

Chapter 2

Indian Women's Writing in English and Indian Middle-Class Society

In the twentieth century, women's writing is an excellent tool for feministic and modernistic statements. The present century marked the triumph of women writers depicting the world of women and frankly providing a vision into the psyche of women. In Indian English Fiction, Women's Writing has expanded into a distinctive genre reflecting Helen Cixous 'écriture féminine' that provides exclusive space to explore feminine self, identity, and experience. The writers related the idea of self in the Indian milieu to tradition, culture, family, and society. The transition in Indian community from traditional to modern reflected in middle-class domestic life also exerts its influence in Literature. This chapter examines the writers' predisposition with middle-class women and the new techniques used by writers in their works, and the evolution of Women's Writing as a distinctive genre in Indian English Fiction.

By reviewing Indian English Fiction through various phases of development, one of the significant interests of writers is the position and role of women in society and the family. Through a close analysis of Indian English Writing, the influence of Western literary forms can be identified. Indeed, Indian English Writers express ideas in English; they retain themes, images, symbols, and myths purely from Indian contexts. India is a place where diversity is celebrated, and the endeavour of a writer becomes quite challenging while handling these concepts, as mentioned earlier in their literary works. Indian English fiction's emergence corresponds to a wave of nationalism and social reform. During the pre-independence period, along with the freedom movement, the upliftment of women, too, gained much strength.

Familiar illustrations of the woman such as woman as mother and protector, woman as inspirer and cherisher, woman as the motivating primal force- 'Shakti'; protecting good and destroying evil, woman as the chaste suffering wife and woman as the charmer generally dominated the literary works of ancient Indian authors. With the advent of Indian English Fiction, these roles reversed on numerous occasions. Westernised and educated women in the earlier period of Indian Writing in English played the role of rebellious women. At the same time, the 'Sita', 'Savitri' and the 'pativrata' type allude to the Indian tradition.

The status of women in India, as represented in myth and legends, is distinct from that of the West. Women have a place of honour, and to give birth to a daughter is regarded as noble according to Indian tradition. Many of the views of anthropologists and archaeologists say that in the West, also women enjoyed a much-advanced status during ancient times when matriarchy was prominent. The medieval age was believed to be women's worst time. At that time, their lives were confined to the hearth and home and women were expected to be comfortable with procreating and upbringing children. The young and beautiful women appeared to be instruments to provide the carnal desires of the male population. Sadly, women's physical weakness owing to childbearing became a factor in their downgrading.

Women came to the forefront of political scenarios worldwide in the late nineteenth century. However, in India, the male section of society raised its voice against patriarchy. Indian social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Keshab Chander Sen, Jobita Phule, and others started new movements to improve Indian society. Miti Pandey observes that legislative reforms like Shradha Act 1929 and the Hindu Code Bill were men-sponsored and ensured further rights for women. Consequently, sufficient legal and constitutional security has been provided

to women in the Directive Principles of state by the Constitution of India. Along with reformist movements, Indian society was passing through the impact of the western feminist movements bringing a shift in the attitude and position of women in India. Many women influenced by these perceptions seek a different and just way of life, but most continue to yield to the traditional chains and customs, dreading ostracism.

The chief distinction between Western and Indian feminist movements rests in the fact that in the West, women's groups demand the betterment of the political condition of women. Nevertheless, in India, Renaissance and English-educated leaders aimed for overall social welfare and woman's emancipation. Missionaries from the West established schools, and the pre-independence period was a period of nationalist development. Mahatma Gandhi believed in the inner strength of women and worked for the advancement of their condition. While going through the history of our national movements, it becomes explicit that the menfolk of the country turned into the motivating force for many women to organise themselves and fight for their rights. Indian Renaissance, modern education, political struggle, and increasing western impact opened the eyes of Indian women who were negligent of their miserable condition. Prominent Indian leaders reinforced equal opportunity for men and women and tried to achieve it. After independence, the rights for which women had to struggle hard in the West were voluntarily granted to women in India by the constitution. Women's resurgence movements in India were moderate and not aggressive like those in the West.

India is a unique place with diverse religions with varied beliefs and conventions. Hindus, constituting the majority of the population, are cast-ridden with classes within the caste. One of the significant causes of concern in Indian society is women's role in a joint family, which demands a lot of flexibility and adjustment.

With its strong bent on tradition, women need to survive by agreeing to the demands of others. A newly married girl faces much trouble and encounters and has to face many unpleasant situations if other family members are less supportive. Women's evolution in society from the domestic setting and ignorance through education is a reality that writers cannot ignore. The early novels, both in regional and Indian English Literature, presented educated women in a favourable light, and their competencies and abilities were shown to improve through education. The writers constructed idealised characters of women who could speak English and Sanskrit, like O. Chandu Menon's *Indulehka*.

