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The present study offers a critical evaluation of the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur with regard to female identity crisis and sufferings at various stages in the life span of women. Being women writers, they have seen the actual conditions and sufferings which a woman in society is subjected to. Their treatment of female theme, therefore, needs to be seriously analysed and critically deliberated to draw upon an objective conclusion.

These novelists portray the existing landscape of Indian society and set to sensitise and impact the human psychology which grants the woman a subaltern and marginalised space in social hierarchy. Woman, as a child, a daughter, a wife, and a co-worker and in various other capacities, enjoys secondary position in spite of her significant contributions in shaping and formulating of the respective institutions. Female subjugation and perpetration of injustice on women has been the major cause of concern which has invited the attention of literary artists across the world, who try to give vent to the pangs of anxiety through the literary forms they practice. Among all literary forms namely prose, poetry and drama, novel is the most viable means of expression, as it allows the writer to use wide space and stretch of time to elaborate his / her experiences.

To make a comprehensive survey of the proposed thesis, it is essential to extend the scope of the study to British literature, and to examine how novel, as a literary form, emerged and telescoped the contemporary sensibility in European countries.

The origin of the novel can be traced back to the medieval romance, a fantastic tale of love and adventure, itself derived from the ballads and fragments of epic poems sung by the wandering minstrel. In 1350, Boccaccio wrote a world-famous collection of love stories in
prose, entitled ‘The Decameron’. In Italian language such short stories are called “novella”. The term originally meant a “fresh story”, but gradually it came to signify a story in prose as distinguished from a story in verse, which continued to be called a romance. F. Marion Crawford, a popular American novelist describes novel as, “What we call a novel may educate the taste and cultivate the intelligence; under the hand of genius it may purify the heart and fortify the mind.”¹

Novel is the loosest form of literary art, but its very freedom from all limitations allows it to give a fuller representation of real life and character than anything else can provide. It is, nonetheless, a very effective medium of portrayal of human thoughts and actions.

Just like a drama, a novel consists of a well-knit plot and well-emerged characters which represent the co-relation between life and literature. The portrayal of characters is a skill of a competent writer. The novel displays the writer’s outlook about different aspects of life or changes in social, political or cultural scenario.

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines novel as:

Novel is an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting.²

B. Prasad in his book *A Background to the Study of English Literature* quotes W.H. Hudson’s thoughts about novel:

Directly or indirectly, and whether the writer himself is conscious of it or not, every novel must necessarily present a certain view of life; that is, it must exhibit incidents, characters, passions motives, as to reveal more or
less distinctly the way in which the author looks out upon the world and his
general attitude towards it. 3

The unsurpassed spell of novel is still consistent, as it is successful in conveying some
message through its characters who reflect real life situations. Similarly, it has universal
appeal, as readers identify themselves with such characters and situations depicted in the
novel. As a general principle, a novelist tends to convey the spirit of society and age through
the imaginative plot and characters. This is what is called as artistic presentation of the
reality. The novel as a literary form of expression enjoys the highest position as it
successfully and more convincingly presents the milieu of contemporary society.

Just like other literary genres, in the first half of the 18th century novel flourished and
acquired the highest place as a literary form. It was firmly established by Richardson and was
further developed by Henry fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne. Among other
novelists in this age, Oliver Goldsmith deserves special place for his luminous style. Novel
further evolved in the nineteenth century and displayed more elegance and refinement.
During the last half of the eighteenth century, Gothic writers brought sensationalism and
mystery in the novel. But in the Romantic Age, Jane Austen changed this convention and
popularized her own style of characterisation, while Sir Walter Scott enriched the historical
novel. Charles Dickens took novel to a new phase in Victorian age. He evolved a more
complex plot and criticised social evils through his novels. Among the other significant
contributors are the three Bronte sisters, Emily, Charlotte and Anne who presented the
feminine heart in their fiction. George Eliot extended the scope of the novel by including
philosophical dissertations in the topics dealing with religion, politics and the social
conventions.
In the later nineteenth century, two novelists stand out—George Meredith and Thomas Hardy. George Meredith is a satirist with a reformer’s purpose. Hardy is completely different in his outlook and style in his novels. His characters are from rustic background like the farmers and peasantry. He skilfully reveals the innermost psyche of his characters. The novel took diverse form during the century. Charles Kingsley, Benjamin Disraeli and Antony Trollope wrote political and social novels, while Henry James emphasised upon the manners and conventions of a narrow section of society.

The novel in the early twentieth century has seen rapid change in the form, subject matter and treatment. Deplorable social state caused by two world wars was reflected in novel. The important group of novelists in this era was the Edwardians. Writers like H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett and Joseph Conrad were prominent Edwardians They were conventional in their creative works. These writers consciously portrayed the transformations occurred by new scientific discoveries and other social and cultural changes. The Stream of consciousness novel or the psychological novel was another important form of novel written in this era, under the influence of psychological theories of Freud and Jung. Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are the chief contributors of the psychological novel. They brought new changes in both the technique and the substance of the novel. These writers were more interested in surveying the deeper recesses of human mind.

