Muslim Women characters. For this purpose, an understanding of how Islam has treated woman and what is her place in the family and society is necessary. Hence, the following questions naturally arise,

What does Islam say and mean about the position of Woman? How has she been treated in real life? How did the Prophet of Islam and his immediate followers treat women? What were the causes of deterioration of the conditions of the Muslim Woman after sometime? And, what were the gradual changes in the status of the Muslim Women after they got education, sought employment and took part in our country's freedom struggle? Was there any genre called "New Woman", emerging from among the Muslim Women, as it happened in the West or even in the Hindu society? All these issues have been discussed with relevant references.

In order to clear the cobweb of centuries-old superstitions and blow away the thick dark clouds of ignorance, which surrounded the Muslim Woman for long and to present her
in the mellow light of the morning, we must know her original worth. That is to say, according to The Quran what rights and privileges the Muslim Women enjoy. The Holy Book has spoken of Woman in every department of life. Woman in The Quran is both ideal and practical. Women belonging to other religions of the East and West have been placed beside the Muslim Woman, to get a fair idea of how the Muslim Woman was in an advantageous position in the beginning. This is done in the first chapter of the thesis.

The same chapter presents how the Muslim Woman was treated by the Prophet and the first four Caliphs, namely, Hazarats Abubakar, Umar, Usman and Ali. And, how the downfall of the Muslim Woman began, when the administration of the Islamic kingdom went into the hands of the Ummayad and Abbasid Caliphs.

In the next chapter, an effort is made to study the Muslim Woman historically. The impact of the Western education on Indian Woman in general and the Muslim Woman in particular, has been studied with the help of the instances taken from the history of Modern India. Education brought awareness among women and various organisations sprang up to improve their conditions.

Due to education, some women could comprehend their recondite human potentialities and individualities. This has definitely prepared them to face the challenges of life inside and outside their homes. Owing to their enlightenment and awareness, they refused to blindly ratify barbarous customs and traditions in the male dominated society. Thus, educated and enlightened women came to know about the double standards imposed upon them. They brought to light many discriminations that were practised against them, in home and society and also in economics and politics. Various Women's movements sprang out of this self-realisation.

In one way, the history of the feminist movement in India is linked with the freedom movement of our country, because the feminist movement and the freedom movement of our country were the simultaneous occurrences in the history of our nation. Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Kulsum Sayani, Begum Shah Nawaz, Qudsia Aizaz Rasul
and others were active in both the fields. This chapter also deals with the fact that how the political parties like the Indian National Congress, cheated Women’s organisations by causing defeat of their bills in the Legislature Councils, which were constituted after the 1937 elections. And, how the Muslim Women and their views were ignored by the other feminist organisations, that ultimately compelled a nationalist and honest lady like Begum Shah Nawaz to take side with the Muslim League, is also described.

The next chapter gives details about the arrival of Muslims in India. They came to India in three different capacities as sailors, preachers and rulers. Every time they came, they established more and more contacts with the natives here and more and more cultural give and take took place between them. This chapter depicts the Muslim Woman in this cultural confluence. She retained what was best in Islam and also welcomed what was wholesome in Hindu Culture. This chapter also provides illustrations, from the Indian English Fiction, of the Muslim Women who were engaged in the cultural confluence.

In fact, this chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, an indepth study of the Muslims, who came to India in different capacities, is made and in the second, this history part is illustrated through the examples taken from various novels and short stories.

In the fourth chapter, how the Muslim Woman appeared to the non-Muslim fiction writers in Indian English has been discussed. The Muslim Women have been categorised as conservative and liberal characters. It is pertinent, at this point, to justify this kind of categorisation.

In every religion, at the beginning, woman was given education and she was treated on par with man. She had her separate identity, as had happened to women in the early days of Islam and Hinduism. Bibi Ayesha, Bibi Umme Ammar, Bibi Khansa, Bibi Fatima, Bibi Asma-binte-Yezid and many more among the Muslim Women and Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra and others among the Hindu Women are such instances. They were the most Liberal Women during those times.
After sometime, the patriarchal society's law-givers like Al-Mutawakkil, Qadir Billah and others among Muslims and Manu and the like among Hindus, took away these natural rights of the respective Women and the latter became virtually slaves.

So, there are two contrasting pictures of Women placed side by side. In the first picture, Woman was free, educated and she was greatly respected by man, (Where Women are worshipped, Gods take pleasure there)

Such high praise of Woman was common during that period. During the subsequent period, Woman was almost a slave and the utterances like (Woman does not deserve freedom)

were very common. These two periods could be called the "Golden Age" and "Dark Age" in history and Women belonging to these periods naturally came to be called as "Liberal" and "Conservative" respectively.

Other Eastern and Western critics have also made similar divisions of Women characters. Rajashekhara, in his Kavya Meemansa, divides female characters as "Sadyovadhu" and "Brahmavadini" or liberal and conservative women. E.M.Forster means the same thing when he divides characters as round the flat respectively.

Throughout history, there has been a human tendency to reinforce the social stereotypes with archetypes. Another way of putting it would be, in every age, Women have been seen primarily as mother, wife, daughter, sister and so on. They are expected to play their roles as Sita and Savithri, because the latter are the role models for Indian Women. However, there is an insurgent minority, who challenged the unjust laws of the patriarchal society. They protested against the unjust behaviour of their husbands and elders in the family. They are the followers of Draupadi's role model. The Sita-Savithri combination exhibits conservative spirit and the liberal characters belong to the second category. Indian Women follow these two camps as their role models. Hence, it was felt that this kind of a natural division of Muslim Women characters would suit our purpose ideally.
A study of Muslim Women, in Indian fiction in English, in chronological units, would not be of much help for the following reasons: For the purpose of present study, we have divided Indian English fiction into two categories; from 1920 till Indian Independence and after Independence, up to 1980. During the span of about sixty years, not many novels were written on Muslim Women. There were, of course, some minor Muslim Women characters here and there, but the full-fledged female characters that attract our attention, are only few. This dearth of life-size Muslim Women characters further renders the chronological division un-necessary.

