A woman has a role to play according to the needs of the society, whether it is the tribal society, the agrarian society, or the Industrial society. In the tribal society of Africa the relation between man and woman was like that of a master and his servant; in agrarian society of India, woman was treated as a junior partner; and in the industrial society of America, the woman was an equal friend of man. Good human relations do not blossom in a conservative society because of slow changes. In a progressive society, there are opportunities for the flow of thoughts and ideas are exchanged freely such that man-woman relations become more meaningful and devoid of misunderstandings.

In ancient India, woman enjoyed a high place in society. No religious function could ever be completed without her participation. She was treated as a goddess of the family. Historical facts, later on, changed her position to a subordinate one. In order to maintain the purity of the Aryan race many restrictions were imposed on her to avoid her exposure to the Dravidians. The woman thus no longer remained an emancipated personality, but became a slave of man. The socialising process of woman gradually disappeared from the scene and laws made by man, decided
her fate. Briefly, so to say, the position of women deteriorated by leaps and bounds and reached to such a state that she hardly had any right worth the name. Heaped with social prejudices she lost every opportunity of self expression.

The plight of women at the hands of domineering men stirred the conscience of a few people and gave rise to reform movements in India in the early twentieth century. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Justice Ranade and Natarajan tried to end the evil practices prevalent in the society and the subjugation of women. The All India Women’s Conference held in 1927 by founders like Margaret Cousins, Sarojini Naidu and Anne Besant also helped to achieve some of the goals. Mahatma Gandhi gave a clarion call to the women of India to join the freedom struggle. Responding to the appeal, women in large numbers began to participate in the freedom struggle. Thus, the insight of Mahatma Gandhi brought women to the fore, and after a very long time they enjoyed equality with men. Thus various social and political events occurring in the Indian society influenced man-woman relations. Gradually Indian women acquired more and more rights for themselves. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 are good examples for this. However a lot yet remained to be done for the rural women. A glimpse into the history, tells us in brief that the Vedic period was the golden period for woman where she enjoyed equal rights with man. Later on during the Gupta period and the Rajput period she was
bound in shackles and became a slave to man. This was thus the Dark Age in the history of womanhood. In the modern age, her position improved and she became a friend of man. Social movements and legislative support are reasons for woman's emancipation.

In the present part of the thesis the influence of the society on man-woman relationship as depicted in various Indian novels in English are brought to the fore. The patriarchal attitude of man has always made woman a puppet in the hands of man. Man has always been an oppressor and woman the sufferer. The typical Hindu woman suffers silently and is an embodiment of forbearance and forgiveness. She is the paragon of resignation, passive, submissive and docile and therefore eulogised in Indian literature. The society looked down upon woman as an inferior species compared to man. The social evils that prevailed in the society made woman to suffer in silence. The social problems existent in the society always targeted woman such that she had to hold a subdued position compared to that of man. Hence this imbalance of the man as the oppressor and the woman as the sufferer kept man to occupy a dominant role in the society. Many of the Indian writers in English have shown this inequality between man and woman in their writings thereby reflecting the dominant role of the patriarchal society in which they were living. Examples from novels are enumerated to show how social evils prevailing in the society have always made woman to undergo the agonies that were heaped on her under one or the other pretext.
In the Indian family system, more importance was always given to the son. Parents wanted a son in order to perpetuate the family line. Another belief was that, if the son performs the funeral rites of parents then only they would go to heaven. As though it was not enough, the very birth of a girl-child was despised. When a girl was born, no jubilation or celebration would take place in the family. This was so because the girl child was wrongly believed to bring bad luck to her parents. Another popular notion about the female child was that she was the property of another household and therefore she was to be looked after by her parents till she was sent away to her husband’s house. A famous Sanskrit poet, Kalidas, in his play “Abhijnan Shakuntala” writes that the girl child is another’s wealth. Female infanticide was practised by some people to save themselves from the burden of giving dowry during the time of the daughter’s marriage. On the contrary, when a son was born, there would be a great feast thrown open for all relatives and friends.

Gandhiji had his own vision about women and thought that they were superior to men. He felt that social evils heaped on them due to ignorance and blind faith prevalent during those times had ensnared the society. According to him -

Invidious discrimination against the female sex is an anachronism. I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God’s gifts. They have an equal
right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going.¹

These age-old customs get reflected in some of the Indian novels in English. In “Kanthapura” a novel by Raja Rao, one of the characters, Sankar, is asked by his father to remarry after the death of his first wife, so that he could provide them with a grandson. His father tells him, “You are our eldest son, and you have to give us at least a grandson so that when we are dead our manes would be satisfied”.² Notwithstanding the fact that the first wife died after giving birth to a daughter, the desire for the birth of a son in the family was still prevalent.

Kamala Markandaya’s novel, “Nectar in a Sieve” shows how Rukmani, the central character of the story, is disappointed at first, upon the birth of a female child. The prevalent patriarchal attitude of society and the importance given to the male child as the propagator of the family seem quite obvious. So, like many other women, Rukmani too desires for a son. She is upset and unhappy when the baby girl is placed in her arms. Her disappointment is seen in her reaction.

