CHAPTER – I

IMAGE OF INDIAN WIFE: WOMEN WRITERS’ PERSPECTIVE

The House is made of brick and stone but the home is made of love alone. It is the wife who makes the home. A home without a wife is like wilderness. A wife is considered as friend, counsellor and champion.¹

The Indian woman in the role of a wife has the utmost significance since ages. Since the dawn of the civilization, she has been a myth and a legend. She is considered to be the backbone of a family. Marriage is given a lot of significance in a woman’s life. In India, a girl’s womanhood is considered to be complete once she is married. Until a girl gets married she feels a kind of pressure from the society. Both in literature and life, the roles as a wife and as a mother overlap with each other. Wifehood is to be followed by motherhood in most of the societies. World religions, ancient scriptures and literary texts hail woman as wife with great significance. In this connection, the important facts pertaining to the role of a woman as wife in various religions, deserves notice.

In Vedas, the well-known Hindu scriptures, wife is addressed as the “ardhangi”, the best half of man. The word “Sati” means faithful wife and pativrata who is “the 820th evocative name of the Supreme Shakthi in 154th sloka of Sri Lalitha Sahasranama”². In Puranas, she is referred to as “Sati” who becomes “Uma” (Parvathi) who dwells with
Shiva, to form “Ardhanarishwara” figure. Hence, “‘Sati’ means pure existence of Sat-chit-ananda - the true Omnipresent Reality”\(^3\). ‘Sati’ is thus the holy, fair and chaste woman, the guardian and saviour – strength of her spouse, the bearer, fosterer, humanizer and divinizes the coming generation. Hinduism terms ideal wife as “pativrata”, “grihalakshmi”, and “sahadharmacharini”. She is represented as the custodian of the family honour who brings prosperity to the family. No Hindu religious ceremony can attain perfection and sanctity without the presence of wife. This speaks about the importance given to woman as wife in Hinduism.

Christianity too hails woman as wife with great significance. It is believed that God has created woman from the uniquely strong and sturdy substance, a rib. She is the rib which means solidarity and equity. She is a steady supporter to man in his life. Hence, the Holy Bible confirms that a man becomes complete person when he takes a wife i.e. when he marries a woman. This is clearly given in the Holy Bible (Genesis: Chapter 2, Verse: 24) as follows: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and shall take a wife and becomes a person.”\(^4\) Francis Bacon, the famous Essayist, emphasizes the importance of wife in his Essay, “Of Marriage and Single life” as follows: “Wives are young mens’ mistresses, companions for middle-age, and old mens’ nurses.”\(^5\)

Islam also recognizes woman as an important person who plays a vital role along with man in the act of procreation of mankind. She is
given equal rights (though not identical) on par with men by the religion. Sayyid Maudadi, a critic, explains the rights of woman in Islam as follows: “The Quran Sura 2:228 says that wives have the same rights as the husbands have on them in accordance with generally known principles.” She is acknowledged as a prominent personality who possesses spiritual aspirations and human qualities as men. The religion bestows her with the right to inheritance of the deceased kin’s property. She is also entitled to receive “mahar” (bride price) from her husband which will be her own in all respects.

Though Buddhism does not consider marriage as a religious sacrament, it recognizes the importance of husband-wife relationship. The historical evidence like the Sigvole Sutta, a recorded work on Buddhism, gives few discourses about the duties of husband and wife towards each other. It considers wife as a hall-mark to the role of a woman in the family set-up. It identifies qualities like beauty, virtue, wealth, etc. in woman which makes her superior partner in marriage. It advocates principle of reciprocity between husband and wife for better relationship.

The importance granted to woman as wife in religions and religious scriptures, makes it clear that from the beginning of the history of the human race, the role of woman as wife has been wider and her contribution to its evolution is more significant, since the female undertook the task of securing a future for humanity. It is the labour of the woman, and her biological aspects that helps the
evolution of mankind. Hence study of woman as wife has been a subject of considerable interest in the literary scenario. But the study of “the concept of wife” with reference to Indian context is even more interesting and fascinating.

The word “concept” means an idea or a principle that is connected with something. Hence the concept of Indian wife is about the Indian woman as wife and also about the importance connected with wifehood in Indian context. The concept appears general and familiar in the wake of the 21st century literature. It also appears as a recurring theme in many of the Indian women novelists of the time. But the concept has so much depth that there are still many more aspects related to woman as wife viz. her needs, aspirations, anxieties and her strategies of life need to be unravelled and explored. As research is a never ending discovery and a continuous process without stagnation, as long as the world admires Indian culture, tradition, and Indian woman for her superior qualities, the topic remains absolutely imperative and evergreen even today.

In the Western societies, there has been re-assessment of position of women accorded by the society in all spheres viz. social, political economical spheres of activity. This has resulted in a notable change in the role played by woman in society. This re-appraisal has also touched the Indian soil which questions the position of Indian woman in a family unit. Hence it is opportune to study the place accorded to Indian woman as wife in Indian family unit. The topic is deliberately
designed to evoke the sentiments connected with Indian woman as wife among the Indian masses. While reading the thesis, one can feel something familiar, something typical that touches the inner most chords of their hearts and leaving a compelling impact on oneself. To make the thesis feasible the topic has been narrowed down to Indian woman as wife in the three selected novels of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya.

Infact, Kamala Markandaya has eleven novels and Anita Desai has twelve novels at their credit. For instance, Markandaya’s novels, Some Inner Fury, Possession, The Coffer-Dams, and The Nowhere Man focuses mainly on the theme of East-West encounter. Another novel, Two Virgins is a story about two unmarried sisters. Her novel, The Catalyst alias Bombay Tiger, which was published posthumously in the year 2008, is about the life of the male protagonist, Ganguli in Bombay city. He comes to the city with great ambitions, and becomes the city’s biggest industrialist. The novel is about transition in Indian socialism due to private enterprise. Similarly, Anita Desai’s novel, Bye-bye Blackbird is about East-West encounter. Her novel, Clear Light of Day is about the development of four children in an apparently absurd and grey world of New Delhi family. Voices in the City presents the lives of four young educated people in the city of Kolkata. Monisha is the woman character in the novel presented as wife but, she is not depicted with much significance. In Custody is about a Hindi lecturer who is interested in Urdu poetry. This novel too has a wife character,
Sarla. But she is not the centre of the novel. It is Deven, the male protagonist, who is focused in the novel. Similar is the case with another novel, Baumgartner’s Bombay, wherein it depicts the loneliness and destitution of a male protagonist, Hugo, who is the main character in the novel. Her next novel, Journey to Ithaca encapsulates the wisdom of Oriental philosophy. The novel, Fasting and Feasting presents apparently opposite cultures of India and USA. Her latest novel, The Zigzag Way is about the conflict between the two different cultures (Indian and Mexican) and problems faced by the expatriates. Most of the novels have women characters in them but all are not focused. The main focus of the study is on wife-oriented novels of both the writers. Hence, Markandaya’s novels, Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice and A Silence of Desire and Desai’s novels Cry, The Peacock, Fire on the Mountain and Where Shall We Go This Summer? have been selected for the present study. The thesis explains how the married women react to real life situations and change their life styles according to their own choices. Along with the selected novels chosen for the study, the other novels of the writers are also studied as they give clear idea about the writers’ narrative techniques, art of characterization, use of imagery, landscape, etc.