In the post-modern era, the scope of the novel expanded and it included range of themes on various subjects. It has become the most popular genre, as it reached very easily up to educated people. The tendency to reject modernist trend was predominant in this age. The novel in this era reflected the trauma, disillusionment and pessimism caused by the two World Wars. It also showed Britain’s weakened role in world affairs and decline of its
imperial status and old glory. While taking survey of major novelists of post-modern age, B. Prasad observes:

The major novelists in the postmodern era are Graham Green, William Golding, L.P. Hartley, C.P. Snow and Antony Powell. Green’s novels are related to themes like international capitalist monopolies, war scare, spy scare, the cold war, Anti- Americanism. Green also adopts the popular form of the thriller to highlight the moral complexity and endemic violence of post-modern world... The Movement novelists like Kingsley Amis, John Braine and Alan Sillitoe articulated the mood of prevalent discontent and restlessness which all young people at the time endured. However, the experimental tendency reasserts itself in the works of Lawrence Durrell and William Golding. The post-war years also saw a number of publications by women writers. Feminist writing is one of the most important developments in fictions. The women writers like Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble and Elizabeth Bowen to name only a few. They have written about the grievances of women with lucidity. ⁴

Thus, it is seen that the British novel has rich tradition of capturing the prevailing landscape of European society. However, the present study deals with Indian English literature in general and novel in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to have a survey of various phases and stages in development of novel as a literary genre in Indian English literature.

Indian English novel is generally classified into two major periods – The pre-independence and post-independence period. The seeds of Indian English novel in the pre-independence period were sown by the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and sir Radhakrishnan. These writers emphasised on ethical values of Indian tradition. Radhakrishnan advocated religious and philosophical prose, while Pandit Nehru expressed his love for beauty and sincere, studious nature through his writing.
The Indian English novel during this period was greatly influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological upheaval caused by Gandhian movement. But at the same time, the Indian English novel reflected the trend towards social realism which had been set in English literature as a result of Marxist influence. So, the Indian English novel was both an Indian phenomenon related to the nationalist movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and as a part of the English social realism of the period. The themes of the Indian English novel became the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem, the plight of untouchables, the landless poor, the economically exploited and the oppressed.  

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, forming a literary trio, were the most important writers in this period. Anand and Rao dealt with the socio-political aspect of Indian life and R.K. Narayan presented Indian rural scenario and criticised the social evils humorously. Gradually, many other novelists also emerged as skilful literary artists and they handled varieties of themes rooted in Indian soil. Thus, the Indian English novel acquired its own identity on account of the varied themes and techniques employed by the luminaries of the age. M.K. Naik records these changes in Indian English novel.

Post-independence Indian English novel retains the momentum it had gained during the Gandhian age. The tradition of social realism established by Mulk Raj Anand is continued by novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Mulgaonkar and Khushwant Singh. Similarly the experimental novel which was established by Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, also flourished in the hands of G. V. Desani, Bhalchandra Rajan, M. Anant Narayanan, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal etc. These novelists dealt with the themes like existential dilemmas, problems of Post-Independence Indian society and the implications of East-West encounter. Another notable development in this period was the emergence of an entire school of women novelists.
The perennial issues like male domination, marginalisation of women, their sufferings at home, workplace and society, the need of women to be recognised as human have always been reinvented in every age. In recent years, a well-sustained struggle is being made by women for their voices to be heard through literary forms. As such novel came to be the most powerful expression. It is also realised that novel is more convincing genre for the women writers to express the issues they wish to focus in their own way. It is reasonably accepted that woman writers can represent their sufferings and experiences more conveniently, as they are the immediate victims of the system perpetually by the patriarchal norms of society. When the woman writers started their hand at novel as a hit genre, they had no tradition and models before them. But they successfully accomplished the art, as they had to formulate their own experiences and feelings in written form. This constituted a path that could brighten up their potential towards their creative and socio-cultural needs.

Indian English literature has developed over a period of time. Many visionary and eminent writers strived hard to give the dignified status to Indian English literature. In the mid-nineteenth century, a number of women writers writing in the English language was considerably increased. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have introduced the female experiences in their writings and it affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. These vast horizons of subject matters incorporated in women writers have added new dimensions to Indian English literature.