In the beginning stages of Indian English Fiction, a conventional representation of the women characters appeared. Indian women in earlier novels are illustrated as favouring the traditional framework of the family, who are obedient, and blindly acknowledged their inferior position. Writers depict women characters as docile, self-sacrificing, patient, loving, and capable of suffering. The image of a woman as 'wife' occupies a central position in most works in Indian English fiction at that time. Rajalakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit*, Mrs Karupbai Sathianandhan's *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Wife* and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* and Shivantibai M. Nikambe's *Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* and Rockey Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dreams* echoed social conditions and position of women in the family as well as in society. The early novels further determine the wife's stereotypical roles as a housewife and child-bearer. These novels picture various sufferings that a woman faces, like a husband's faithlessness or indifference, a hostile mother-in-law, problems and humiliation due to childlessness. They suffer, submit and adapt themselves to challenging circumstances

for the family's well-being. These situations in women's lives were celebrated themes in the early novels of Indian English Fiction.

Literary works produced during the pre-independence era featured images of women who blindly internalised their shadowy existence and endured suffering stoically. The women characters maintained the thought that their husbands were superior and that they must obey them and look to the husbands' comfort and satisfaction. The only alternative left for women was to suppress their aspirations or spiritualise their dreams. Such an assumption is reflected in early Indian English Writings until the first half of the twentieth century. The writers neglected women who are victims of superstition, poverty, and ignorance. However, the later writers went ahead to write novels on social motives. Indian English Fiction resulted from exposure to western literary forms like the novel. Although Indian English Fiction took a slow opening and was meant for western readers, the women characters who are authentic, powerful, and convincing appeared much later in the novels. In the early novels, both regional and Indian English fiction, women were far from reality, extremely moralised and sentimentalised. In regional languages, writers swiftly turned towards asserting women with a character and sensibility. Even then, Indian English Fiction continued giving romanticised pictures of women and failed to grapple with reality for a long time. Dr Meenakshi Mukharjee pointed out that Indian English Fiction is "twice-born fiction- the writer's experience has to go through the pains of two births to see the light of the day" (*Twice Born Fiction*). The thought was mainly because of the difficulty in giving expression and transmitting the experience in an acquired language.

The evolution of sensible women in Literature was a phenomenon of the twentieth century. It coincides with the period from the 1930s onwards in Indian

English Fiction. The neo-feminist movement in the West has inspired Indian English Writers immensely to construct a unique approach to reality dealing with the woman and her representation in Literature. The image of women in Indian English Fiction is complex and multifaceted, owing to the influence and background of our ancient Indian culture. Woman in Indian English Fiction appears to be constrained by the limited perception of early writers because most of the writers may be missionaries or the wives of British officials who had insufficient knowledge about Indian women. They were not well versed in any Indian languages and were seldom exposed to the rigid tradition and custom that did not favour an outsider to have a close glimpse of the Indian woman hidden in her home or behind the purdah. One point to be recognised is that they expressed biased, racial, and imperialistic prejudices in their representation, and very few writers could escape from this.

Indian women exposed to western culture interestingly picked up fresh ideas and concepts and incorporated them into their lives. Indian capacity for assimilation and tolerance is essential to the path to success in representing women authentically. The writers were equally persuaded by Indian tradition and European literary approaches. Indian writers found the historical romances of Walter Scott suitable for conveying their patriotism and religious and cultural views without considerable indulgence in politics. These novels did not hand over an intense portrayal of women but looked at women as an appendage of men. As a symbol of beauty, sweetness, purity, and faithful love in the days of Scott's chivalric romances, early writers of Indian English Fiction displayed women in their writings. This was the status of women in early novels of Indian English as well as regional languages. Early novels like *Padmini* by T. Ramakrishna, *The Prince of Destiny* by S. K. Gosh, and *Hindupur* by S.K. Mitra, *The Slave Girl of Agra* by R.C. Dutt, *Nur Jehan* by J'ogendra Singh,

The Unveiled Court by U' Bahadur reflected the influence of Scott and revolved around ancient glamour and glory. These works give an idealised image of an Indian woman from history and legends.

Women's appearance in Indian English Fiction from the 1930s onwards has shown radical shifts in characterisation, themes, and style. Wide varieties of representation of women can be seen after independence. In the pre-independence period, there was a lack of systematic portrayal of feminine sensibility. Arising political and social awareness in the fertile environment of the Indian Renaissance brought out open protests and marches against gender inequity, dowry deaths, rape, and exploitation of women. Women seek to be emancipated even though the male-dominated society manipulates them. The transition in women's perspective is pictured with great awareness in the novels by women writers. When associated with people with modified attitudes and perspectives, women who were educated moved forward with fresh ideas and temperaments. Indeed, women writers of the early phase stuck firmly to the traditional ideals; they preached the importance of liberation and expected other writers to follow their way. Writings of Toru Dutt, Swarna Kumari Goshal and works of women novelists like Raja Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife*, Krupabai Sattiandhan's *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Wife*, H Kaveri Bai's *Meenakshi Memoires*, Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy*, Vimal Kapur's *Life Goes On* belongs to the initial stage of women's writing in Indian English Fiction.