I turned away and, despite myself, the tears came, 
tears of weakness and disappointment; for what 
woman wants a girl for her first-born?³

Even Nathan, her husband, is not happy to have a daughter as his first born, so he does not pay much attention to the child:

He had wanted a son to continue his line and walk  
beside him on the land, not a puling infant who  
would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a  
memory behind.⁴

He is drawn towards his daughter only after she calls him 'Apa', meaning father, when she is ten months old. When a son is born to them, both Rukmani and Nathan are overjoyed in spite of the fact that their daughter is seven years of age by then. Nathan is extremely happy by the birth of his son, and he invites everybody to a feast. Even Rukmani's father comes all the way from his village to see his grandson. As Rukmani states,

My husband was overjoyed at the arrival of a son;  
not less so, my father. He came, an old man, all

⁴. Ibid., p. 15.
The differential treatment and attitude of parents on the birth of a girl and boy appears glaring in literature. No particular celebration marked the birth of the girl, as her very birth spelled doom to the parents. Thus Rukmani’s mind too is influenced by the patriarchal attitude of the society as seen by her desire for a son. Alladi Uma in her critical work has also depicted the anxiety and longing of a woman to give birth to a son. She says,

*In her anxiety to please, in her yearning to be recognised, in her desire to gain a prominent position in the family hierarchy, the woman longs for a son—her social redeemer, thus perpetrating male dominance and patriarchy. The son becomes a symbol of her power, a contorted or lopsided symbol nevertheless.*

In Rama Mehta's novel, "Inside the Haveli", there is no rejoicing when a girl is born to Lakshmi in the servant's quarters. Gangaram, the husband and Khyali, the cook are waiting eagerly to hear the news of the

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5. Ibid., p. 20.
birth of a child from Sarju, the midwife. They realise that it must have been a girl for—

..... had it been a boy, Sarju would have come out in the rain and thunder shouting, in her shrill voice, 'It is a boy; it is a boy. Give me money'.

The very thought makes Gangaram feel depressed as he feels that the birth of a girl only brings gloom. Khyali, too voices his concern and sympathy. "Girls are a burden, I admit," he says. Due to pre-fixed antagonism against the girl child her very entry in the world causes great consternation and miseries to her parents. When Pari, the maid servant, is informed by Ganga - another maid that a baby girl is born in the family she curtly remarks that it is not an occasion for Lakshmi to rejoice.

In Indian homes, boys are given preferences and thereby enjoy more privileges compared to the girl child. This differential gender treatment has been beautifully depicted in the novel, "The Dark Holds no Terrors" by Shashi Deshpande. Sarita (Saru) the central character of the novel has had an unhappy childhood. She is always neglected and ignored by her parents whereas her brother, Dhruva, is pampered. This was so because the male child is preferred with the hope that he will keep up the family lineage. He is also needed to light the pyre of the dead, lest the soul of the dead parent does not get entry to heaven. On the death of her

8. Ibid., p. 8.
mother, Saru reflects as to who has lit the pyre as Dhruva is already dead. ". . . who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died".9 The painful and bitter reminiscences, when she was away from her parental home were due to the discriminatory treatment she had undergone and suffered as a child.

In the similar way, the looks of a girl are also very important for her marriage prospects. She has to be beautiful and fair with pleasant features. On the other hand, a boy’s features and complexion are not of much consequence in the marriage market. It is not difficult for boys even with dark complexion to find girls for marriages. Again in the same novel, “The Dark Holds no Terrors”, time and again Saru is warned against going out in the sun to avoid being tanned. Her mother is afraid that it will be difficult to find a groom for her daughter if she turns dark. It is not the same with Dhruva because he is a boy - “He’s different. He’s a boy”.10 Saru’s parents think that their only responsibility is to marry off their daughter as quickly as possible. When Saru wants to pursue her studies in medicine her mother does not approve of it. She tells her husband, “Let her go for a B.Sc . . . you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over”.11 Thus, daughters are treated like a burden on the shoulders of parents and getting them married off as early as possible, helps to relieve them of their responsibilities. Here again,

10. Ibid., p. 45.
11. Ibid., p. 144.
Shashi Deshpande tries to portray the discrimination between Dhruva and Saru.

In this particular instance one can notice that the biased treatment given to Saru, a sensitive female child, leaves much bitterness in her mind. She starts disliking her brother Dhruva, who gets all the attention and care only due to his gender. This gender discrimination grows up in such a proportion that it does not allow Saru to lead a normal life with Manohar (Manu), her husband. The feeling of constant neglect of the past gives rise to a desire of vengeance towards men, who collectively represent Dhruva. Partiality in upbringing male and female children is a social evil of the by-gone days. It does create some unwholesome effect on man-woman relationship as is seen in the case of Saru and Manu.

Saru drifts away from her parents due to the improper treatment meted out to her. Dhruva is the apple of his parents’ eyes. Saru notices from the beginning the disparity in the treatment meted out to her vis-à-vis her brother. This instills a big trauma on her mind and she is engulfed by sibling jealousy which gives her an inferiority complex. Thus the biased behaviour of the parents towards the female child creates a psychological chasm between both the genders and the birth of the girl child heralds the beginning of routine frictions between a man and a woman. This is particularly true with the Hindu woman, who hands over the patriarchal system to her daughter, who may either accept it or deny it in the
beginning. However, in the end she accedes to it and thus willingly or unwillingly she herself becomes the propagator of the patriarchal system.