In the past, the works by the Indian women authors have always been underestimated because of patriarchal dominance. Male experiences were considered as worth recording. In those days, women’s writing was limited up to their enclosed domestic experiences. Male writers on the other hand, dealt with varieties of themes with broadened experiences. Male writers
were preferred and accepted in the society. Thus, during the 18th century, Indian women writers could not get the status they deserved. Considering these factors, production of women's literature declined further. However, in the 19th century, women writers wrote abundantly, as more and more women actively participated in India's reformist movement against the British rule. It led to the women's voices valorised in literary works. At that time, their writing was mainly based on the country's freedom struggle movement in which they had participated and gained recognition as activists. After the decolonisation of India from the foreign rule, lots of challenges were perceptible in every walk of life. Women, who were confined to domestic chores, transcended the patriarchal boundary and participated in social and political programmes. The demonstrative ideas further strengthened them and they had courage to cite their grievances and sufferings through literary forms.

In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernist and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who deal with novels that consist of the latest burning issues related to women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. These works are thoroughly enjoyed by the masses. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their writings give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has so far no accessibility. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of women. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. They feel that a woman is as competent as man and shares equal rights like man. A woman has also become a direct money earner and can contribute equally to the wellbeing of family and society at large.
The women of modern era think independently and excel in every sphere of life. This is what has been delineated by the woman writers through their novels. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the themes that range from childhood to complete womanhood. Through their novels, they tend to reflect different aspects of female experiences, servitude and marginalisation. The novels further present that the set of problems faced by women is not local but global phenomenon which immediately needs to be addressed by active participation and joint venture of women and rest of the members of society.

The researcher leads to survey how this challenge was accepted by the women writers as responsible members and how through their creative works, they articulated their anger against every system which subordinated them in society. It is, therefore, necessitated to mention writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai who have identified the problems and issues faced by the women in today’s male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For instance, the novels of Anita Desai like ‘Voices in the City’ and ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’ have portrayed the complexities between man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. Nayantara Sahgal has also contributed significantly by underlining the female issues and carving a new era for women. In this context Varun Gulati points out:

Nayantara Sahgal is a writer in Indian English fiction with a refined and modern sensibility, and a profound knowledge of the world around her. Her contribution to the Indo-English fiction is great and unique in her precise and scholarly description of the contemporary Indian political scene. Her novels portray the contemporary political realities and the disillusionment of the post-independence era in all concrete worlds. She tries to dig deep into the human mind by recording the individual responses in a particular
situation. This, in particular, can be a situation in which citizens in a
country are facing sudden changes in politics. She, undoubtedly, is a
woman novelist raising her voice with the 'New Woman'. The central
concern of her novels is the suffering caused to woman in the prison-house
of loveless marriage and her suffering when she makes a breakaway. 7

Kamala Markandaya excels in recording the inner workings of the minds of her characters,
their personal complexities and social conflicts. She portrayed the individual development of
her characters, revealing the difference between what they were and what they are. Major
characters in her novels project their reasoning about the anticolonial or anti-imperialist
attitudes and power politics. Her most popular novel is ‘Nectar in a Sieve’. It is a restrained
as well as a touching account of the life of an Indian peasant woman, Rukmani, and her
struggle for survival and her abiding love for her husband, Nathan.

However, in ‘The Nowhere Man’, Markandaya reveals the sense of alienation of modern man
represented by her character in the novel called Srinivas. In this novel, she primarily
emphasises the alienation of modern human being rather than political issues. Markandaya
successfully balances between human psychological and social problems. She presents the
crisis situations in political and cultural scenario. Her success lies in her creative variation in
themes and characters, as well as her vision.

In ‘Some Inner Fury’, she presents the fervent love story of Mira and an English government
officer, Richard. However, their love-story takes tragic turn in the whirlpool of India’s
Freedom Struggle. Their passionate love comes under many trials and tribulations of political
forces. Richard is murdered by the enraged mob. Thus, the love story ends in distress and
makes Mira retrospect about her life and its harsh realities.

Kamala Markandaya tries to give a message through her novels that India should firmly walk
on the path of traditional values and look for new avenues of self elevation. She disapproves
blind imitation of western culture. With her matchless creativity and views about Indian social and cultural changes, she creates her own place in Indian English novel.

Kiran Desai is one of the new women writers, who have enriched the Indian English fiction through her prolific creative talent. She expresses contemporary issues like alienation, displacement, problems of Diasporas. Her first novel 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard’ reveals superstitious nature of Indian people. In this novel, people worship the Baba who climbs on the Guava tree and pronounces himself as a Baba. This Baba is in truth jobless person who has nothing constructive to do in life. It is a pungent satire on Indian society.

In her Bookers Prize Winning novel ‘The Inheritance of Loss’, she presents the harsh reality and pathos of immigrants who are displaced and alienated in their own country. Kiran Desai skilfully explores the psychology of her characters through her work.

Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri are writers belonging to the second generation and they, too, like their seniors, write about the trials and tribulations women face in the Indian Society.