Subsequently, there was a change in attitude among women writers, and it was revealed in the characterisation that there is a choice either to bow to male dominance or to challenge the old ways by adopting a new path. There prevailed a conflict between tradition and modernity, family norms, and individual freedom. The marriage turned into confinement and needed to be shattered if it stood in the path of personal

with unique attitudes. An improved model of empowered womanhood emerged- a woman aware of her identity and dignity and manifesting a solid determination to resist oppression and subjugation. The characters are courageous enough to question gender norms and break the traditional boundaries that inhibit them. Another noticeable feature is the tracing out of love outside marriage. Women who feel communication vanishing from marriage sound forlorn and seek solace in extramarital relations.

The post-colonial history of Indian English Fiction offers a wide variety of novelists focussing attention on social, economic, political, religious, and spiritual issues confronted by humans. Women novelists have gone beyond male writers with bold experimentation and new approaches. They try to incorporate tabooed subject matters, depicting all categories of women- rich, poor, rural, urban, aristocratic, bourgeois, high caste, Dalits, and sex workers. Novelists after independence pictured the changing psychological realities of Indian life in a Post independent scenario, and Women novelists have faithfully illustrated it. Writers like Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Sashi Despande, Ruth Parawar Jabwalla, Nargis Datta, Sobha De, and Bharati Mukharjee outlined several women characters in real life. They showed the deep psychological nuances of educated women caught in the east-west conflict. They also expressed the oppression inflicted on women in society. A prevailing theme of their works is that our community requires massive changes to defend the suffering of women.

Awakening women's consciousness and protesting against inequities are the favourite themes that most writers deal with. The writers create tortured Indian women who endure and succeed with their inner strength and integrity. Most often postmodern Indian Women Writers explore the feminine consciousness of women

characters and their progression towards an improved conscience which leads to their enrichment. Self- introspection and self-distancing help women characters preserve their hidden inner strength. Women Writers render female characters as the ultimate redeemer: mother, wife, sister, or daughter and centre the power of sustaining a family. When women characters indulge in self-introspection and self-discovery, its consequent effects are diverse. Female characters who are hyper-sensitive after introspection may plunge deep into neurosis. The next group may suffer silently and become idealists. The third group finds gratification in revelations about themselves and the world outside. They adjust successfully to a male-dominated tradition-bound society. They establish their identity, value system, and inner potential, enabling them to resist unjust social pressure.

A woman's place, position, and chiefly her identity are significant issues in contemporary Indian English Fiction. A woman's life is divided into several roles, like daughter, wife, and mother. All these roles need adherence to certain strict norms. A woman is supposed to have no separate existence as an individual or human being. When women are educated, they became free individuals and began to think and act according to their wishes. This provides her inner strength to have a strong existence of her own other than a daughter, a wife, and a mother. Indian women gradually gained a voice to express their aspiration to be liberated. The transition from the traditional image of women to the new is a recurrent image in the writings of following novelists. The novels of Anita Desai like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, and *Clear Light of the Day* explore the theme of identity. Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Virgins*, *The Golden Honey Comb* points out woman's woes in a patriarchal society. In India, the new generation of women

seeks to assert themselves, question, and challenge what oppresses them. Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Saghal are more assertive about woman's identity and freedom than Anita Desai and Kamala Markandeya. They maintained the view that our society is in a transition phase and women are neither free nor dependent. They occupy a place somewhere between the two.

Modern women writers show an urge for identity and independence from our society. Sobha De's novels like *Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots*, and *Shadows* are perfect examples of the emergence of a new modern woman; woman coming to the forefront who questions submissiveness in a male-dominated society, where a man enjoys more privileges and women have to be content only with a few. Saghal's *Storm in Chandigarh*, *This Time of Morning*, *A Time to be Happy*, *The Day in Shadow*, and *Rich Like Us* echo this theme.

Quest for identity has developed into a prominent theme in Indian English Fiction by Women Writers. The works that deal with this theme fall into two categories; first, some women who are so much affected by tradition find an expression of their identity in losing it selflessly. Another group consists of women who revolt to assert themselves and establish their identity even though the result is unfavourable. For Women Writers, female identity and expression of their psychological dilemma serve as a way to give an expression of their individuality too.

Kamala Markandeya's female characters are torn between tradition and modernity, between the desire for emancipation and her need for nurturance, her duty as a daughter, a wife, and a mother, and her dignity as an individual being. Women characters in the works of Kamala Markandeya are victims of social and economic disparities. Even though they face many hardships, they ascend above all barriers of

discrimination. Their physical and emotional vitality is appreciable. She fully reflects the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. The women characters are from different strata of society, such as peasants, middle-class, educated women, and women from royal families. Still, they all share a common thread: the quest for self-autonomy related to her duty to her family. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, explores the life of the peasant class, the life of women of the lower class, and the effect of industrialisation and their efforts for survival. Her *Some Inner Fury* shares the life and experience of the sophisticated upper class of Indian society. This novel depicts the conflict between tradition and modernity and the uncertainties of a progressive woman. In *A Silence of Desire*, there are two types of woman characters; first, there are women who have a firm belief in tradition and suffer silently and patiently. Next is the younger generation of women who craves freedom from various social constraints. In *A Handful of Rice*, she paints the silent suffering which has no choice under traditional and morality-bound social contexts. The woman characters mirror the unprivileged women of rural India, who suffer silently both physically and emotionally without any protest. Her works like *The Coffer Dams*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Virgins*, *The Golden Honeycomb*, and *Pleasure City* deal with female characters who have an independent spirit and can change the traditional and political system. Even though her heroines are a blend of tradition and modern ideologies, they all possess the inner strength to encounter life's problems. Women as an individual with feelings and aspirations make her novels unique.