The reason for selecting the two women writers, Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya for the study is also deliberate because both the writers are known for their literary excellence and surpass other women writers in their depiction of Indian woman as wife in Indian
context. H.M.Williams, a critic, brackets Kamala Markandaya with Anita Desai in his book, *Indo-Anglian Literature* as both are typical nineteenth-century novelists who explore the anguish of women in modern society. Both these novelists are considered to be the first novelists who have discussed in their novels the themes like: despair and agony of human life, search for identity, clashes of East and West ideologies, etc. that were popular with European and American novelists.

There are other writers who dealt with the concept of woman. But their approach is different from that of these two writers’. For instance, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala has written about middle-class women in India. But there is only sympathy and irony in her perception of Indian social problems which she views with coolness and objectivity. She does not offer any solutions to Indian woman’s problems in social transformation. Another writer, Shantha Rama Rau recommends old and traditional standards of life and thought for Indian people. Nayantara Sehgal brings out the political scenario effectively than anything else in her novels. Though these women writers have depicted women characters in their novels, they seem to study the woman character from one-dimension point of view i.e. either from social or cultural or political or economical point of view. Hence the study of the Indian woman’s character as wife is not completely defined in their novels.
But Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya set themselves apart from these Indian women writers in their projection of the image of woman as wife in Indian context. The study of both the novelists make the study of the image of the women complete because Kamala presents various slices of life in terms of social political, cultural and economical aspects, and places her women protagonists against these various situational backgrounds and explores to expose the strength and stamina of their spirit and morality. Her women have clear conscience of the problems. They face the problems boldly and depict a positive attitude with good ray of hope yet to come in future. She demonstrates the importance of faith in life as a great sustaining power.

On the other hand, Anita Desai views women’s problems from psychological perspective. She studies the Indian women’s problems from psychological point of view which is rarely reflected in other writers’ novels. The solutions presented by her may be muted or oblique at times but the significance of her efforts can hardly be denied. Hence, a comparative study of Indian woman as wife, studied from different points of view by both the writers in their novels, gives a complete picture of Indian wife in the Indian society.

Though both the writers differ in projection of image of wife in their novels, they proceed from common centre and finally converge upon a common focus. In response to tradition and change they have been guided by their own individual talents and unique sensibilities. This
thesis seeks to explore both the common ground that holds together and the divergent vision of both the writers.

This chapter shall deal in detail with the women writers chosen for this study, in addition to recapturing the beginning of Indian Writing in English followed by the depiction of the image of Indian woman in the novels of men and other women writers.

The Indian Writing in English of the twentieth century presents a consistent picture of the changing social realities of the century. Indian writers have made valuable contribution to the arena of fiction. The Indian novel in English has stood the test of time and proved its worth in fulfilling one of the primary objectives of literature, i.e. presenting reality. M.K.Naik elucidates the chief purpose of literature as follows:

Literature encounters reality, explores reality and exposes reality.7

The publication of the first Indian novel in English, *Rajmohan’s Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chaterjee in the year 1864, marks the real beginning of the Indian Writing in English. Hence, Indian Writing in English which was designated variously as Indo-Anglian Literature, Indian-English Literature and Indo-English Literature, is about 146 years old. It may be appropriate, at this juncture, to give a brief account of the genres of Indian Writing in English.
English education has made rapid strides much before the Indian independence. It is the period ripe for the flowering of the creative Indian genius in the new arenas. Many Indian writers in English have started their career by presenting the spontaneous expressions of the people under the foreign rule. *One Thousand and One Nights* by S.K.Ghosh and *Indian Detective Stories* by S.B.Benerjee and *The Slave Girl of Agra* by Ramesh Chandra Dutt are some of the works of fiction in English from Indian hands. Eminent Indian thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Aurbindo, Tilak, Gokhale, etc. have used English as a language to communicate Indian thought to the Western audience. Infact, English has awakened and enlightened the spiritual cause for freedom. It is under Gandhiji’s unique leadership and perseverance that India is liberated from the foreign rule on August 15th 1947. The great political leader too wrote extensively in English with a lucid style. English as a language remained in India as it is loved by all these writers and admired by common people. Literacy in English has grown steadily as more schools, colleges and universities are established all over India. *In toto*, English has become an indispensable tool as it is the only means of communication in the multi-lingual community and for all round development in India.

The change in the political power has brought a change even on the literary screen. Indian Writing in English acquired a new range and power. Consequently, the emergence of the three stalwarts i.e.
Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, has raised the Indian Writing in English to greater standards. At this juncture, it is important to study their perception about women protagonists.

Mulk Raj Anand, an outstanding exponent of social realism, flourished during nineteen twenties and thirties. He presents a world with a striking variety of fictional characters. Among the women in his fictional world, one encounters both rustic and urban types - the princess and the beggar maid, the village belle and the society lady, etc. These characters either have stirred his humanitarian compassion deeply or have evoked his admiration. Anand depicts the real position of women in the Hindu society. Writing about the depiction of women characters in his novels, M.K. Naik opines that:

The position of woman in traditional Hindu society is a recurring theme in Anand’s fiction, and quite a few of his short stories are devoted to it, bringing out both the tears and the laughter latent in the subject.8

For this reason, Gauri and Parvathi (in the short story, Birth) are perhaps his most outstanding creations among his women characters. In his novel Lajwanthi, Anand presents with deep compassion the most memorable female character, and the psychological torture undergone by the young wife as she comes to realize her true plight in the house merely as a lust satisfying machine
for her husband. Anand’s novels are an indictment of the social evils and rampant superstitions which prevailed in the Indian society.