The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim their creative existence with definite precision and mastery. The contribution of women novelists to Indian fiction in English has been quite substantial and laudable. The depiction of the social scene has been the most salient characteristic of the women novelists. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. They objectively tried to probe into minds of both, oppressed and oppressive to highlight different shades of patriarchy.
After a brief survey of Indian English Fiction, it is required to focus the attention on those women writers who have been selected for the present research work. A brief introduction to their life and works would definitely help in deep understanding of their works and purposes for which they were oriented into creative works.

Shashi Deshpande began her literary career in the year 1970. She believes that men and women write differently. She says in an interview:

I think it is very clear that my own writing is very much a woman's writing. I think just one little example, the beginning of “That Long Silence” for example: it's a very stark beginning at the same time it uses a metaphor of childbirth for the act of writing. It uses the idea of looking into mirrors to speak of different images. I somehow feel that anybody who reads this would know this is a woman writing.8

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad in Karnataka as a daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. She pursued her education in Dharwad, Mumbai and Bangalore. She received degrees in Economics and Law with a gold medal. After getting married, she shifted to Mumbai. During her stay in Mumbai, she decided to pursue a course in Journalism. So, she got herself enrolled in the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Thereafter, she took up a job as a journalist in the magazine "Onlooker". While working in the magazine, she began her writing career, as a creative artist. Her short stories were published in popular magazines like “Femina” and “Eve's Weekly”. Her maiden collection of short stories was published under the title "Legacy" in the year 1978. Her first novel, "The Dark Holds No Terrors" was published in 1980. Her novel titled “That Long Silence” which brought her lots of praise and appreciation, won her the Sahitaya Akademi Award in 1990. She has been actively involved in writing books for children. Her most appreciated works include:
The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980): It is her first novel which is all about male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage.

If I Die Today (1982): This novel contains elements of detective fiction. The narrator, a young college lecturer, is married to a doctor. The arrival of Guru, a terminal cancer patient, disturbs the lives of the doctors and their families. Old secrets are revealed, two people murdered, but the tensions in the families are resolved after the culprit is unmasked.

Roots and shadows (1983): This novel depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist, Indu in a male dominated and tradition-bound society.

Come Up and Be Dead (1985): It deals with the evil of sexual exploitation in an educational institution which is actually meant to empower girls to acquire knowledge and offer justice.

A Matter of Time (1996): It explores lives of three women from three generations of the same family and the way they cope with the tragedy that overwhelms them. Deshpande for the first time enters the world of metaphysical philosophy.

Small Remedies (2000). It is about Savitribai Indorekar, the aging doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and home to pursue her genius.

However, the following selected works of Shashi Deshpande for the present research will be elaborated as below:

**That Long Silence (1989):** Jaya, an unsuccessful writer, is a protagonist who introspects herself through the memories of the past. The novel deals with Jaya’s differences with her husband, Mohan. Jaya’s life is disturbed when her husband, Mohan is blamed for malpractice in his office. Jaya assesses their seventeen year old marriage, differences in their married life and her failure as a writer. She decides to erase a long silence that began in childhood and
rooted in her. The novel discloses the turbulence and tolerance of woman which she undergoes in her maiden and married life.

**The Binding Vine (1993):** Urmi is a protagonist and narrator of the novel who suffers from the trauma of death of her daughter and surrounded by the loving care of her mother, Inni and her childhood friend and sister-in-law, Vanna. Through her grief, Urmi is drawn into the lives of three very different women. As the stories of these women unfold, so does a tale of quiet courage and strength. The first woman Urmi is drawn to is her long-dead mother-in-law, Mira who exists only in the notebooks she has left behind, discovered by chance in a dusty storage trunk.

Mira’s journals and poetry reveal the pain of a vibrant young woman trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage. She is a gifted writer who writes poems about suppression and the injustice of a woman in male dominant society. But her poems remain unrevealed till Urmi brings them to light. Another victim of patriarchal norms is Kalpana, the victim of a brutal rape who hovers between life and death in a hospital ward. Urmi forms a bond with Shakutai, impecunious mother of Kalpana. The lives of three women, Mira, Kalpana and Shakutai who are "haunted by fears, secrets, and deep grief" are bound together by a binding vine of love, concern, and connection that spreads across chasm of time, social class, and even death. The novel depicts her journey into past through flashbacks and different persons in her life whom she binds with herself emotionally.

"The Binding Vine" beautifully brings about the feelings, which are left unspoken in the Indian women. It also reflects their modest quest for identity and love in their life.

**Moving On (2004):** “Moving On” is a story of Manjadi, a young widow. Her self discovery begins with her father’s diary which she reads after his death. Manjadi, the protagonist happens to break all bonds of relationships and moves ahead alone and independent.
Manjari’s journey of life represents the contemporary women’s unending search for selfhood. As Manjari unlocks the past through its pages, rescuing old memories and recasting events and responses, she understands not only her parents from diverse angles but also her own actions and reactions. In “Moving On” Shashi Deshpande reveals the intricate familial bonds, devious property mongers and self-dependent and confident protagonist who is baffled by the marriage proposal offered by her childhood friend.