Anita Desai is an outstanding figure in Indian Women's Writing in English. She adds a new dimension to the fictional world of Indian Literature. She depicts the transformation of both rural and urban scenes and the plight of women in the post-colonial scenario. She explores the inner world and the outer life of an individual. In

her article 'The Indian Writer's Problems', she says she created her female protagonists who display some kind of character disorders that make them different from ordinary passive homemakers. Her women characters are susceptible individuals who brood over their miserable plights and would react to them violently by choosing extreme steps. Desai is conscious of the desolation of Indian middle-class women surrounded by social conservatism and forced to spend their entire lives within the four walls of family. Her works like *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, and *Voices in City* explore the life of female characters torn by alienation and frustration in a male-dominated system of marriage and society. They refused to admit their fate and were rebellious to the whole social system. She outlines Indian women as fighters, victims, heroines, and ultimately, winners because of their indomitable spirit and attitude. She portrays two extremes, a woman as the giver of life, a nurturer, and possessing powerful means of regression and destruction. Through her works, Desai suggests that there is no simple, straightforward solution to women's problems. The awakening of her consciousness gives strength to overthrow male domination.

Shashi Deshpande maintains a special place in Indian English Fiction, chiefly among Women Writers. She, as a writer, represents modern Indian women and deals with middle-class women, their conflict, and their struggle for identity. She pictures educated women and their conflict in the male-dominated socio-cultural system of India. Most of her writings resulted from her conflicting awareness about herself as an individual human being in society. Her best works include *Roots and Shadow*, *That Long Silence* (Sahitya Akademi Award), *A Matter of Time*, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *The Binding Vine*, *Come Up and Be Dead*, *Small Remedies*, and *Moving On*. Shobha De is another realistic writer in the array of Women writers in Indian English

Fiction. She emphasises the glamorous life of the upper-middle-class life of India. She boldly explores the fundamental human condition under colourful life. Her women characters were independent economically and were seldom inhibited socially. They reflected equal position with their male counterparts and were individuals with self-esteem. The women are bold, innovative, and readily accept challenges. She was aware of the displacement and marginalisation of women and worked to shatter the patriarchal hegemony and voice protest against male dominance. She sets forth a different type of woman, probes into her inner heart and analyses her emotions and passions. She provides an improved facet to woman, who protests not for equality but for the right to be acknowledged as an individual. Her works like *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Night*, *Sisters*, *Strange Obsessions*, *Sultry Days*, and *Snapshots* explore the spirit of post-modernism, redefining women's personal and domestic roles and breaking the taboos. Shobha De also examines female sexuality, which was repressed. Her women characters were frank and fair about their views on sex and celebrated sexuality. Sex is perceived as a means to build mutual dependency and love. She was critical of mechanical, loveless routine sex.

Bharati Mukharjee is a celebrated writer of the Indian Diaspora. She gives new perspectives and universal appeal to Indian Fiction. She paints a wide range of women characters who are ready to shed away the image of a traditional woman. Her women characters show a passionate desire for freedom to lead their lives without anybody's intervention. Her women characters had a steady impulse to build up fragmented life and affirm their individuality. She also concentrates on the characters' emotional, intellectual, physical, and psychological realms. Her leading works include *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Jasmine*, *Wife*, *The Holder of the World*, *Leave It to Me*, *Desirable Daughters*, and *The Tree Bride*. Even though her characters sound obedient

and meek, they simultaneously manifest courage and power to fight against life's problems.

Jhumpa Lahiri is the first Indian writer to win the Pulitzer. She is a prolific diasporic writer who picturises the plight of women who felt lonely and homesick as immigrants. Her novel *The Namesake* powerfully renders the desolation and estrangement in another culture explicitly mentioned. The writer depicts women trapped in a patriarchal setting without any help. Her women characters show a gradual hold upon their lives while asserting their individuality. Her significant works are *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, and *The Lowland*.

Arundhati Roy is a writer and political activist well known for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997. It is also one of the best-selling works by the author and is listed as one of the notable Book of the Year by The New York Times. In her novel, she deconstructs the stereotypical images of women. She confronts the accepted gendered behavioural patterns in society. In this monumental work, she sternly attacks the phallogocentric culture of Kerala. She emphasises equal positions for men and women. She believed that for women to have an equal status in society, they must transcend all the traditional barriers that make women voiceless. She depicts the changing role and position of women in our community.