Infertility or barrenness is believed to be another social stigma or a curse for a married woman. Whatever be the cause for the infertility, when a married woman does not bear children, the woman alone is held responsible. In such eventualities, relationship between both the partners gets strained and many a times ends up in a failed marriage. Again, it is the woman who bears the brunt of the consequences. Many Indian writers in English have depicted in their novels how this wrong belief mars man-woman relationship.

In the novel, "Nectar in a Sieve", Rukmani's daughter, Ira, is abandoned by her husband for not being able to conceive. A woman, unable to bear a child is held responsible for being unproductive. "A barren woman is like a counterfeit coin which is returned to the owner or discarded as useless".\(^\text{12}\) Ira's husband sends her back to her parents as he is unhappy with her for not being able to bear a child for him. He tells Ira's parents, "I have brought her back to you. She is a barren woman".\(^\text{13}\) Rukmani tells him that Ira will yet conceive, as they have not been married for long. Ira's husband responds to this, that he has already

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waited for five years. "She has not borne in her first blooming, who can say she will conceive later? I need sons". The infertility of Ira causes agony to her and disrupts her marital life. Barrenness in Ira spoils the man-woman relationship as her husband finds her of no use as she cannot conceive a child. Here it shows that for happy relationship between Ira and her husband a child is essential.

Monisha’s barrenness, in “Voices in the City”, by Anita Desai, becomes a matter of gossip among the members of her husband’s family. In her absence they discuss about her infertility in derogatory terms. They wonder if her fallopian tubes are blocked or whether her womb is in the wrong place and needs operation. When Monisha overhears them discussing thus, she knows that it is regarding her inability to conceive.

Like a burst of wild feathers, released full in my face, comes the realization that they are talking of me, my organs, the reasons I cannot have a child. I can’t leave these vegetables I am cutting up for them -- that would create a disturbance -- but I stop listening, and regard my insides: my ovaries, my tubes, all my recesses moist with blood, washed in blood, laid open, laid bare to their scrutiny.

Monisha, the docile and unloved wife of Jiban wants to get away from the stifling claustrophobic atmosphere of her in-laws’ home where there is no privacy between the husband and the wife. Without the understanding support of her husband for which she longs hopefully, she is led to desperation. She ends up believing that only death could redeem her from this plight ultimately. She is so mentally distraught that she takes the drastic step of ending her miserable life by immolating herself.

In another of Anita Desai’s classic work, "Cry, the Peacock", Maya is a childless woman, who becomes very much attached to her pet dog Toto. On the death of her pet dog, Maya becomes inconsolable.

Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence, and agonized remembrance.\(^{16}\)

Maya suffers from loneliness with an over busy middle-aged husband Gautama, who has no time to spare for his wife. He believes in detachment, whereas Maya longs for his attention.

But his unwillingness to understand her sensitivity, his reliance on the Gita, his emphasis on rationality, his lack of warmth make her realise

\(^{16}\) Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1980, p.10.
her merciless enmeshment in an inescapable net of married life.\textsuperscript{17}

The frigidity of their marriage turns Maya into a psychological wreck and she ultimately sends her husband to his death by pushing him down from the terrace. Her loneliness, mingled with the astrologer's prophecy of death of either of the partners four years after their marriage, drives her to insanity. She takes the extreme step of killing her husband who was responsible for her neglect. One can now visualise that had a child been in their midst, the scenario would have been entirely different. The loneliness of not having a child, multiplied by the indifferent attitude of her husband brings negative thoughts in her mind that ends in the above tragedy.

In the novel, ”Music for Mohini” (1952) by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mohini again represents a barren woman. Her mother-in-law prods her to appease the Goddess (Devi) by offering her blood from her bosom so that she could bear a child. The novel shows that even after independence of the country orthodoxy and superstitious beliefs prevailed in the society which could not be wiped out easily. No doubt, she is able to conceive later. In the similar way in the novel ”Kanthapura” by Raja Rao, Rangamma is a childless widow. Being childless she becomes a target for ridicule by Venkamma. She taunts Rangamma saying that – “I've two

\textsuperscript{17} Alladi Uma, Woman and Her Family: Indian and Afro-American – A Literary Perspective, Sterling Publishers: New Delhi, 1989, pp. 24-25.
sons and five daughters, and that shaven widow hadn't even the luck of having a bandicoot to call her own.\textsuperscript{18} Thus we find that the woman is always targeted for not bearing a child, both by her in-laws and the people in the society, who take every opportunity to ridicule her.

In the examples taken from the novels, "Nectar in a Sieve", "Voices in the City", "Cry, the Peacock", "Music for Mohini", and "Kanthapura", the pathetic condition of the women folk, Ira, Monisha, Maya, Mohini and Rangamma respectively results from their not being able to conceive. Ira's husband wants to take another wife to keep their patriarchal lineage on. Monisha suffers from mental agony as a result of the gossip she overhears regarding her inability to bear a child. Maya shows her preoccupation with her pet dog, as her husband is too busy to spare his attention towards her. But, the death of her dog, which was her only solace, shatters her completely. Mohini's mother-in-law is orthodox and superstitious and is of the opinion that Mohini should offer her blood in order to appease the Goddess. Mohini, despite being educated, is willing to follow the superstitious belief in order to please her mother-in-law. Rangamma, becomes a victim of the insensitive comments by Venkamma of her village for being a childless widow. All the four women namely Ira, Monisha, Maya and Mohini mentioned above suffer marital neglect due to their inability to bear children. Rangamma becomes the object of mockery at the hands of a few illiterate women. Thus we observe that man-woman

relationship loses its compatibility because the woman is unable to bear a child, especially a male child. Thus the society based on patriarchal system has always considered the woman to be at fault for not conceiving a child. The patriarchal arrogance speaks volumes about the man's inability to accept any shortcoming in him. This is due to the false belief that man is supreme and the woman is weak and needs to remain subjugated. The bloated male ego is unable to grasp the fact that both the man and the woman are equally responsible for human reproduction.