Manju Kapur is another woman novelist who constitutes the frame of research problem and has joined the growing number of women writers from India, like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Mridula Garg, Anita Nair or Shobha De. She comments on the bold subject like lesbianism through her writing. She was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She graduated from the Miranda House University College for women and went on to take an M.A. at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and an M.Phil. at Delhi University. Manju Kapur lives in New Delhi, where she is a teacher of English literature at her alma mater Miranda House College. She was awarded with Commonwealth Prize for her first novel, “Difficult Daughters” and the book turned out to be a bestseller in India. Manju Kapur is a spokesperson for the modern middle-class women and skilfully portrays sensible characters which are caught in tricky situations. Manju Kapur’s unparalleled work acquires a significant new meaning as it presents the canons of cultural views which are interlinked. Her work gives a convincing starting point to the feminist outlook on family life and she focuses on the discriminating marital roles of husband and wife, dual responsibilities and asymmetrical opportunities offered to women and various hypocritical policies commonly practiced in patriarchal society.

Tradition, transition and modernity are the stages through which the woman in Kapur’s novels is passing. Woman in her novels seems to be a personification of a ‘new’ woman who
has been reticent for ages, as her voice was silenced by the society is now ready to discard the restrictions and saddle of expectations she has carried over the years. A noticeable alteration can be observed in the image of modern woman who is more confident, self-dependent and responsible in every walk of life.

This changing image of incredible women is a basic theme to support the feminist viewpoint in her three novels undertaken for the present research work: “Difficult Daughters”, “The Married Woman” and “Home”.

**Difficult Daughters** (1998): It narrates the story of a young woman, Virmati who aspires to continue her study. Eventually, she falls in love with her neighbour, a married professor. On this ground she rejects an arranged marriage which required a great courage in her conventional joint family. She is entrapped between love and loyalty to family values. But she opts to become second wife of the professor, after undergoing many trials and tribulations. Her benevolent nature at the backdrop of Indian Freedom Movement and partition between India and Pakistan and challenges in her domestic roles find expression in this novel.

**A Married Woman** (2002): It explores the journey of Astha from adulthood to middle years. This journey depicts her marriage, initial dreamy, romantic marital life enjoyed with her husband. But this hay day does not continue for a long and a rift between them is clearly seen in the novel. This gives strength to Astha who tries to establish her identity as a painter to challenge the traditional role of women and confronts the well doctorined and defined role of a woman in the family. In this odyssey, she becomes socially active and falls in love with a woman. This new relationship helps her to search her identity which she finally finds to her satisfaction.
**Home** (2006): It portrays the life of three women, Sona, her sister Rupa and Sona’s daughter Nisha, who are interrelated. They give voice to their problems in their own ways. The novel begins with the story of Sona and Rupa’s struggle for their identity. Sona’s daughter, Nisha is the only daughter in the family. In spite of this, she becomes a prey of sexual abuse in her childhood by her own cousin. She experiences discrimination between daughter and son in her family. She fights for her love with a low-caste boy against her conservative family and gets discouraged by abandonment of her lover due to pressure of her family. But she does not give up. She creates her image in society through her creative talent and skills. She drives to establish her identity as a human being at the familial and social level.

The Immigrant (2008): It is Manju Kapur’s fourth novel. In this novel, Kapur explores the status of immigrant wives. Nina, the protagonist goes to Canada after her arranged marriage. It is difficult for her to adjust with her husband in the foreign culture. There is a drastic difference between Nina and her husband in context to intellectual, emotional and physical needs. Sexual inadequacy turns into disloyalty, when Nina deceives her husband and engages herself in extra-marital relationship with a male classmate. Thus, through this novel, Kapur presents the adjustments and frustrations of a modern marriage.

Custody (2011): Manju Kapur’s fifth novel comments on modern situation of marriage institution. It portrays the dilemma of the modern ambitious careerist woman, Shagun. It is set in the prosperous, upper middle class colonies of Delhi in the mid-nineties, against the backdrop of the globalisation and privatisation in India. Shagun leaves her husband as she gives importance to her individual existence than adjusting with marriage and family bonds which become hindrance in her ambition and separate identity. Eventually, she divorces her husband, Raman and marries her lover and moves to New York. Then Raman remarries Ishita, another divorcee and overcomes the difficult situation in his life.
Thus, these novels focus on dominance of patriarchal norms which are frequently imposed on women against their will. Manju Kapur reveals the fact that even after sixty years of Independence, status of Indian women is yet to be much improved. Indian women still fight for their independent identity. When a woman openly expresses her desires and aspirations for her individuality, she is considered as rebellious or feminist. Such women are often rebuked or looked down upon by the conventional society. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains an unfinished combat. When she expresses some aspirations as men do, she is labelled as feminist. The women characters in the novels of Manju Kapur often pay for their insurgence.