Manju Kapur belongs to modern women writers who portray the process of change that continues in the current culture. She sketches women who realised their unique place and position in family and society. She throws light on women reflective of their individuality, emotional needs and urges for self-fulfilment. The female protagonists of Manju Kapur are educated and aspiring individuals. They were autonomous women who struggled between tradition and modernity. They are in

perpetual conflict with family and society to assert their individuality. Her heroines had an intense determination to break free from the shackles of male domination. Her much-acclaimed works are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Brothers*.

Gita Mehta is a much-renowned writer and critic. Her female characters are pictured with an inflated sense of strength and decisiveness in a male-dominated world. The author tries to redefine and rediscover tradition differently, which enables women to assert their individuality. Her female characters break social taboos and establish their own identity in society. She uses myths, legends, mysteries, and historical facts to reveal her feministic views and aims for women's liberation. Her influential works are *Raj*, *Karma Cola*, *River Sutra*, *Snakes and Ladders*. Sudha Murthy is a famous figure in Indian short stories and fiction. She has the credit of creating an accurate picture of the female psyche in a changing world. Women's struggle to sustain themselves independently has been successfully expressed in the works. She characterises conflicted female figures' search for identity. *Mahashweta*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, *How I Taught My Grandmother to Read*, and *Other Stories*, *Wise and Otherwise*, *The Mother I Never Knew* are her significant work. Gita Hariharan is a highly acclaimed writer, and her works include *Thousand Faces of Night* which won the Common Wealth Writers Prize, the short story collection *The Art of Dying*, and *The Ghost of Vasu Master* are her notable works.

Indian Chick Literature can be recognised as an offshoot of Indian Women's Writing. Chick literature comprises the life of a young, urban, single, and working woman. This category emerged as a new trend, especially for the young autonomous working women who are striving to identify a space for themselves in the socio-economic scene of the twenty-first century. The main plot of this type of fiction

revolves around a thirty-year-old young girl who is into a glamorous job but feels insecure in her life despite all worldly pleasures. The writers deal with the characters' singleness as a convenience that allows for self-exploration and further assimilation of the western mode of living, leading to a hybrid female identity. Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion, Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* deal with social realism and depicts the tension between the traditional image and the contemporary image of the modern woman. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices*, Meera Syal's *Life Is 'nt All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Anghiari*, Anuradha Marwah Roy's *Idol Love*, Meena Alexander's *Nampally House*, Rani Dharker's *The Virgin Syndrome*, Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season, Matrimonial Purposes*, Kavitha Daswani's *Gypsy Masala*, Preethi Nair's *A Story of Dreams*, Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Night Birds Call*, Usha K R's *A girl and a River*, Sumina Ali's *Madras on a Rainy Day*, Bapsi Sidwa's *Water* attracts much consideration in the contemporary literary scene of Indian English Fiction. They concentrate on the troubles of present-day women, notably their struggles for emancipation and liberation from the patrilineal social system.

Love and marriage are much-celebrated themes in Indian English Fiction, especially among Women Writers. Marriage in feminist writing looks problematic because it is perceived as a means of patriarchy to place women under perpetual subjugation. The conflict between tradition and modernity is a recurrent theme in most works by women authors. Writers display a variety of presumptions concerning love and marriage and the psychological, personal, and cultural factors involved in this. Anita Desai's women characters, chiefly Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, throw light on the inner depth of the female psyche and explore women caught in incompatible relationships. Amla in *Voices in the City* shows a bitter outburst because her marriage

was not out of love but a financial settlement. Anita Desai's women characters sound impassioned and possessive in their longings and frustrations. At the same time, Shashi Deshpande's protagonists seem to compromise with tradition and custom. The novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* shows the influence of family pressure in marriage. In India, brides were hardly supposed to protest when marriage decisions were made. Individual choice is the most negligible factor of consideration.

In a convention-bound society like India, women's sole aim in life is to get married, bear children and look after the family. Childbearing and rearing are considered social obligations. Many novels exalt the self-sacrificing picture of an Indian mother who lives mainly for her children and family. A mother merges her identity with the family. Her identity is closely associated with her child and is seen as her extension. She sacrifices her interests, desires, and dreams for the sake of the children and the family's healthy functioning. In every woman, there is an instinctual desire to become a mother. The bond between mother and child is much dominant in Indian English Fiction. Even though motherhood is the most prominent theme and is depicted as offering joy and sorrow, some female writers represent mothers being fed up with their roles. Feminism considers motherhood a hindrance to individual growth and empowerment and has become a controversial subject. According to female writers, it gives pain and pleasure simultaneously. They believe that a mother has to be practical in the modern world. Before bringing a new creature into this world, she has to think about its upbringing. There seems to be a change away from the conventional portrayal of motherhood in the works of modern female authors. Writers maintained that both mother and father were equally responsible for raising children; it is not the mother's obligation alone.