One more obnoxious system that prevails in the Indian society is the practice of the *purdah* system. Segregation of woman, hiding her from other men's eyes and deification are some of the tricks adopted by men to keep women under perennial control. *Purdah*, in its original form, was not a mechanism to isolate woman from other sections of the Islamic society. It was a sort of protection for women from the lusty eyes of men. From Muslims, the aristocratic Hindus like the Rajputs and others too adopted this system. In the "Ramayana", Rama tells Sita, "Dear, Parshuram is an elderly sage, approach him covering yourself in veil".19 The original reason for the use of *purdah* was totally camouflaged and man managed to curtail the freedom of woman to an unimaginable extent by misusing the *purdah* system. As a result of this, Muslim women began to live life like house prisoners, thereby affecting the man-woman relationship to a considerable extent. Free dialogue and communication of

thoughts become hampered. Women hesitate to express themselves in the gatherings of men. Eventually, men's opinions are carried out and women are once again relegated to the dark corners. About the purdah system, Jasbir Jain rightly puts,

Purdah reinforces the idea of female subordination inbuilt in patriarchal societies, it also defines family and political structures and constitutes the basis of gender ideology.20

Some of the Indian novels in English depict the evils of the purdah system and also how this system has curtailed the freedom of women. In some cases blossoming of love between husband and wife is hampered due to rigid purdah system.

In "Purdah and Polygamy" (1944) Iqbalunnisa Hussain makes a strong attack on the evils prevalent in the Muslim society, responsible for curtailing the freedom of women. Here Iqbalunnisa describes the suffering woman behind the purdah due to the forced ridiculous restrictions that make mockery of her existence. The peculiarity of this system is depicted in the death scene where women are forbidden from paying obeisance to the dead body of Umar, the father of Kabeer, due to the observance of purdah. "After all a man is a man, even (though) dead and purdah before

him is essential". Such absurd restriction through the *purdah* system not only vitiates man-woman relationship but also brings discredit to the society.

In the novel, "Inqilab" (1955) by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *Phoopi Amma*, is a lady of eminence but the *purdah* system reduces her to a workhorse. Such *Phoopis* (father's sisters) and *Khalas* (mother's sisters) are found in plenty in novels wherever a Muslim family is described. These kind of elderly ladies are the perpetuators of the *purdah* system and the ills associated with it, through wrong interpretation of the custom.

In "Inqilab", Khwaja Ahmad Abbas depicts the evils of *purdah* in the Muslim family. *Anwar’s Phoopi Amma* wants his sister *Anjum* to observe *purdah*. She dictates -"*Anjum* is now almost eleven and must observe *purdah*". *Anwar* is shocked to hear that his sister would have to cover herself from head to foot with a *burqa* (veil). He wonders whether she will be able to breathe properly inside the veil. He is curious to know why women have to wear the *purdah*. He inquires from *Phoopi Amma* about it. She answers that it is their Islamic religion, which requires observing *purdah*. *Anwar* is eager to know why this is so only for the women and not for the men. His query surprises *Phoopi Amma* who stutters -- "It is...

it is because"... "men in the streets are so bad and stare at a woman with evil intentions!"²³

The purdah system is not only found among the Muslims, but also among the Hindus. In Rama Mehta’s, "Inside the Haveli", the purdah system adopted by the aristocratic Hindu families of Udaipur in Rajasthan has been depicted. Geeta, who is married to Ajay, finds the customary purdah in her in-laws’ house too stifling. Geeta, who originates from Bombay, finds on her very entry into the city gates of Udaipur, the restrictions to be laid on her. When Pari, the maid-servant, points out to Geeta her uncle-in-law’s residence, the latter lifts the veil from her face to see it. To this, Pari immediately snaps, "No, no, you cannot do that," pulling back the veil over her face. "In Udaipur we keep purdah. Strange eyes must not see your beautiful face".²⁴

Geeta realises that purdah custom is followed by all the women folk, both young and old, inside the haveli, ‘Jeewan Niwas’. Only the daughters of the family are free to move about without covering their faces. The novelist Rama Mehta, further describes how women keep themselves veiled from men. She describes the intricacies of the haveli that prevents men and women from coming close together.

_The courtyards divide the haveli into various sections._

_The separation of self-contained units was necessary_

²³. Ibid., p. 45.
because the women of Udaipur kept purdah. Their activities were conducted within their apartments. The courtyards connected their section with that of the men. The etiquette established through years permitted only close male relatives to enter the women's apartment. Even so no man entered the courtyard without being properly announced.25

Besides the purdah system, other social evils like child-marriage, denial of widow re-marriage and caste systems have also affected the man-woman relationship. Some Indian English novels have described such events. Child marriage was practised in ancient India. Though Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice against this social evil and the cruel sale of small girls, it is still prevalent in some parts of rural India. One can come across such instances in the fictional world too. It not only shows the greed of the people but also the inhuman customs responsible for the crime. Man was free to marry and re-marry at any age he chose, but the girl required marrying by seven or eight years of age. This custom resulted in marrying off tender aged girls to widowers of very ripe age for their nursing needs. In certain cases, sexual gratification was the only purpose behind such marriages. In such conditions no meaningful interaction can ever be possible between the husband and the wife. Thus

25. Ibid., p. 6.
no proper relationship can be established between them because to a man, the woman is only an object of gratification.