The proposed study undertaken can be objectively analysed and thoroughly discussed by the application of certain key terms like feminism, patriarchy and identity crisis emerging from the critical survey of literary forms. Therefore, it is important to have an in depth study of these key terms.

**Patriarchal system:** Patriarchy is a system of male domination, male potency and control which considers women as subordinate or weaker to men. It is essential to understand this ideology thoroughly, as it is inevitable part of feminism. The concept of patriarchy can be explored through various definitions:

Patriarchy is “a social system in which the male acts as the primary authority figure central to social organization and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property” (wikipedia.com). The site also defines patriarchy as referring to social systems in which the power is primarily held by adult men. These two definitions give a meaning that patriarchy implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and also produces female subordination. It also says that many patriarchal societies are mostly patrilineal which means that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. 9
Azhariah Rachman in his essay on feminism defines patriarchy as:

Patriarchy is a social system in which males are the primary authority figures central to social organization, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination.  

Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”

Andrew Heywood forwards his view on patriarchy:

Patriarchal ideas blur the distinction between sex and gender and assume that all socio-economic and political distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy.

Feminist and political theorist Carole Pateman also puts her opinion about patriarchy, “The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection”.

Ann Tickner views Patriarchy:

In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations.

The deliberations of the above definitions bring out that different feminists have different views about the concept of patriarchy; however, they unanimously blame patriarchal system for female subordination. They believe that patriarchal reasoning is influenced by separation
of male and female synchronisation in society and creating crisis and dualism between them. Therefore, it is essential to know what really patriarchal system is. Kate Millett asserts that patriarchy is an ancient and universal skill for domination of one birth group by another, the scheme that prevails in the area of sex, through which the relationship of dominance and subordinance between the male sex and female sex is very efficiently brought in to effect.

Kate Millet, one of the earliest and most influential theorists of the Women’s Liberation Movement, wrote in 1970:

"Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property."

Patriarchy is deeply rooted because of family structure. It nourished on the concept of female subjugation which further reached on larger scale in the society. Patriarchy further strengthened and spread its tentacles on economic and social restrictions on women through religious powers. The gender discrimination is seen very commonly in every walk of life. Contribution of woman as a mother, as a home-maker, as a bread winner is always devalued and disregarded under the influence of patriarchy. Similarly, woman’s role as a decision maker is always looked down upon, as it can become a threat to perpetuate patriarchy. Patriarchal ideology idealises woman as a goddess and even mystifies her as a witch and still expects them to be patient, tolerant, forgiving.

Feminists in early twentieth century held patriarchy responsible for sufferings of women. It is therefore, essential to understand the concept of feminism to be applied in the ensuing discussion with regard to the books selected for research work.
Feminism: The term ‘feminism’ has its origin from the Latin ‘Femina’ meaning ‘woman’. It refers to struggle of women against gender discrimination and exploitation by conventional society on the name of religion, culture or morality. Feminism has emerged as a powerful socio-political movement across the world.

Elaine Showalter, one of the leading feminist critics in the United States, has identified three historical phases of Women’s literary development: the “feminine” phase (1840-1880), during which women writers imitated the dominant tradition; the “feminist” phase (1880-1920), during which women advocated minority rights and protested; and the “female” phase (1920-present), during which dependency on opposition is being replaced by a rediscovery of women’s texts and women.  

The basic objective of this movement was emancipation of women from patriarchal oppression. Renowned American feminist, Virginia Sapiro’s thoughts in this regard are very significant.

Feminism is a perspective that views gender as one of the most important bases of the structure and organisation of the social world. Feminists argue that in most known societies this structure has granted women lower status and value, more limited access to valuable resources, and less autonomy and opportunity to make choices over their lives than it has granted men.

In their book “Some Questions on feminism and Its Relevance in south Asia”, Kamala Bhasin and Nighat Khan record some factual observations about feminism:

Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation.
Krishna Das and Deepchand Patra express their views about feminism and women writers in their book ‘Studies in Women Writers in English’:

Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and discrimination against women. Feminism is also described as an ideology focussing on equality of the sexes. In literary historiography, it means digging at the past a new from the women’s point of view, breaks and continuities of woman’s writing in history. Virginia Woolf traces out the history of English literature and expresses that women were deprived of education, economic independence and domestic space: ‘a woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write a fiction’. She cites an example of Jane Austen who wrote stealthily. She tried to conceal her identity as a writer for the fear of being mocked at.19

There are different theories of feminism like Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Eco Feminism. Researcher considers it essential to throw light on the ideology of these theories.