Raja Rao is another bright star in the literary firmament of India. His novels reflect the social and political conditions of the times. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who has played a significant role in Indian politics of the times, he depicts the women characters as the representatives of Shakti. The indomitable spirit of Shakti possesses them as they march in processions and face police atrocities. They also represent the devotional aspects of Shakti. Raja Rao’s women characters are first inspired to join the freedom movement when they are told that Gandhi is like Rama and he is trying to free Sita (Bharat Mata) from the shackles of Ravana (the British Government). Women are presented as freedom fighters in the novel, Kanthapura. In the other novel, The Serpent and the Rope, the women are represented as different aspects of Shakti. Little Mother represents the self-sacrificing and compassionate aspects of Shakti. Lakshmi (with whom Rama stayed in Bombay) represents the destructive aspect of Shakti. Savithri represents the feminine principle in its complete form. The young queen of England who is going to be crowned also represents the feminine principle. She is going to give new life and vitality to the British nation. Raja Rao appears to probe the problem of good and evil, order and disorder by equating the freedom movement with the Ramayana and the Gita.
R.K. Narayan, an innovator of the series of Malgudi novels, is a renowned novelist in the realm of Indian Writing in English. He is basically humorous, concerned with the lower middle class of South India. Narayan’s depiction of women characters may suitably be divided into two groups or classes. First, they are typical Indian housewives, such as Krishna’s wife, Sushila, in *The English Teacher* and Savitri in *The Dark Room* who are simple, modest, gentle, loving and obedient. They are religious and traditional in their ways. Indeed, they are the upholders of the ancient Indian way of life. Their only anxiety is the welfare of their husbands and their children. They are experts in running their households economically and efficiently. The more they grow old, matured and experienced, the more independent and assertive they become. For example, Raju’s mother in *The Guide* and Krishna’s mother in *The English Teacher* represent the typical housewives in an Indian household. The other types of women characters are more modernized, and unconventional in their views and ways of life. On the other hand, they are beautiful flirts. They do not value traditional norms of virtue and chastity, such as Rosie in *The Guide*, Shanti in *Mr. Sampath*. Rangi in the *Man-eater of Malgudi* represents a cruder type, for she is a professional prostitute, neither ashamed of her profession, nor tried to conceal it. Narayan’s women characters are neither the forms of Shakti as portrayed in the novels of Raja Rao nor like exploited women characters of Mulk Raj Anand. They are typical South Indian women. Inspite of the rich imagination
and comic caricature, Narayan’s novels faithfully reflect an India as real as Anand’s or Raja Rao’s.

On analysis of women characters depicted by the trio, it is clear that these novelists have depicted women in their stereo-typed forms as daughter, wife, mother, mistress etc. Women are represented more as statues and less as people. Positively or negatively, they are portrayed in one-dimensional manner as virgin–heroine or temptress, the dutiful daughter or all sacrificing mother, the ‘pativrata’ or the redundant widow.

Along with these novelists, there are other young successful male novelists of recent times like: Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Humayun Kabir, Sudhin N.Ghose, Venu Chitale, Anand Lall, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi, Ved Mehta, etc. who have cherished Indian Writing in English. Just like their seniors, these male writers have presented an idealized concept of womanhood. The images, based on social conditions of women drawn by these male writers, are either idealized versions close to angels or monsters. Most of these women characters have never represented the real woman of the times. The male writers are governed by the general notion that woman is innately weak, emotional, dependent, and has limited capacity to work. These women characters are one-dimensional - could be epitomes of virtue or beauty or sensuality; but they are never real women who possess many more qualities and capabilities than those portrayed by them. They have depicted women characters in a
way what patriarchy demands of woman but not what woman
demands of life.

This stereo-typed image of a woman has been repudiated by the
women writers in the country. Through their writings, they have
initiated a shift in the mindset of the people. An interesting aspect of
their writing has been the creative release of the “feminine sensibility”.
Like her Western counterparts such as Jane Austen, George Eliot,
Virginia Woolf and the Bronte Sisters, the Indian women novelists
have established a strong tradition in Indian Writing in English.

Women novelists appeared on the Indian English literary scene
during the last quarter of the nineteenth century (1874 -1900). They
have established a distinctive style in exploring the problem faced by
people in general, and women, in particular. These writers take their
characters from all walks of life but are more concerned with the
downtrodden and depressed section of the society. The emergence of
women writing in English during this period is quite significant in
itself, marking the birth of a new era which held out for the Indian
woman opportunities for dynamic participation in the social life of the
country. The rise of the Indian novel in English is a symptom of the
emergence of the individualistic social order in the society. The first
phase women writers like: Toru Dutt, Shevanti Bai Nikambe, Krupabai
Santhinathan, Cornelia Sorabji, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, etc. not only
contributed to the raise of Indian novel in English but made the novel
as an instrument for self-realization, social reform and regeneration.
The history of the Indian women writers begins with Toru Dutt and her unfinished novel *Binaca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden* (posthumously published in 1878). Other women writers and their novels of the early period are: Raj Laxmi Debi’s *The Hindu Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876), Krupabai Santhinadhan’s *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna*, Shevanti Bai Nikambe’s *A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife* (1896) and Cornelia Sorabji’s works include *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), etc. M.A.Waheed throws light on the depiction of Indian feminine sensibility in the works of early Indian women writers as follows:

Writings of these women novelists of the first phase are to be seen in terms of Indian feminine sensibility with certain emotional and aesthetic propensities and predilections shared by the Indian English women writers even today.  

Hence the main aim of women novelists of the early phase is to locate women’s problems in the male-dominated society.

After the World War II, women writers of quality have enriched Indian fiction in English. There are quite a good number of women writers like: Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shasi Deshpande, Attia Hosain, Bharati Mukerjee, Nergis Dalal, Shoha De, Veena Paintal, etc.
who have contributed immensely for Indian fiction in English. They share, along with men, the fame of enriching the Indian fiction in English.

Writing about the feminine sensibility in the works of women writers of post-independent era Madhusudhan Prasad opines that:

The post-independent India witnesses the rise of a number of distinguished women novelists.... In the development of the Indian novel in English, the feminine sensibility has assuredly achieved a certain degree of imaginative self-sufficiency which has been recognized by the Indian as well as foreign critics of the Indian Writing in English.¹⁰

These women writers of post-independent era have witnessed the emergence of the new woman in the fast-changing social milieu waiting for liberation from the tyranny of the ages. They offer a convincing world in which characters live with maturity. They have their own distinct style and project a vision of their own. They reveal a power of artistic selection by which their novels tend to achieve harmony. The recurring theme of many of the Indian English novels is quest for woman’s identity and self-awareness.

The post-independent Indian scene, with rapid socio-political changes, has stimulated a variety of reactions in Indian English women writers. It is noteworthy that domestic issues, marital
problems, and feministic outbursts appeared only after Independence. The feelings of protest and frustration have found explicit expression in the modern age. The women novelists, however, seem to have favourably responded to the changing situations and psychological realities of Indian life.