In “Kanthapura” by Raja Rao, Bhatta is not a worthy husband and after the death of his wife, Savithri, this pot-bellied priest thinks of marrying again. Though the widows are not allowed to marry on the death of their husbands, it is not so for the widowers. This middle-aged priest marries a twelve and a half year old girl. In spite of his widower status, offers of marriage poured in from everywhere. It is rather very ridiculous to find that in Indian society even a middle-aged man like him begets enormous dowry.

A thousand rupees cash, and five acres of wet land beneath the Settur Canal. And a real seven-days marriage. Horoscopes agree marvellously. “Well, if the heavens will it, and the elders bless it, let our family creepers link each other!”26

The same Bhatta arranges the second marriage of Advocate Seenappa, having two lost teeth, with a teenaged daughter of Venkamma. Bhatta tells Venkamma,

After all, Venkamma, what does it matter whether it is first marriage or a second marriage? What we ask is that your daughter will have enough to eat, and be

blessed with many children, and perform all the rites, isn't it? Seenappa is thirty-four, but you would say he is twenty-one if you saw him, and he has only three children, and one of them is soon to be married and will go away to her mother-in-law's, and your daughter will have the two god-like children to live with.27

Another evil attitude of men clearly observed is the plight of the widows who are forbidden from re-marrying. A few of the Indian novels in English throw light on the cruel traditions and practices of the olden days. A glimpse of widows' plight is seen in Rama Mehta's "Inside the Haveli". Widows are not allowed to adorn good clothes and jewelleries. They are forbidden to wear colourful attire and are forced to wear only black, grey or white clothes. In the novel, Pari, the maidservant tells Geeta how her great grandmother-in-law did not allow her to wear colourful clothes when she became a widow. "She would not let me put on coloured saris or bangles like the other girls".28

In "Inside the Haveli" by Rama Mehta, Lakshmi, one of the characters, suffers due to early marriage at the age of fourteen - an age of fun and frolic. Early marriage meant early motherhood and responsibility of looking after a family. Anjum in "Inqilab" by Khwaja

27. Ibid., p.84.

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Ahmed Abbas, has to pay dearly with her life due to early marriage and early motherhood, resulting in her death at the time of childbirth.

In "Kanthapura" by Raja Rao, Ratna is a child-widow. She has hardly seen her husband and does not accept her marriage at all. The villagers look at her as if she is defying all customs when she is found moving around in colourful clothes and her hair combed to one side.

Again the same kind of woe of a child widow is found in the novel, “Inside the Haveli”. Here Mangi, the cousin-in-law of Geeta narrates her miseries as a child widow. She is hardly fourteen when the bolt of widowhood struck her. She does not know why she is forbidden from wearing jewellery, coloured sari and attending religious functions. Later on she understands that it was her fate which she has to face and accept.

No one was to blame for that, it was the custom in Udaipur. It was my fate to be a widow in this life. I had to learn to accept that. All of us have to pay for our past actions.29

Thus child marriages leading to child widows was a stigma in the society that added to the restrictions laid only on the woman. She was looked down upon by the society and had to lead a dull life. She was even

29. Ibid., p. 117.
forbidden from attending religious functions. This was however not the case with man and he could even marry after the death of his wife.

Casteism was also one of the social evils existent in the society and is still prevalent though not with the intensity that was found in the earlier times. The rigid make of society became little broader in its outlook. The social practice of high caste, the low caste and untouchability seemed very glaring to human eyes. Marriage outside the caste was looked down upon and at times such people were treated as outcasts.

In the novel, “A Bend in the Ganges” by Manohar Malgonkar, Dada Talwar belonging to the Brahmin community marries a girl of Koshi caste and hence she is not treated at par with other members of the family. The women folk of the house ostracise her and do not permit her entry in the family prayer room. Her sisters-in-law even refuse to use the cotton wicks that she prepares for the oil lamp. This kind of social stigma prevalent in the society was observed by the writers as reflected in the novels.

In the novel of Nayantara Sahgal’s "Storm in Chandigarh", Vishal Dubey, one of the characters says –

*Whatever womanhood had once meant in India had been lost in the mists of antiquity. In its place these*
had long been a figure of humility, neck bent, eyes
downcast, living flesh consigned to oblivion.30

This was the dismal picture of the Indian woman before Gandhiji entered into Indian politics. Even the position of men was weak. Due to political slavery, the social status of men and women was the lowest. In such an atmosphere no meaningful interaction between man and woman could be possible. The changing political order had greatly affected the position of woman in the society and consequently it affected the man-woman relationship also. Indian woman enjoyed her golden period of freedom wherein she was as free as a man. During the days of social and political upheavals, the position of women also changed and it produced corresponding impact on man-woman relationship.

After the entry of Gandhiji into politics, the Indian society also changed for the better. The social order was galvanised and woman’s status was changed. Gandhiji’s electrifying personality gave rise to a new face in the Indian National Movement and cast a magic spell on the masses. “Few men in their life time aroused stronger emotions or touched deeper chords of humanity than Gandhi”.31 The Indian women too became bold and assertive.