Till the nineteenth century, women, in general, maintained a conventionalised image in family and society. They regard it as their obligation to perform, preserve and follow the norms of tradition and custom. This tendency gradually faded away when women gained education and began to think liberally, which led to the 'New Woman' emergence. The image of the New Woman is visible in the works of women novelists and in male writers too. A woman's desire for autonomy is embodied not merely in her personal and public life but in her literary sphere too. Female writers explored the areas like feminine sensuality, menstruation, childbirth, masturbation, and lesbianism, which are neglected and considered taboo. Modern women writers feel no hesitation in opening up discussion on these areas of feminine experiences. Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* emphasised the importance of independence in women's writing and developing a style that can genuinely depict feminine experiences. There has been a progressive change in the way women were writing. They discussed sensual matters with much ease, and such assertive writing aroused opposition from everywhere. The New Woman was so because of her modern thinking, economic independence, and understanding of psychological issues. Female protagonists of Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, and Dickens can be considered predecessors of New Woman.

There is a transformation from the Victorian model of the ideal homely woman, who finds gratification in expressing tribute to man's courage and strength as seen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary works. The New Woman serves as a sharp contrast to the conventional model. Modern women are desperately yearning for freedom from hearth and home. An English feminist writer, Sarah Grand, referred to independent women who seek radical changes in society. Her works deal with the concept of the 'New Woman' in fiction and fact. In her article *The*

New Aspect of the Women Questions she explores this idea. In her novel *The Heavenly Twins*, she reclaims this assumption and questions the moral dual standard of society.

Further, the term was popularised by Henry James, who used it to describe the growth in the number of educated, independent, careerist women in Europe and the United States. According to historian Ruth Bordin, the term New Woman signifies "women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting their own. New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives, whether personal, social or economic" (Bordin). Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, Thomas Hardy, and George Moore explored female figures with an independent spirit and who were accustomed to acting on their own.

New Woman, distinguished by her physical and intellectual capacity and social freedom, has turned into favourite material for women writers. Works of Women writers like Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, Annie Sophie Cory, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird in her article "Marriage" in *Westminster Review*, George Egerton's short stories *Keynotes* and *Discords*, Ella D'Arcy, Ella Hepworth Dixon's novel *The Wing of Azrael* are pioneers of New Woman Fiction. Anna Lombard Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*, HG Wells' *Ann Veronica*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* are worth mentioning works dealing with this notion. Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing belonged to a transition phase when women tried to give up their old values and enter into a new world of their own. Doris Lessing says that her heroines belong to the new breed of women and are different from their old ones. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing develops the image of a 'free woman'. The New Woman tries to shake off the irrational traditional ties. She is represented as

more rational and better balance between reason and passion. She questions her surroundings as well as her existence.

In his article 'Daughters of decadence: the New Woman in the Victorian fin de siècle', Buzwell observes that a new air of sexual freedom surfaced in fin de siècle. "Fiction during the fin de siècle, male writers tend to cast the New Woman as either a sexual predator or an over-sensitive intellectual unable to accept her nature as a sexual being"(Gerg Buzwell). In *Jude, the Obscure*, *The Woodlanders*, and *Esther Waters*, writers emphasise the relevance of pursuing a new sensation that inevitably leads to sex, and sexuality plays a vital role in seeking new experiences. Even male writers during this period reacted against conventional standards of woman portrayal. Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* combines the theme of free love with an anti-marriage message. George Gissing's *The Odd Woman* focuses on the fate of the single woman and the incapability of patriarchal society to adopt new independent women in the public sphere. Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* serves as the best example of the representation of a New Woman as a sexual predator. Sue Bridehead, in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, who refuses to marry, incurs the wrath of society, is modelled on the concept of the New Woman.

The genesis of the New Woman is a reaction against the fallacies spread by tradition and the psychological views on femininity as described by Jung and Freud. Freud, in his discussions, argued that inferiority is an inherent quality of females. He considered women negatively and believed that women's lives were dominated by their sexual reproductive function. Another landmark in the emergence of New Woman is education. When women became educated, their degree of awareness grew, and they became more reasonable and intelligent. Education helped them to think on their own and be practical and independent. New Woman tries to question the existing

social order, which places males superior and females in a secondary position. New Woman struggles to denounce the age-old gender difference deep-rooted in patriarchy and to stand up for her privilege and rights as a human being. They focus on self-definition, spiritual satisfaction, fulfilment, and the quest for self. Modern women try to overlook the meaning and necessity of social institutions, especially marriage. They were courageous and not hesitant to have pre-marital sex, not afraid of adverse circumstances, undergo an abortion without any feeling of guilt or aspiration, and survive as unwed mothers even though they passed through terrible mental and psychological agonies.

The New Woman is also a new mother conscious of the child's emotional, psychological, mental, and physical needs. Modern women have become independent of traditional women who can easily be controlled by a father, husband, brother, and son. The tyranny of male domination occasionally leaves modern women to deny marriage. Her urge for self-expression, education, career, and independence results in her taking convenient ways of family planning. She prefers to have a limited number of children so that she can be more thriving and make the children's growth better. "The New Woman in Indian literature does not break family ties but aspires to make family a better place to live in. She is a blend of both tradition and modernity" (Sinha 85). When New Women revolt against the existing system, men cannot stand it. When a woman tries to get detached from a married relationship, men often threaten her in the children's name. However, they are less anxious about being single mothers because she is economically and intellectually resourceful and an able parent. New Woman seeks personal fulfilment in all areas of human relations like sexual, maternal, and social. As she is economically independent, she added to the family income.