Education has brought a tremendous change in the outlook of women writers. It has ensured economic freedom to them. Pen has become a greater weapon for women to express their ideas. This terrified man and he has imposed more social and legal regulations on them. But women did not remain silent; they have been combating these obstacles to prove that they are in no way inferior to their counterparts. Despite the harassment, women have proved themselves by gaining access into the patriarchal world.

The independence movement has brought the Indian women out of their sheltered and fully protected existence. It has propelled Indian women writers onto the political and social scenario and they have begun to develop the prevalent reformist zeal. Moreover, the portals of educational institutions are then thrown open to them. Freedom for the Indian women did not mean freedom from British rule and its tyranny alone; but simultaneously, it is a release from centuries of male-domination and male-ordained social and cultural norms. Though the Indian women did not struggle like American women for universal suffrage, she had to strive to attain recognition of her individuality and acceptance by society for an existence beyond
her gender based roles. Patriarchy has compelled the Indian women to be totally subservient to the male in both the social and economic spheres. She has then sought to change that, and bring some balance to the long existed inequality.

The Indian woman has attempted to bring a slow but sure change within her home. It is this change in the Indian woman that provides the mainstay for much of the fiction written by women in post-independent India. More than in any other genre of literature, it is in fiction that women attempt to portray their introspection realistically. With reference to the basic problem of survival and existence, the modern Indian woman writer in English has discovered new ways to counter this problem of existence. The female protagonists in the novels of writers of the second phase are no revolutionaries; but in order to survive, they have successfully carved a niche for themselves. They are more concerned with the minute things of everyday existence besides struggling to keep up their ideology and identity. Their suffering is mental, emotional, social, psychological and existential. In their novels, women writers have focused more on psychological and social issues. They have brought out the conflicts and predicaments of Indian women against the background of contemporary Indian situation. A brief study of Indian women novelists would be more insightful, at this juncture.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is a well-known women novelist who has published seven novels over a period of twenty years. Jhabvala has
left India and settled down in the USA in 1975. Her novels, *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) are mainly concerned with socio-cultural issues. Jhabvala’s novels of middle-class Indian life in Delhi present a similarity to those of Jane Austen. The women that have featured in her novels are the silently suffering Indian wives like Indu in *The Householder*.

Shakuntala Shringesh is another prolific writer in the realm of Indian women writers in English. She harped on the themes like: the hopelessness of unfulfilled or ruined love, the terrible suffering of artistic ambition, the search for self-realization, etc. Her novel, *The Little Black Box* (1955), is somewhat out of the milieu, in which the story is presented in the form of a dairy by the narrator-heroine, Sarla.

Another woman writer, Shantha Rama Rau is a follower of R.K.Narayan and Jhabvala who have supported the old and accepted norms of life and thought. Her heroine in the novel, *Remember the House*, is for the East in preference to the West.

Nayantara Sehgal advocates a new and fresh exploration of man-woman relationship that still seems largely unrehearsed even in the atomic age where the other problems have been explored and resolved. Her novels, *A Time to be Happy* (1957), *This Time of Morning*
explore and highlight the impact of transition period of India on man-woman relationship. She stresses the importance of communication between husband and wife in her novels. The women in Sehgal’s novels sometimes break the barriers and customs that prevent their emancipation and contradict their life styles. Being related to Nehru’s family, her focus on a whole is mainly on the political changes that occurred in India during independence.

Shasi Deshpande, comparatively a recent entrant into the literary scene, portrays the new woman and her dilemma in her novels. Her major concern is about the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and struggling to preserve her identity as wife, mother and, above all, as a human being with individuality. Such a quest for identity forms the theme of her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, *That Long Silence* (1989). Her other novels include: *Roots and Shadows* (1983), and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980).

Bharathi Mukerjee portrays her protagonists as the victims of life. These characters are shown struggling to find modes of authentic communication. Her characters suffer from “isolation.” In *Jasmine* (1980), *Wife*, (1976), *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1973), her protagonists are presented as highly sensitive women with certain capacity to question
accepted social codes and then try to achieve a role and pattern of life that suits their expectations. Commenting on the achievement of Bharathi Mukerjee, Indira Nityanandam underlines the portrayal of her protagonists as follows:

Her protagonists are victims of life which is visionless because it is voiceless. Therefore, these characters are shown struggling to find modes of authentic communication. 11

The third group of Indian women novelists includes writers like: Nargis Dalal, Namita Gokhale, Gita Hariharan, Raji Narasimhan, etc. who have enriched Indo-Anglian Literature with their works. The depiction of woman’s subjugation in the Indian social scenario within a spectrum of religious, philosophical and political conditions has always been the main thrust of these women writers.

Shoba De became very popular with her first novel Socialite Evening. Her other works include: Starry Nights (1990), Sultry Days (1994), Shooting from the Hips, and Selective Memory: Stories from My Life (1998). In her novels, she depicts the role of women in contemporary Indian society emphasizing upon gender relationships and possible alternatives available for women to reflect their true identity.

Arundhati Roy has come to limelight in 1997 after her novel, The God of Small Things, bagged Booker Prize for literature. Her novel
depicts the story of the love of forbidden caste and what the community will do to protect the conventional ways. Roy, who has grown up in Kerala, powerfully portrays the burdens of caste and tradition that crushes some of her characters and wraps others, but leaves none untouched.

All the women writers that are mentioned display keen observation and fine sensibility of intuitive insight into life, and put forth their strong points in writing their novels. Though hailing from the upper middle class, affluent and urban educated families, these writers are deeply and sensitively alive to women’s predicament in a patriarchal society.

Of all these women writers, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai deserve particular attention because they have established a special identity as writers in the firmament of Indian women novelists. Kamala Markandaya is the first major Indian woman novelist in the post-independence era who portrays a large repertoire of women in a changing Indian society, their struggles in the face of extreme exploitation, and their consequent success in asserting themselves within the framework provided. William Walsh, a critic, terms her as “the most distinguished women writer of post-independent era.” She is different from other women writers in the sense that she depicts her ideas openly through her characters. None can equal her in the portrayal of Indian rural life particularly its disintegration under the impact of industrialization. She depicts the dilemma of the individuals
stemming from the contemporary chaos created by crumbling of values in the society. No other writer equals her in her mastery of depicting the principle character against various situational backgrounds. She studies the principal character from social, political, cultural and economical backgrounds. For instance, Markandaya’s picture of Rukmani in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is known for her human dignity with her effacing stoicism.