Gandhi’s chief contribution to humanity was to free the Indian psyche from the shackles of slave mentality and infuse it with self respect and human dignity. Gandhi’s leadership restored courage and potency to the Indians and helped India to acquire national coherence. The essence of his teaching, fearlessness, truth, action and that, which was allied to these- "The black pall of fear was lifted from the people’s shoulders“\(^{32}\) said Nehru about Gandhi’s impact. According to Saroj Sharma,

> The basic Gandhian objectives were Sarvodaya (welfare of all). The Gandhian movements were directed against the British rule as well as against evils of the Indian society like untouchability, child marriage, subordination of women, etc. Gandhi believed in the purity of means, he rejected the theory that end justifies the means.\(^{33}\)

Saroj Sharma further adds about the impact of Gandhi that led to creative writing thus:

> In the third decade of the twentieth century, the catalytic impact of Gandhi led to the metamorphosis of creative writing in English. This was the time of social realism in literary circles all over the world. Thus, a large number of novels were written, which depicted

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the contemporary socio-political reality which in turn was deeply influenced by Gandhi.\textsuperscript{34}

Under the influence of Gandhi, social reforms too became part and parcel of freedom struggle. He enlarged the novelist’s imagination. Freida H. Das in her novel, “Into the Sun” (1933) showed how women came out of the four walls of their homes and got involved actively in the social reform programmes such as untouchability.

In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novel, “A Goddess Named Gold”, \textit{Sohagi} and \textit{Lakshmi}, two women of the village Sonamitti recollect how Gandhiji inspired the womenfolk to come out of their homes and involve themselves in the country’s struggle for independence. They felt that they were equal to men due to the influence of Gandhiji.

\begin{quote}
Gandhiji touched our spirit as it slept. Wakened, we became equals of our men from being mere ‘Cabbages’. This new order was paving a better way of life for women, even in politics.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

In another novel “Music for Mohini”, by Bhabani Bhattacharya, \textit{Mohini} says, “Don’t bow down to such insult. You are the new India”.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp. 17-18.
Such examples prove that the society revolutionised under the impact of Gandhiji and the position of women also improved along with it. Woman was not only a partner of man but was symbolically referred to as the spirit of India. A woman's life becomes more respectable and worthwhile, when awareness regarding her status dawns upon her.

In this section of the thesis, the evils prevalent in the society affecting man-woman relationship have been examined. The patriarchal beliefs and traditions which govern the society influence the relationship to a large extent. The novelists too have focussed this issue in their writings. Voices have been raised by women writers more than by men writers. Man has always subdued woman and therefore man as the oppressor and woman as the sufferer became a constant theme of the writer's pen. In the first instance, there is a strong preference for the son over the daughter. In this category four novels have been studied, "Kanthapura", "Nectar in a Sieve", "Inside the Havell" and "The Dark Holds No Terrors". In the first novel, the parents want their son to marry again as his dead first wife has left him with only a daughter. The desire of having a grandson tempts them for the remarriage of their son. In the next two novels, the mothers become unhappy when daughters are born. They weep and curse their fate because of the fear of being abandoned by their husbands. In the fourth novel, the girl Saru, who was the victim of male-female discrimination, develops such a strong grudge against men that her life with her husband Manu, becomes hell. The preference for a
son by the in-laws makes a woman panicky enough to believe that she has committed a sin upon the birth of a daughter. This is highlighted very clearly in the above novels. This situation compels her to accept life on conditions set by her husband and thus a slave is born out of her. In the other instance, the pendulum sways to the other extreme. The rearing of Saru makes her hate men and her married life is largely affected by it. Thus a combination of a slave and a rebel is born out of this discriminatory treatment.

In the second category, the women characters are affected by infertility as found in the novels, "Nectar in a Sieve", "Voices in the City", "Cry the Peacock", "Music for Mohini" and "Kanthapura". In this category, the woman is not subjected to a harsh physical treatment in the real sense, but yet she undergoes mental trauma. Ira is sent back to her mother Rukmani from her marital home. Both the families being uneducated, such behaviour appears to be natural among them. People openly gossip about Monisha's infertility in "Voices in the City". Monisha initially bears up with the mental torture as a result of the sarcastic remarks of the people in her in-laws' house for some time. Finding no remedy for her humiliation she reaches the point where she thinks self immolation is the only recourse left to her to overcome the mental torture. In "Cry, the Peacock", Maya develops attachment with her dog, Toto and its death shatters her completely. She becomes psychic and kills her husband holding him responsible for Toto's death. In "Music for
Mohini", Mohini's mother-in-law wants her to follow the prevalent superstitious belief of offering her blood to propitiate the Goddess. In spite of belonging to the educated class, Mohini is on the verge of surrendering to her mother-in-law's wish. She is stopped by her husband from taking such drastic step right on time. No doubt, Mohini conceives later on much to the happiness of all. Rangamma is a childless widow, who becomes a subject of mockery, especially by Venkamma, a village woman.

In these instances of women unable to conceive, it is observed that they are either neglected or discarded by their husbands. Some women channelise their maternal instincts towards their pets, as in the case of Maya. If these women had even given birth to female children their worries would not have been over. Arrival of the son alone is eagerly awaited by the husband's family. Mohini's husband is engrossed in other activities and does not pay any importance to his young and beautiful wife, which is the main cause of discord.