There is a will to become autonomous individuals; social establishments and inhibitions no longer hinder them.

The women writers of present India are aware of females who are conscious of their emotional needs and efforts for self-fulfilment by rejecting the existing social system. "The word New Woman has come to signify the awakening of a woman into a new realisation of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the New Woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man" (Vijay 255). Modern women long for liberal and individualistic ways of life which can guarantee them satisfaction and gratification as free individuals were powerfully communicated in the works of women writers. One major factor for this change is the role of education which makes women apprehensive of their potential. This realisation made them recognise their place and position in the family and society.

Women writers in India come out as a distinct group by their uniqueness in representing diverse domestic and public sphere phases that an Indian woman passes. In Indian English Fiction, a significant portion is occupied by Women Writers. Fiction by Women Writers furnishes insights and a better understanding of various issues related to Indian Women. Women writers distinguished themselves by their bold representation of women in contemporary Indian society. The evolution of women writers paved the path for sketching the inner psyche of Indian females. As feminist literary critics firmly believe that women must create Literature of their own, feminine sensibility is of prime importance and must centre on feminine issues and experiences. As far as Indian Women's Writing is concerned, female writers are outstanding in generating a unique trend in the world of fiction that presents a space exclusively for visualising the lives of Indian women. "the result of self-introspection

varies in the second and third generation women writers. In the first group, women characters are hyper-sensitive, which plunges them into dark, dismal neurosis. In the second group, they are silent sufferers, and in the third, women discern new and important discoveries of themselves and find a sense of fulfilment in their equation with the world" (Myles 8). The feminine consciousness sought by women writers contributed to the self-discovery of the women characters, who realised their inner strength.

Women's writing in English in India and abroad presents dilemmas in women's lives from a different point of view. "In the large corpus of women novelists who have appeared in the post-independence period, wrote on multiple issues in a single work of fiction. One can find individualistic, social, economic, political, religious, spiritual, and psychological patterns, highlighting that 'plurality in India is an ideology" (Khan 34). The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed many female novelists trying to depict female characters who possess strong self-identity and often face suffering caused by broken relations. These writers reject the image of confined, submissive women and replace it with female characters trying to expand their space literally and symbolically.

Women writers in post-colonial India has created a literature of their own by placing women in changing social settings and concentrating on a woman's psyche. Indian women of today are exposed to advanced sets of values due to the progress in education. Economic independence provided them with the courage to step out of the dreadful traditional chains if necessary. The influence of western feminist movements and theories put forward by Simon De Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, and Kate Millet enabled the women writers to break away from the literary and social norms that the previous writers followed. Even though the writers like Kamala Markandeya, Anita

Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Shobha De, and Bharati Mukharjee never asserted themselves to be feminists, their writings provided an in-depth analysis of women's issues and pictures of true feminine sensibility.

This new tendency among Indian Women Novelists contributes to the progress and betterment of women's status in Indian society. As Anita Myles points out, "In a tradition-bound and conventionally conscious nation like India, any movement which focuses on the concept of women liberation or claims to champion the doctrine of the right of the fair sex, certainly amounts to a pattern of change which results in the social upheaval of immense significance" (128-129). Indian women portrayed in the recent novels are progressive and confident of their rights like their contemporary western counterparts. Still, they are conscious of their crucial role in a family they must sustain and care for. They appear not to neglect or disregard her feminine virtues and instinct for being liberated. This serves as a post-feminist aspect that presents in the works of contemporary female writers. As Seema Sunil comments, "This awakening among feminists and women writers has helped them to project in their writings the image of 'New Woman.' In such times when radical change is going on all over the country, it has become quite desirable for a woman to redefine her new role and determine parameters to become an integral part of family and society, striking a proper balance between extreme Feminism and the conventional role of subjugation and self-denial (Sunil 50).

A significant development in modern Indian English Fiction is the growth of a woman-centred approach that projects the feminine self and sensibility. The portrayal of middle-class, educated women, her quest for identity, and issues regarding parenting, marriage, sex, and exploitation in a patriarchal setup became recurrent themes in the works of contemporary writers. The writings of modern women writers'

present women's struggle to establish themselves and their efforts to attain autonomous selfhood. Female characters of these writers go through enormous strains to free themselves from the pressures of traditional and familial bonds. Feminism and feminist movements in the West affected Indian society differently. As Uma Narayan comments, "third-world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of Western agenda in one clear and simple sense. Indian feminism is a response to the issues related to Indian women". The emergence of the New Woman was an important phenomenon in Indian English Fiction. A new Indian woman has turned into the symbol of imagination, emancipation, and independence. The writers explore women owning independent selfhood and who refuse to submit before the patriarchal conventions. The woman characters were powerful enough to devise their separate path, which permits them to be self-confident and self-reliant.