 LIBERAL FEMINISM: Liberal Feminism is an original form of feminism and theory. It believes that the root cause of subjugation of women is restrictions on their free thoughts, actions and decisions by the conventional society. It asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reforms. It highlights feminine capability to be equal to their male counterparts through their own actions and choices. Liberal Feminism aims at bridging the gap between men and women through personal interactions and to renovate society into a more gender-equitable place. American feminist, Virginia Sapiro expresses her view about Liberal Feminism:

Liberal feminism means that women are not given the same opportunities as men to pursue their individual interests. This is because women as a group are blocked by informal and formal discrimination and ideology which
people learn through socialization that views women very differently than men.  

Liberal Feminism laid importance to issues which include education, equal wedges for equal work, bringing into light the sexual and domestic violence and exploitation against women, childcare and health care.

**Radical Feminism:** Radical Feminists believe that male supremacy and patriarchal social structure are responsible for subjugation and discrimination. Unless the patriarchal system changes, subordinate position of women will not improve.

Radical feminism stated that sexual relations and sexuality are the center of their feminist framework. They defined that men are the problem and women are the solution. Societies which currently arranged are patriarchal. They are run, organized, and defined by men for their own benefit.

It considers that as long as the patriarchal system and orthodox values are intact, any significant social reform to bring equality is impossible. Sylvia Walby simplifies the objective of Radical Feminism:

Radical Feminism is distinguished by its analysis of gender inequality in which men as a group dominate women as a group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women. This system of domination, called patriarchy, does not derive from any other system of social inequality; for instance, it is not a by-product of capitalism.

Radical Feminists feel that total uprooting and reconstruction of society is essential for healthy social structure. Nancy Mandell says, “Radical feminists believe that unless sexuality is reconceived and reconstructed in the image and likeness of women, the later will remain subordinate to Men.”
**Marxist Feminism:** Marxist feminists raised their voice against discrimination of women, improper evaluation of the responsibilities she aptly handles at domestic as well as social front.

Marxist Feminists consider that women are considered as unequal to men at the workplace as well as the domestic sphere. Prostitution, domestic work, child birth and care are all seen as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system, which devalues women and the substantial work that they do. Virginia Sapiro criticises hypocrisy of the male dominant society that claims that women get same opportunities as men get:

> Socialist feminism which developed from Marxist thought, criticizes the liberal followers which stated that women have the same opportunities as men within given social institutions, but we have to look more deeply at the structure and relationship of those social institution themselves.\(^{24}\)

Marx felt that when class oppression will be abolished, gender oppression would vanish as well.

**Ecofeminism:** Ecofeminism believes in similarity between nature and women in context to childbirth, creation, modesty and submissiveness. Similarly, they share common agony of subordination and exploitation by the patriarchal society.

Famous feminist in UK, Mary Mellor comments about Ecofeminism:

> Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of
humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.\textsuperscript{25}

Krishan Das and Deepchand Patra also express similar thoughts about Ecofeminism:

Ecofeminism links ecology with feminism. Patriarchal system, where men own and control the land are seen as responsible for the oppression of women and destruction of the natural environment. Since the men in power control the land they are able to exploit it for their own profit and success. Similarly women are also exploited by men in power for their own profit, success and pleasure.\textsuperscript{26}

We can get different aspects of feminism. But some feminists focus on difference rather than equality. Some give emphasis on opposing masculine culture. Although different feminists believe in different theories, they unanimously oppose the subordination of women.

Elaine Showalter identifies four models of difference: bio-logical, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. The biological model is the most extreme; if the text somehow mirrors the body, this can reduce women merely to bodies. Yet Showalter praises frankness with regard to the body in female poets and finds in their intimate and confessional tone a rebuke to those women who continue to write “outside” the female body, as though it did not exist. Showalter’s linguistic model of difference posits women speaking men’s language as a foreign tongue; purging language of “sexism” is not going far enough. If women continue to speak as men do when they enter discourse, whatever they say will be alienated. Yet advocates of this position admit that there is no separate “female” language and no evidence to suggest that the sexes are programmed to develop structurally different languages. Showalter’s psycho-analytical model identifies gender difference as the basis of the psyche, focusing on the relation of gender to the artistic process. It stresses feminine difference as the free play of meaning outside the need for closure. Showalter’s most important contribution has been to describe the cultural model that places feminist concerns in social contexts, acknowledging class, racial, national, and
historical differences and determinants among women, but offering a collective experience that unites women over time and space—a “binding force”.27

In recent years, the outlook of feminists is gradually transforming. Instead of attacking on patriarchal norms, they focus on the empowerment of women by creating their identity, by virtue of their strengths.

Most feminists consider that conventional social norms are established in favour of men. Feminist literary critics try to expose the gender discrimination which is apparent in society and is reflected in literature. They criticise the hypocrisy of society and its biased attitude towards women and try to promote women writers by re-evaluating their writing through various aspects and to reconstruct the image of women. Simone De Beauvoir established the fundamental issues of modern feminism by arguing that man defines the human, not woman. Thus, humanity is revealed from the point of view of man. Various feminist critics have tried to define feminism which they consider as a very challenging task.