In the third category, where purdah system is described in "Purdah and Polygamy", "Inqilab" and "Inside the Haveli", the kind of sufferings inflicted upon women is not the same as in the previous cases. The woman is denied freedom and not life. But, when freedom is curtailed, her life automatically becomes dull, and her existence meaningless. It is a shame that women are required to observe purdah even from a dead
man! In all the above cases, one gets to visualise a suffering and oppressed woman, who is left to vent out her feelings of disappointment just behind the purdah secretly, with none to understand her feelings.

In the fourth category, the evil practice of child marriages and its consequences have been highlighted. We get to know to what extent such customs and traditions in the society influence the man-woman relationship. Customs like child marriage deteriorate further the plight of woman in the society. The cradle-marriages, which are not heard of anywhere else in the world, are practised in many parts of our country with disastrous consequences. In the novel "Kanthapura" the priest marries a twelve and a half year old girl on the death of his wife, though he himself is in his middle-age. Again, we find him fixing a match for a thirty-four year old widower, Advocate Seenappa, with a teenage girl, even though the latter is well aware that it is against the law to marry a minor girl. But such laws are only meant for the books and not for real practice.

In Rama Mehta's "Inside the Haveli" Lakshmi too is a victim of child marriage. She is married off at the age of fourteen, when she should have been playing with her friends. All her playful activities get curtailed and in place of it she learns to observe purdah.
The consequence of early marriage and early motherhood is seen in "Inqilab". Anjum becomes a victim of it and she has to pay with her life. In "Kanthapura", Ratna is a child-widow who has been married at a tender age of ten; an age when she did not understand what marriage actually meant.

The fifth category deals with the plight of widows, who were prohibited from remarrying after the death of their husbands. Not only that, but to add insult to injury, they are required to lead a dull and colourless life. The condition of Pari and Manji in “Inside the Haveli” speaks volumes about the plight of such women in the olden days. These examples taken in all the categories prove that lives of women become paralysed when cruel practices are operational in the society.

As man is a social animal, he cannot live like an animal in the society. He creates and adopts various relations with people around him. Among these relations man-woman relationship is very prominent. Healthy relations between man and woman keep the society healthy. Both man and woman should enjoy their freedom equally. If the freedom of women is curtailed for various reasons, like child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, observation of purdah and so on, relational crisis arises between man and woman. The sociological backdrop provides scope to study such problems and seek remedies.
Various novelists have successfully highlighted these social evils prevalent in the society through their novels. There are ways to effectively counter the social evils depicted in the novels; legislative method is one of them.
The law-making and law-enforcing institutions play an important role in prevention of harassment to women and in the maintenance of good relationship between husband and wife. Some individuals like Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Harbilas Sarda, Jyotiba Phule and others have been instrumental in getting several laws passed which strengthened the position of women in the society. Earlier the Hindu widow either burnt herself alive along with her deceased husband or continued to live the life of a recluse. These laws brought an end to the silent sufferings and humiliations of the Hindu widow. Thousands of child widows were remarried and they led normal lives. Thus, the Widow Remarriage Act passed in 1856 helped to improve the man-woman relationship.

Another landmark legislation was the Civil Marriage Act of 1872, which was passed on account of the courage and perseverance of Keshab Chandra Sen. This Act made marriage a secular ceremony and provided for the registration of marriages. The girl's age of marriage was increased to fourteen and inter-caste marriages which were illegal till then were encouraged. The most significant feature of this Act was the enforcement of monogamy. They are The Hindu Marriage Act (1955), The Hindu
Woman Inheritance Law (1956), The Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) and The Gender Detection of Child Act (1994) are all very important laws.

The main aim of the ancient Hindu lawgivers was to preserve the property of the joint family. So, women were not given share in the property with the fear that they would lose it to other families. The only redeeming feature was the recognition of ‘Streedhana’ - movable property given to a woman at the time of marriage, either by her parents or by her husband. A revolutionary change was brought in the Married Women’s Property Act of 1874, which widened the scope of ‘Streedhana’ to include the earnings of woman and the money she gets through her artistic and writing skills. This legislation provided an incentive to women to engage themselves in remunerative jobs. The image of women improved from that of a slave to that of a mistress of the household.

One more disgusting custom prevalent in many parts of India, especially in Karnataka and Maharashtra regions, is the Devadasi system. It is a system by which innocent girls are dedicated to the worship of Goddess. This Devadasi system is nothing but prostitution in the name of god. Selfish people for their vested interests have glorified it. The main reason for this disgraceful practice is lack of education, superstition, ignorance and poverty among the people who dedicate their daughters to the Goddess. They were under the wrong belief that it was their sacred duty to dedicate their daughters to appease the powerful Goddess,
Renuka. At times the parents and the guardians of girls keep this system alive because of their greed for money. Men took advantage of this custom for their own gratifications.

The Devadasis can now hope to lead a better life, forgetting their infamous ways of livelihood. In order to eradicate the Devadasi system, the Karnataka State Government has enacted the "Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1982". It also imposes penalties on the defaulters.

Such legislations lessened the woes of Hindu women considerably. Muslim women are more fortunate in this regard because they got the right to property, religious sanction to remarry in case of widowhood, right to claim divorce from their husbands, right to education and right to give consent or reject a marriage proposal and so on. As regards to the Hindu women, the above mentioned legislations brought some respectability and consequently the relationship between men and women became compatible.