Anita Desai is an acclaimed novelist who for the first time initiated psycho-analytical approach to novel writing among Indian women novelists. She breaks new grounds by dispensing with the conventional method of narration. She makes a psychological exploration into the Indian woman’s mind. She creates the image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world thus depicting the existential predicament of woman in a male-dominated society. She could be seen as ahead of her contemporaries in renewing and re-energizing the words, syntax and transforming the banalities of everyday realities into the work of art. From her first novel to the latest, one may discover the growth of her vision in the diversity of her contexts and subject matter. For instance, in her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, Anita depicts hypersensitive heroine, Maya whose marital discord drives her to the edge of emotional limits. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the novelist projects the theme of struggle and alienation of the protagonist, Sita who fails to communicate her feelings to her husband and others around her. Sita is symbolic of the
loneliness of a woman, a wife and a mother conditioned and forced by family and society. All the protagonists Maya, Sita, Monisha (Voices in the City), Nanda Kaul (Fire on the Mountain) crave for a way of living that will respond to their innermost yearnings for emancipation and dignity for the self.

Both the writers study the predicament of married Indian women from multi-dimensional view i.e., from psychological, social, economic and cultural points of view. Though their works are not identical, they are complementary to each other. Their wide acquaintance with the vagaries and nuances of life, both in the East and the West, and their high educational and intellectual standards have given a sharp edge to their observations. Their natural feminine sensibility and introspection have imparted to their observation a humane touch and psychological depth and to their art a neat finish and precision of outline. Hence their works are quite stimulating and fascinating than other women writers’ works. At this point of view, it would be more justified to study Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai at individual level.

Kamala Markandaya is a prolific writer who was born in an affluent, rather orthodox Brahmin family of Mysore, South India in 1924. She has migrated to England in 1948 and married Mr. John Taylor and settled in London. She was awarded the National Association of Independent Schools Award (U.S.A.) in 1967 and the Asian Prize in 1974. Her literary career begins with the publication of
her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* in the year 1954. To this date she has eleven novels to her credit; they include: *Some Inner Fury* (1955); *A Silence of Desire* (1960); *Possession* (1963); *A Handful of Rice* (1966); *The Coffer Dams* (1969); *The Nowhere Man* (1972); *Two Virgins* (1973); *Golden Honey Comb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1987). She has breathed her last breath on May 14th, 2004 in London. Her last novel *The Catalyst* alias *Bombay Tiger* was published posthumously on February 15th, 2008. Her novels explore the issues regarding human relationships in terms of the parts played by the social, economic and political forces. Traversing down the superficial layers of the society she discovers a pattern of ordered experience in terms of human sensibility. Her works at a first glance appear to be comedies of manners or social domestic chronicles, but when closely approached, a subtler mechanism of analysis and exploration can be discovered in her works.

Kamala Markandaya offers every experience as an adventure of the individual sensibility. Her novels in comparison with those of her contemporary women writers seem to be more fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society. As such, Kamala Markandaya merits a special mention both by virtue of the variety and complexity of her achievement and as a representative of a major trend in the history of the Indian English novels.
Kamala Markandaya depicts her feelings and ideas in a proper order which result in the production of a truly enjoyable work of art. Her creative sensibility endows her novels with a certain representative character that marks them out as a significant entity in the Indian Writing in English. In all of her novels “traditional life” forms the subtheme. The fact that none of the protagonists in her novels run away from the hard realities of life by choosing death or escape as the final solution is a vindication of the traditional values of Indian culture, namely acceptance and tolerance. The spiritual oneness and unity of life and experience is the central idea in the intellectual tradition of India that has remained permanent, enduring and unravelling by the passage of time.

It is but natural that the Indian English writer not only reflects this archetypal quality of her culture, but also dramatizes its characteristic new configurations under the impact of change. Markandaya’s contribution to the Indian Writing in English lays essentially in her capacity to explore vital areas of individual consciousness that project the images of cultural change. When she has been asked in an interview if she is an expatriate, she says:

I do not think of myself as an expatriate writer. All my thought processes are Indian, my parentage, religion and schooling are Indian, all my formative factors, are Indian.13
Kamala Markandaya says that her spirit has not been altered, even after years of physical alienation from her people and country. And yet, in her novels she has always evinced full involvement in the conflicts and tensions of those uprooted from the country of birth, and living in an adopted country. It is therefore interesting to study how a sensitive author like Markandaya orchestrates her views and, as an expatriate, defines it for her readers. She does not see India as an indeterminate glorious past, or as a totally westernized future. She sees it as a changing reality, ever in flux, with clashes of attitudes, interests and emotions of living contemporaries and maintaining its essential self. She does this with perfect ease and skillfulness for the simple reason that she writes about herself, every time with a new set of characters, a different setting and a fresh emphasis.

Kamala is considered to be the first important woman novelist to enrich Indian fiction with a novel treatment of human relationships. Her debut novel, Nectar in a Sieve (1954) has been compared to Pearl S. Buck’s The Good Earth, which deals with the sufferings of the peasants in colonial India. Her novels revolve round average men and women and familial relationships against the backdrop of political, social or economic issues. In her novels both men and women receive equal attention.

The incidents that one comes across in Kamala Markandaya’s novels seem to have been culled from actual life-experiences. Several strands go to weave the web of her plot. She has achieved a global
distinction, and her novels are widely read in America and England. They have elicited critical acclaim from both native and foreign critics. Stephen Ignatius Hemingway, a foreign critic opines that:

Markandaya is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Anglian novelist and a superb representative of the growing number of Indian women writing serious literature in English (qtd. in Harrex 52). 14

Kamala Markandaya’s main aim is to draw the attention of the people towards the plight of the women in Indian society. Talking about the main concern of Kamala Markandaya, R.S. Pathak, a critic opines as follows:

To awaken the polite society to real problem is her main concern. 15

Kamala Markandaya herself considers her novels as “Literature of Concern,” throwing light on her concern for the social life in India, which bristles with problems – “Vagaries and varieties” as Iyengar calls it. She highlights the social evils, which are shaking the very foundation of Indian society. Writing about Kamala Markandaya on her contribution to Indian English fiction Anil Kumar Bhatnagar, a critic, cites her as follows:

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most distinguished women novelists on the Indian scene. Though she is not a
didactic novelist, a crusading spirit for the welfare of humanity and the alleviation of human suffering inspires her work. Whatever the differences of them and setting and style there may be in her novels, a single thread binds them together, they are what as she herself calls, “Literature of Concern”.