Donna Hawxhurst and Sue Morrow in “Living Our Visions: Building Feminist Community” say:

Feminism has only working definitions, since it is a dynamic, constantly changing ideology with many aspects including the personal, the political and the philosophical. It can never be simply a belief system. Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out.28

Thus, feminism is a significant movement which reveals various phases of women’s liberation from different clenching restrictions, from her roles and responsibilities as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and home-maker. It tries to bring back the glorious status of women at the domestic and social level by creating awareness about her intellectual abilities and freedom of expression.
Feminist Movement in India:

Indian feminism is different from feminism in the West. India has a glorious history of matriarchal culture in ancient period, when women were unique and powerful. However, this concept was soon declined under the influence of patriarchal culture and the idea of subordination of women is imbibed in society through religion. Women in Indian society consider themselves subordinate to men, as this thought is deeply ingrained in their minds since many centuries.

Their subordinate and submissive position is justified by their male counterparts. This is evident in one of the laws of Manu, the ancient Indian thinker which says, “In childhood a woman should be under her father’s control, in youth under her husband’s and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence...” (The laws of Manu 5.148) In the oppressive patriarchal social structures, the women had to face various patriarchal traits like dowry, caste, community and sati.

Free expression of thoughts and feelings of women has negative connotation in India. Therefore, feminism is considered as the most detestable concept in patriarchal culture of India, as it is a threat to conditioned mindset of man to treat woman as a slave. Woman needs approval of her family for the choice of her life partner. Even if she is economically independent, she does not have freedom to spend the money she earned. It is decided by the male in her family. Legally son and daughter have been given equal rights; however, daughter is expected to leave her right from family legacy. Throughout her life she is psychologically moulded to be dependent emotionally, physically and economically on man.

The psychological conditioning of women in India makes them accept male dominance instantly. Patriarchal ideology embedded its disapproval for feminism, as it termed feminism
as moral degradation of women under western influence. Vrinda Nbar explains the reason of slow momentum of feminism in India, “Patriarchal religious traditions and overt or covert conservative super structures have kept feminism from becoming widely apprehended phenomena”.29

The feminists in India realised the dire need to deconstruct patriarchal structures through individual questionings. Indian feminists need to upgrade the miserable status of women through balanced criticism and improvement in socio-economic status of women, which can result into pleasant co-existence of men and women.

Before 1980s, the writing of Indian women writers was ignored and undervalued. But after 1980s, under the influence of feminist movement in West, the new generation of women writers in India consciously focused on various issues and problems of women which were so far remained unattended or ignored, instead of portraying the self-sacrificing women. They gave voice to women’s identity, the changes in her thought process due to education, her suppressed sexual desires, her aspirations and expectations from life through their writing and received global appreciation for their creative intellect.

The prominent Indian novelists who have taken up various issues regarding women are Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, R.P.Jhabwala, Kamala Markandaya, Manju Kapur, Gita Hariharan, Rama Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee and Arundhati Roy.

They occupy prestigious position in Indian-English fiction. Their writings reflect a variety of shades, colours and visions. They assert identity of women in their writings and handle this issue more responsibly and sensitively than male writers. They criticise the cruel treatment given to women by the society and also record their responses and reactions. These women writers through their writings revolt against the monotonous roles of women and their
mechanical life, failed marriages and dominance of their husbands. The protagonists of their novels are Indian middle class, educated women who oppose the tyranny of a patriarchal society.

**Identity Crisis:** Identity is a complex term; often elusive and incomprehensible. History, culture, society, education, aspirations and relationships give shape and meaning to the identity of an individual. Failure to establish one’s own individuality due to psychological or social reasons is called as identity crisis. The attempts at self-identification lie across the pages of contemporary fiction; more so in the case of the female characters whose identity is entwined and often enshrouded within the labyrinth of her relationships. The stereotypical image of the Indian woman has come a long way and has freed itself of the clichés associated with its makeup and its portrayal in literature. Today there is no single term or association that can be linked with the image of the Indian woman but there exists a multiplicity of identification wherein the traditional role of woman coexists with the modern bonded with the liberated and the lost with the self-assured.

A sense of identity is a constant sustaining creative force in a writer. For the modern man, the search for identity has been one of his chief preoccupations. Identity and its quest refer to the social and spiritual odyssey of the modern man. When an individual finds himself/herself in the fullness of his/her capacities, he/she is satisfied with himself/herself. All his/her needs roles in the society, his/her sublimations and his/her personal and cultural achievements – together can give the impression of an individual with established identity. If all above factors are negated, identity crisis will result. It marks deadening life alienation of individual from social, natural and cultural aspects of life.

The following chapters will be explored in the light of these key terms which will facilitate the true understanding of the virtual discussion and advance the findings in proper direction.
References:


4. ibid p. 219