Marriage brings man and woman together for a blissful life. To keep marriage intact, the relationship between husband and wife should be built on the basis of mutual trust and affection. When there is a good

rapport between the husband and wife, the married life becomes meaningful.

The relationship between husband and wife gets vitiated due to various reasons. It may happen due to mistrust, misunderstanding, infidelity, incompatibility or failing to recognise the fact that both of them are equally important individuals and they have to live together. When the married life becomes unbearable, the husband-wife relationship develops fissures and the two fail to pull on together. In such cases it is the legislative institutions that come to their rescue. Husband and wife can seek divorce through the court of law in extreme cases when it becomes too difficult to get along together.

In Nayantara Sahgal's novel "This Time of Morning" (1958) Rashmi realises that she cannot get along well with her husband. She, in order to assert her individuality, decides to divorce Dalip and marry Rakesh, for without a man her life would feel empty. In another of her novel, "The Day in Shadow", (1971) Simrit is compelled to seek divorce from Som who trades in armament, much to her dislike. Som is too much after materialistic pleasures and does not consider his wife as an individual. The wide chasm that develops between them makes him to ask her to choose between leading a normal life or to end the farce of living together. His ultimatum surprises her. She tells him, "You know damned well why it’s happening. When a woman freezes up every time her
husband touches her it's time to call it a day". When the relationship between Som and Simrit gets vitiated, divorce is the only remedy. After her divorce, Simrit marries Raj, a Christian political worker.

The lesson to be drawn from such novels is that the old belief that marriages end only with the death of one of the partners and that woman cannot re-marry, was a selfish trick of man. When life becomes unbearable, woman can also take divorce and can marry a person even from the other caste. The Civil Marriage Act (amended) 1956 makes provision for this. There are other examples also which explicitly or implicitly refer to various legislations passed to improve the marital conditions of women.

Child marriage was rampant in the earlier days. In some places, girls were given in marriage before puberty. Sometimes the ‘marriage’ was performed in the cradle. In Rama Mehta’s, “Inside the Haveli”, Lakshmi, the servant-maid was also a victim of child marriage and was married off to Gangaram, a servant in the Haveli, at a tender age of fourteen. Lakshmi was unhappy when she was reminded by Dhapu, another maid servant, that she was no longer a child but a married woman. She was forced to move about with her face veiled. She was a woman and she had no voice or feelings to be expressed in front of men folk. She had to do her household chores like a machine. Lakshmi was

told, "Which man can put up with a wife who does not make him comfortable?"39 'Making man comfortable' was the only aim of a married woman. Her comforts, her needs, her words etc. had no value. This slave mentality did not allow man-woman relations to blossom.

The effect of early marriage and subsequent early motherhood has been depicted in K.A. Abbas's, "Inqilab". Anwar's sister Anjum is just fifteen when she is married off to his nephew, Rouf by her father. The boy has just entered the age of puberty. Akbar Ali wants to marry off his daughter, before his death. Girls were a great liability to their parents and hence were married off quite early to be free from the burden. The consequence of the marriage is that Anjum becomes a victim of early motherhood. She dies after a caesarean is performed on her to remove the dead child. The English lady doctor who comes to attend Anjum, along with Dr. Ansari says,

Poor girl . . . so young and sweet-looking. . . I know the father. He is a wonderful man."

. . . married too young . . . should never have been made to bear a child. . . It's just murder.40

Similar consequences of the child marriage are also seen in Raja Rao's "Kanthapura". Kamalamma's widowed daughter, Ratna, is a victim of child marriage. She revolts against the tradition and wears bangles,

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nose-rings and ear-rings, which a widow is prohibited. When people ask her why she behaves as if she has a husband, she says,

. . . that was nobody’s business, and that if these sniffing old country hens thought that seeing a man for a day, and this when one is ten years of age, could be called a marriage, they had better eat mud and drown themselves in the river.41

In Anita Desai’s novel, “Fire on the Mountain”, though there is a legislative enactment forbidding child-marriages, there is an instance of child marriage taking place. Ila Das, in her capacity as a social worker, tries to knock some sense into Preet Singh’s head, as he wants to marry off his daughter, who is just seven years old, to a widower having six children. His greed for a meagre piece of land prompts him to take such a step. Ila Das knows the law which forbids such marriages and advises him not to act illegally. She tries to apprise him of what is right and what is wrong. Preet Singh cannot tolerate such interference, that too from a woman. He stoops so low that he uses his brutal power in curbing the obstacle created by Ila Das who has decided to teach him law. Preet Singh not only rapes Ila Das but murders her too. It is his vengeance on her as he does not want to learn about law from a woman. The meagre piece of land promised is more important to him than his daughter who is still a child.

There goes a dictum that ‘Ignorance of law is no excuse’. People go out of their way to break the law. Preet Singh must have been aware of the law which forbids child-marriages, but when Ila Das tried to teach him what was legal and what illegal, he could not tolerate such warnings from a woman and took law into his own hands.

Though legislation forbids child marriages in order to avoid the future danger of incompatibility, there are some who do not follow the law, in spite of being aware of the repercussions. No doubt the raising of the age of girls’ marriage through legislation will deter many parents from giving away their girl child in marriage. Hence the earlier novels describe about the plight of child-widows, but now due to legislations women stand in a better position as compared to the earlier ones.