Kamala Markandaya is recognized as one of the most productive, popular and skilled women novelists on the Indian literary scene. She is talented to occupy the safest place in the commonwealth arena. The authentic portrayal of contemporary India has assigned her this status. She is careful enough to take characters from all walks of life. She has greater interest in analyzing women characters and suggesting the unusual poignancy of their fate. It would be apt to quote Bhatnagar’s remarks in the context of Kamala Markandaya’s themes and characters:

Her particular strength lies in the delicate analysis of the relationships of persons, especially when they have a more developed consciousness of their problems. She has been most successful and at her best, an impressive best, in dealing with the problems of the educated and middle class and has a gift for delineating the self-imposed laceration of the dissatisfied.
Kamala Markandaya has taken the task of exposing the life heading towards a catastrophe and seeks the positive reaction from the hopefully living humanity. She uses her art of writing novels as a platform to protest the existing injustice, social inequalities, and exploitation, of the poor by the rich and the wife by the man, which occur due to the erosion of social values. Avadesh Singh, a critic, comments on her contribution to the fictional world and also her option of themes as follows:

Of all the contemporary Indian novelists writing in English, Kamala Markandaya is the most accomplished both in respect of her sensitive handling of a foreign medium and her authentic portrayal of the Indian scene. What distinguishes her most incisively from other Indian novelists in her acute awareness of a gradual shift in values that has been taking place in this subcontinent during the past decade or so.  

Comparing her works with other contemporary women writers, A.V. Krishna Rao opines:

Kamala Markandaya’s novels in comparison with those of her contemporary women writers seem to be more fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society.
Thus Kamala Markandaya has established herself as an important Indian English novelist both due to her novels theme-wise as well as her concern for the Indian woman. Another writer on par with her is Anita Desai. Anita Desai, whose writing career spans over a period of forty seven years now, was born on 24th of June, 1937 at Mussoorie. Her father is a Bengali and her mother is a German lady. She has married Ashwin Desai and is a mother of four children. Her daughter Kiran Desai is also an acclaimed writer like her. Desai is a very reputed and prolific Indian woman novelist of the post-independence era. She has received many prestigious awards such as Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. This novel also won the Royal Society of Literatures Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and also the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award for her. Later, she has been awarded the Author’s Guild Award for Excellence in Writing for *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Her two novels, *Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody* have been considered for Booker Prize. Usha Bande, a critic, compares her style of writing to that of the Western writers like Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing and Flora Nwapa.

When Anita Desai’s first novel *Cry, The Peacock* was published in 1963, Kamala Markandaya was already an acclaimed novelist. It is with Anita Desai that a totally new approach to fiction writing in English by Indian women was evident. Srinivas Iyengar describes the difference between the two writers as follows:
In Kamala Markandaya’s the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds: economic political, cultural, social but in Anita Desai’s two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that clears or rumbles like the thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightening is more compelling that the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility.  

Though Mrs. Desai has inter-continental parentage which is a mix of German and Indian culture, her novels are firmly entrenched in Indian soil. Her novels and short stories revolve round the working of the mind of her women protagonists. Speaking about the intense inner existence of the characters, Shanta Krishnaswamy says:

Anita Desai introduces new images packed with freshness check and unsurpassable evoking power. Her perception understanding the extraordinary queerness and mysteriousness of the world in which she lives.

Anita Desai has something at once personal and universal. The distinguishing feature of her writing is a special power of language, a special feeling for the connection of words in sound and meaning. Most of Anita Desai’s characters suffer from the stress of the soul and their overwhelming emotions. Anita Desai brings through images the inner turbulence of the protagonists to the surface.
Anita Desai explores the psychic depth of her characters and analyses in detail their motives. The plot or story of the novel is not so important. Her main concern is the existential predicament of an individual which is projected through incompatible couples – “acutely sensitive wives, and dismal, callous, inconsiderable, ill-chosen husbands.”

Her works include: *Cry, The Peacock* (1963); *Voices in the City* (1965); *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971); *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975); *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976); *Fire on the Mountain* (1977); a collection of short stories: *Games at Twilight* (1978); *Clear Light of Day* (1980); *In Custody* (1984); *The Peacock Garden* (1984); *Village by the Sea* (1985); *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988) a novel for the teenagers, *Journey to Ithaca* (1995); *Fasting, Feasting* (1999); *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000); *The Zig Zag Way* (2004) and quite a few essays, articles, interviews and short stories.

*Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in the City* are written when the novelist was a young lady. These novels explore the world of young female protagonists, Maya and Monisha, who are also in their twenties. Desai handles the nuances of the human psyche powerfully. The reader observes how the outside pressure drives Maya out of her mind to near insanity. *Where Shall We Go This Summer? Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of the Day* belongs to a stage in Anita Desai’s career when she had achieved greater maturity as writer. The protagonists in these novels are less romantic than the ones in the earlier novels. Anita Desai concentrates on the inner life of the
protagonists. She is influenced by the writings of Catherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Anita’s characters seem to be lifted from their writings. The behavioural aberrations of these characters echo the voices of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. The impact of the writings of Kafka and Camus is also seen on the novels of Anita Desai.

The characters of Anita Desai face the dilemma of finding their identity precisely because their background is rooted in a caste-ridden society with group ascription by birth. From a fixed sense of social placement they are transferred to alien surroundings where it is an individual who matters, and not a group. This becomes the recurred theme in her novels. Her inter-continental parentage has brought two separate strands into her life. She admits: “My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother.”23 This transgressing of regional identity endows her with the stance of an objective observer. In the majority of her works one finds a character trying to adjust, either to the place or the society or to the self. To quote Srinivas Iyengar:

Her forte is the exploration of a particular kind of modern sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists.24

Desai’s academic and literary life needs as much attention as her novels for correct assessment of her work. Desai never gives
details of her personal life. She deliberately keeps it a secret because she feels that “To make the public scrutinize it...is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder. It is something that must remain secret and silent...”

On the one hand, she wants to distance herself from the critics and readers as far as her personal life goes; yet, on the other, she adopts all the strategies to keep herself in the limelight.

Anita Desai manipulates the external world cleverly so as to reflect the subtle nuances of the inner experiences. Her novels serve both as a mirror and a lamp; not only do the novels reflect contemporary life as it is, but they also throw light on the new and emerging patterns of life. Therefore, she undoubtedly deserves the status of being the voice of contemporary India.

Most of Anita Desai’s protagonists desire to escape into the world of fantasies. Her female protagonists very often flee from society when they see their “vital interests” being threatened by the patriarchal social order. One should not, then, conclude that this desire and act of escape of Desai’s protagonists is a reflection of their cowardly disposition. Infact, this explanation appears logical but it is not reasonable to apply to the sensitive female protagonists of Anita Desai. It is true that a sensitive and educated woman brought up in an environment of obedience and sobriety would feel threatened, if she is reduced to be a submissive and passive partner. So they use the survival strategy of escapism as a defense mechanism to survive in the patriarchal social structure as well as an opportunity for the
realization of the meaning of life. It is only in their search for life that Desai’s protagonists realize their true selves.