On the contrary, the Hindu female characters are many. These characters exhibit different traits of their personalities and different purposes behind their creation. In such events, more subtle chronological division of these women characters is possible. Many types of characters could be seen in the novels of one and the same novelist. For instance, Rukmini in *Nectar In a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandeya, is true representative of a simple, gentle and generous village woman. In her later novels, Kamala Markandeya's women become more bold and smart. Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire* (1960) and Saroja and Lalitha in *Two Virgins* (1974) show a dialectical change in their overall bearing. This vertical growth cannot be seen among the Muslim Women characters. They are social stereotypes. The interrogating attitude, the steadfastness to achieve something in life and the capacity to think and act independently, all these characteristics are absent among the Muslim Women characters. In such conditions, it would be not only difficult but also futile to divide them in any other form than liberal and conservative characters.

The Muslim Women characters, drawn by the non-Muslim fiction writers, are generally found to be meek and stereotype, because these writers could not observe Muslim life closely due to the pardah system. Secondly, they did not bother to study the bold and brave role models from the early history of Islam.

However, in post-independence India, when female education had already covered much ground and life had started changing, the "new woman" started emerging from both the sections of the Indian society. The impact of the "new woman" heralded the conflict between the traditional woman and modern woman in both the communities.
Feminist trends appeared on the horizon and they came in conflict with the conventional moral code. In fact, a set of new paradigms, related to women's life, came into existence, "tradition and modernity", "self-assertion and self-effacement", "economic independence and dependence" and so on. Commenting on this situation, Yashoda Bhat writes:

"These new attitudes stimulated a dialogue in the life of our country. Hiatus of this kind persists in our society even today. Post-independence Literature in India portrays all these trends and also voices the clamourings of Women for a new and just way of life. The age-old image of Woman seems to be slowly blurring and gradually shading off into a new image. At present, the image seems to be Janus faced. The old conventional image belonging to the past, still lingering on and the emerging image of new woman looking forward to the future".

In the latter part of the chapter, another teasing issue has been discussed. Why most of the Muslim Women characters have been shown as singers, dancers and prostitutes by the non-Muslim writers in various Indian English novels? With the help of the 1931 census record, it has been proved otherwise.

In the fifth chapter, the Muslim Woman, as seen by Muslim fiction writers, has been considered. Even here, very few women characters like Laila in Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) by Attia Hosain, Ayesha in Men and Rivers (1945) by Humayun Kabir and few others are liberal and the rest are conservative woman characters. One point to be marked is, all the conservative characters show similar attitudes towards life, whatever be their social status. Early marriage - bearing children - cooking - telling prayers - never protesting against injustice by leaving everything to the Will of God and so on. This compromise formula, adopted by the Muslim Women in their lives, made them to succumb to male chauvinism ultimately.

Simultaneously, an effort is made to study the Muslim Women characters, presented in vernacular languages like Kannada and Malayalam, for the purpose of comparison. The Women shown in vernacular novels are better presented than the Muslim Women characters in Indian English fiction.

In the concluding chapter, a brief recap of what has been said earlier is presented with special emphasis on the following points:

It was our intent to place Muslim Women characters, drawn by non-Muslim fiction writers, beside those of the Muslim fiction writers, for a fair comparison. It is observed that though the non-Muslim fiction writers, while depicting the Muslim female characters, have provided enough range, they have failed to penetrate their mind. It is not without reason. The rigidity of the pardah system, ignorance about the basic principles of Islam on the part of the non-Muslim writers, their feeling of racial superiority and their ignorance about the galaxy of brave and intelligent women in early days of Islam.

On the other hand, the Muslim women, created by Muslim fiction writers, suffer qualitatively as well as quantitatively. They are few in number and are mostly drawn from the middle and lower middle-class society. These characters are backward because they refused to welcome renaissance.

Having said all this, something more remains to be said. What kind of Muslim Woman, one would like to see emerging from the Indian English fiction? The writers should depict the Muslim woman, who is educated and gainfully employed either in any office or doing business individually or in partnership with an honest and known person. Howsoever high she might fly in the affairs of the world and get pelf and position, she should not cross the "Hududalla" or the limits set by God for the smooth conduct of life of husband and wife.

The Muslim Woman of tomorrow – should gain more and more political empowerment. She should not be cut off from the mainstream culture of the country. She should come out of the cell of the past and she must know that she is capable of making progress, in all the fields, as is done by Hindu Women. The Manzalvi sisters of Egypt, who are the Managing Directors of the one of the top most commercial banks in Egypt and Ms. Athaullah of Turkey, who was the Founder President of the 'World Body of Muslim Women’s Organisation' are some of the examples for the Muslim Women in India to emulate.
The Indian English fiction writers, who want to create worthwhile literature on Muslim Life and Muslim Women, should thoroughly study the rich Islamic mythology, because it includes some liberal traits of Judaism and Christianity. This is a virgin area of experience that should be tapped by the writers of Indian English fiction, to create a rich variety of Muslim female characters. In the early history of Islam, there were many fascinating women, who not only made Islam strong but also the entire womanhood proud. Such women can also be the role models for the fiction writers. Then, probably, an acceptable class of the Muslim Women would emerge from Indian English fiction.