The female characters are haunted by a peculiar sense of doom, withdrawing themselves into a sequestered world of their own. The sense of futility, boredom and alienation of these women characters is presented lively by Anita Desai through her ability to delve deep into the inner world of her characters. Anita Desai has brought out convincingly the sense of loneliness and alienation of her protagonists in her novels. The problems and conflicts faced by women in her novels are existential in nature. They occur for any woman in the society. Their self-assertion leads to self-alienation. The more the search for freedom and independence and the meaning of life, the more it results in alienation and loneliness. Thus her novels explore the inner psyche of women. It is this beautiful presentation of the inner psyche of woman that has carved out a special niche for Desai in Indian fiction. Anita Desai’s preoccupation in her own words is a perpetual search for meaning, for value and for truth. This is perceptible in the words of Jasbir Jain as follows:

To her reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the ice-berg that one sees above the surface of the ocean, and the truth the remaining nine tenths of it that lie below the surface. The purpose of her entire writing is to explore this submerged truth which she does through the exploration of the psyche of her characters.
This exploration of the consciousness necessitates turning inward, probing deeply into the innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom its mysteries, the inner turmoil, and the chaos inside the mind.

In almost all of her novels there is a striving, on the part of the protagonists, towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one that is available to them. For instance, there is a need to be loved: Maya, Monisha, Sita – almost all of them – desire this above all else, but they also resist surrender and involvement. Surrender of the self, appears to her protagonists, to be a subtraction from their personal freedom and wholeness. In each successive novel the problem of involvement versus detachment, of surrender versus freedom is viewed from various angles and psychological perspectives. It becomes, in the ultimate analysis, a question of reason versus unreason and the balance is precariously held.

Anita Desai excels her fellow women writers in portraying the psychic elements of her women protagonists successfully. The tensions and anxieties of modern society have been overlooked by most of these writers who have mainly devoted their attention to broad social features that emerge in the course of gradual metamorphosis of the old order. So intense is their devotion to the physical aspects of this change that they fail to take note of and project the psychological reality which must be allowed an upper hand in the face of the world
undergoing a rapid change with the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge and rapid progress of communication and industrialization.

Since the publication of her first novel, Anita Desai has received substantial critical acclaim. Her works have elicited five full-length studies besides quite a few articles and essays. Meena Belliappa comments upon the scope and nature of Anita’s first two novels as follows: “one finds an evidence of departure from current modes of fictional writing and of an earnest effort to break new grounds.”27 R.S. Sharma refers to her writings as “anti-fiction” and considers her as a “novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind and psyche.”28 For him, through Maya’s tragedy, the novelist weaves social fatalism into a coherent pattern to communicate the tender sensibility of a woman. Anita Desai disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that she is interested in individuals and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only where they affect the characters. Madhusudan Prasad considers her as a “grass root existentialist.”29 Jasbir Jain views that: “her works thematically, bring out the process of her psychological concerns.”30 G.P. Sharma opines that “the Karma theory running through the entire narrative of Cry, The Peacock and the depiction of woman’s plight in modern Indian society in Desai’s novels confirm the fact that modern Indian woman’s psychic turmoil reveals an era of awakening.”31
Writing about the Desai’s women characters, Dr. R.S.Pathak opines:

Anita Desai is one of those few Indian novelists in English who have tried to understand intimately the predicament of their female characters. She represents the welcome creative release of the feminine sensibility. 32

Desai is not a novelist whose predominant interests are social or sociological. She takes interest in the “inner” rather than “outer” world, preferring the psychological to that of social novels. Desai herself has written excellent psychological novels, which she describes as “purely subjective.” When she has been asked by Mr. Atma Ram a critic, in an interview about her interest in psychological novels, she makes the following statement:

It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels, thereby avoiding problems a more objective writers has to deal with since it depends upon observation rather than a private vision.33

Both Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai have written about Indian women, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India. While doing so, they have analyzed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian
women their image and the role towards themselves and the society. The changing contexts have placed these women writers in an unenviable position. Their chief contribution consists of their exploring the moral and psychic dilemmas and repercussions of their women characters along with their efforts to cope with the challenges and achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings.

These two women writers have a distinctive style in exploring the problem faced by people in general and women in particular. These writers take their characters from all walks of life but are more concerned with the woman’s life in the society. The answers given by B. Battacharya to the question why he gave importance to women in his novels reflect the choice of women writers as well:

I think the women of India have more depth more richness, than the men. The transition from the old to the new, the crisis of value adaptation strikes deeper into the lives of our women than our men folk (qtd. in Fishr 95).34

In spite of the obvious similarities that exist among the protagonists of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya, there are also contradistinctions between both the writers in depiction of them. This study also proposes to examine the similarities along with the dissimilarities. One notices that Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya
do not study human relationships only with a peripheral interest; rather they make them central to their main fictional concern.

The treatment of the theme by Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya is a three-faceted affair. A personal story slowly develops into a wider conflict in which the individual’s identity for supremacy and the social demands are involved. The personal story is used as a spring board to explore social change in India in all its complex manifestations. They seem to examine the transition from a traditional society to an urban industrial metropolitan society in its comprehensiveness.

With respect to the narrative technique, both Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai have tried to solve the problem of narrative technique by having a narrator-heroine or by employing the point of view of a female character that is either at the centre of the events, or as an observer. Kamala Markandaya’s stories are gripping and all-absorbing. They are extremely readable, and there is hardly a dull moment anywhere. By and large she is a traditionalist in her fictional technique. Her technique of narration, her art of characterization, and her plot-construction are traditional. She portrays as it is seen; there is no probing into the depths, no study of the conscious or the sub-conscious, as in a modern novel which is clearly visible in Anita Desai’s novels.
In *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala has adopted the auto-biographical mode of narration, and the chief protagonist Rukmani narrates the story of her life and suffering, beginning with her marriage with Nathan, a poor tenant-farmer, and ending with his death in the city and her own return to the village to live with her children Selvam and Ira. The narration is straightforward and chronological. There is no flash back technique - moving backward and forward in space and time as reflected in Anita Desai’s novels. In other words, it is not a modern “stream of consciousness” novel, but it follows the conventional technique of the 19th century. Hence it is easy to follow, and it does not give any strain to the readers. This is one of the reasons for its wide popularity. As Rukmani spins out her tale, the readers follow her with rapt attention. There is a sense of complete involvement in Rukmani’s suffering, and that of her husband; it is felt to be as one’s own, as the reader gets identified with the narrator due to the intensity of the narrative technique.

However, it is also noted that in her technique of narration Kamala constantly breaks new ground, and her technique differs from novel to novel. She rarely repeats herself; there are always subtle and interesting variations. In her third novel, *A Silence of Desire*, and in her fifth, *A Handful of Rice*, the autobiographical mode of narration is discarded, and the author narrates the story on her own as an omniscient writer. Both the novels are in third person narratives, and men-characters occupy the central place. In *A Silence of Desire*, only
one point of view is seen and that is Dandekar’s point of view. Whereas, in other novels, the author enters into different characters at different times and narrates the story. In *A Handful of Rice* the action is seen through a male protagonist, in a third person point of view, though to a limited extent. However, there are two sections where the author gets into another character. One is brief; where Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* describes rude behaviour of her husband, Ravi. The other is longer, where the narration of the story takes place through Nalini’s father, Apu’s eyes, as he lies in bed after his debilitating stroke.

In Anita Desai works, she projects the psychological dimension of Indian reality. The narrative is internalized, in the sense that the action is filtered through the minds of the characters. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf’s technical capacity when Desai peeps into the minds of her characters. The story, action, plot, etc. emerge straight from the characters she creates. The most striking feature of her technique is her mode of individualizing the character. Her female characters Maya, Sita, Nanda Kaul are exceptional portraits.

Desai tries to make out difference between truth and reality and she observes no discrepancy between the two terms. Anita Desai uses the technique of contrast between diversified settings, situations, characters and even between different stages of life of the same characters. Her achievement lies in recording the serious mental conflict of the characters through flash-back technique. Unlike
Kamala Markandaya neither does she use the traditional plot structure nor does she indulge in self-conscious story-telling.

The use of fantasy is another important narrative method in Desai. Desai uses fantasy in her novels as a narrative technique to reinterpret reality. Fantasy becomes a part of the total structure of her novels and is constantly present in contrast to the world of reality. In her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* the protagonist Maya clings to fantasy because she is unable to cling to reality. Her inability to link her thoughts with reality finally leads to insanity. Thus there is a constant interaction between illusion and reality in Anita Desai’s fictional world.

In her novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita uses fantasy to reinterpret reality. For instance, considering Manori as the magic island, referring to Sita’s father as a protective figure in the island like Prospero, of *The Tempest*, and finally Sita’s desire to keep the child unborn, etc. are some of the references in the novel which have an element of fantasy in them. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul and Raka have their own worlds of fantasy woven into their own perception of reality. Raka’s world of “male and female monsters” is juxtaposed with the morbid world of her parents.

Both Desai and Markandaya depict the landscapes of city and village. Desai is basically a city novelist, revealing the tensions of survival in the cosmopolitan jungles – Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi.
But she is equally adept in presenting nature like the Kasauli landscape that is the “objective correlative” for Nanda Kaul’s mental state in *Fire on the Mountain*. Similarly, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* feels dejected and isolated among the family members in the crowded city of Mumbai. A paradox of Old and New India is presented in her novels. Kamala Markandaya depicts the landscape of unknown villages and towns of Tamil Nadu. She does not give any specific name to the villages that she mentions in her novels. In *A Handful of Rice*, she gives a clear picture of youth who migrate from village to city in search of better employment opportunities. But she does not mention the name of the city to which Ravi migrated.

Mrs. Desai’s fiction is loaded with typical Indian imagery – the Kathakali dancer, the dance of the peacock, etc. The image of dust storm recurs in most of her works. For e.g., in *Cry, The Peacock* the dust storm is a symbolic gesture of Maya’s sweeping sanity which in *Fire on the Mountain* implicitly warns of the final fire. Like Anita Desai, Markandaya too uses imagery and metaphor picked from Indian environment and experience. She uses alien language to depict the idioms and imagery of Indian context. She moulds her language to harmonize the concept of her idea. For instance, she uses imagery and metaphor picked from Rukmani’s peasant environment and experience. Nathan’s sensitive nature is compared to bamboo: “Nathan is as brittle as a bamboo before it bursts into flames.”

In *A Silence of Desire*, “silence” signifies in the calm, placidity and efficiency
of Sarojini. In *A Handful of Rice*, the theme is conveyed through the repetition of keywords and imagery. Nalini’s winnowing the rice mixed with chaff and stones is symbolic of how Nalini tries to winnow out bad habits of Ravi, which are like chaff and stones in the Rice. “Rice” which is left after winnowing chaff and stones is symbolic of the best things in Ravi’s life. In her novels, imagery is linked to the earth and hence words like day, mud, brown which are used repeatedly, become a *leitmotif*. The imagery of difference of colour is used in her novels which divides the human race and is the root cause of conflict.

As for religious opinions, Desai’s view on the subject can only be deduced from her works. From her comment on the albino priest in *Cry, The Peacock*, one can detect her disapproval of dogmatic and convention-bound religion. In *Fire on the Mountain*, there are no evidences where Nanda Kaul, at the age of eighty, is seen as having faith in God. Similar is the case with Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Though she has been named after the mythological figure Sita, she is depicted as quite opposite to her in her nature; whereas in Kamala Markandaya’s novels, the characters believe in God and religion. They embody their own respective philosophies and religious beliefs to the point of being incomprehensible to the other. These characters are like rays of hope in the backdrop of stark pessimism. For example, in *A Silence of Desire*, Sarojini’s insistence on faith is symbolized by the tulasi plant that is the centre of their small courtyard, which she worships everyday. The belief in the religion is
also depicted when there is mention of images of gods and goddesses; that are pasted on the walls of Dandekar’s house. There are photographs of dead family members also on the pooja shelf of his house; Sarojini worships the photograph of her old music master alongside the tulasi plant. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani’s mother places Shiva lingam in the hands of her daughter, which symbolizes fertility, when the latter does not bear sons for several years after her marriage.

The portrayal of various facets of Indian woman’s life imparts an element of universality to the works of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya. The present study is concerned with the comparative analysis of married life of an Indian woman in the selected novels of both these writers. This study will examine the extent to which both these authors, despite their divergent attitudes, perceive the life of Indian women in India. Though all the novels of these women writers have women characters in them, only the relevant three novels which substantiate the title, *Concept of Indian Wife* have been selected for study. The psychological implications and sociological concerns of Indian woman’s life as wife make their works an interesting study for those who explore the reality of human happiness in terms of psychological truths and sociological concerns.

Since the lives of women protagonists as wives form the base for the study, the concept of the institution of marriage serves as the preamble for the same. Hence, the next chapter in addition to
discussing the importance of *Marriage* as an institution in the Indian context will examine the marriages and married Indian women characters in the selected novels of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya.
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3. Ibid., 22.


8. Ibid., 2.


17. Ibid., 23.