In India emergence of the New Woman comprises a series of tasks. In a robust tradition-bound society, it is not an easy job to get liberated from all the social institutions, especially marriage. Early women writers hint at the rise of New Women gently. The heroines of writers belong to two categories. First, married women are wives, daughters, and mothers who wish to experience freedom and are aware of the boundaries that limit them. They cannot overcome conventional social norms and personal hesitance. Then there was another category of women characters who are career women as wage earners. They have a deep urge to be acknowledged as equals. They believe that the man-woman relationship can be healthier and more fulfilling if women are granted equal status, rights, and opportunities in life. They uphold the view that the concept of freedom must not be limited to social or economic contexts. They believed that absolute freedom could be attained only if it amounts to the emotional level, and a physical relationship must not be barely a physical act. The

post-independent period marks a welcome change in the expansion of women from being docile, domestic, and passive to reasonable, rational, and educated independent entities.

They give importance to individual longings and self-fulfilment. They delve into women's quest for self-discovery who realise their inner strength. They portray women who refuse to remain silent, demand their own space, question irrational things in tradition, and project an identity free of guilt and stigmatisation from society. In India, feminist issues are more complex than in the western world. The communal and caste-based system always creates barriers in the way of women's emancipation. What is essential for liberating women from all shackles that constrain them seems hard to attain. Presently women have moved far in their empowerment. Now there is a need to integrate all sorts of feminist discourses- philosophical, theoretical, literal, social, and cultural. Such a fusion can provide harmony among various thoughts on women's issues.

A New Woman is supposed to be adequately educated, self-reliant, financially independent, politically and self-decisive, and even have the freedom to decide if, when and to whom she wants to marry and how many children she wants to have, to show outward signs of being different by wearing more comfortable clothes and above all defy conventions and social norms to create a better world for all (Talat and Tarlochan Kaur Sandhu 138). They express that even though women who were traditional in their ways of living have a solid determination to retain their individuality. They challenge the conventional notion of 'angel in the house. "A major development in modern Indian Fiction has been the growth of a feminist or woman-centred approach, an approach which seeks to project and interpret experience from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensibility"(Gupta 43). Feminism

assumes that women experience the world differently from men and write out of their different perspective. As Patricia Meyer Spacks remarks, " there seems to be something that we might call a women's point of view... an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognisable through the centuries (4-5).

The faint foreshadowing and premonitions of Feminism become visible in Indian Fiction as early as the 1920s and 1930s. It was, however, only in the post-independence period and especially since the 1960s that Indian novelists began to question seriously and systematically and, at times, reject outrightly traditional interpretations of women's role and status in society. Ideals of womanhood imposed by men that the woman unconsciously internalised lost their sanctity and are critically evaluated. Recent novelists tend to present the suffering of women with greater self-consciousness, a more profound sense of involvement, and not occasionally, a sense of resentment.

The third generation of Women Writers in Indian English Fiction enlightened the Literature with its quality and vividness. Although the writings profoundly deal with regionalism, they cross the natural boundaries with their universal appeal. The third-generation writers concentrated on themes around sociological, diasporic elements, feminine subjects, science and technologies, explorative writings, and much more. As far as Indian Literature is concerned, it has perhaps been more manageable for these third-generation novelists to reflect on the new challenges and changes in present-day society. A significant development in modern Indian English Fiction is that it seeks to project and interpret experience from the point of feminine consciousness and sensibility. The portrayal of the predicament of middle-class, educated Indian women, their quest for identity, issues about the parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation are the hallmark of Modern

Indian writing in English. These writers represent the contemporary modern woman's struggle to define and attain autonomous selfhood.

Women writers in English have been instrumental in popularising this theme. The social and cultural change in post-independent India had forced women to be conscious of the need to define themselves, their place in society, and their surroundings. The female characters in such writings underwent great torments to free themselves from dreadful traditional constraints. The female quest for identity has been a pet theme for many Indian English women writers. They indicate the arrival of new Indian women eager to defy and rebellious against the orthodox morality of the patriarchal social system. These female characters were modern and robust and took bold decisions to survive in society. The self-effacing tone of earlier writers is replaced by the self-assertive style of the latest writers. Women writers concentrated more on middle-class families and projected the alienation and identity crisis of the characters in a male-dominated setting. Women's quest to find themselves and the strength to be emancipated while living within traditional roles of society became leading trends in contemporary women's writing.

The Middle-class covers a majority of the population worldwide, so any social change has a considerable influence. The upswing of middle-class women altered the outlook of contemporary Indian society. Most of the women writers of India are from the middle-class/ upper-middle-class and are aware of the class's sensibilities. It became easier for them to depict the real-life experience that an Indian woman passes through. The post-independence period showed an increase in the number of women writers rendering women's issues in their works. Women writers are aware of women's changing roles in the family and society. Women Writers of the modern era

depict female who is educated, free-thinking individuals with career or who possess bold personalities.

Middle-class Indian society perpetuates tradition and conventional bonds strongly. For women, escaping from these constraints seems hard. Family ties also play a significant role in making women submissive and subjugated in the patriarchal setup of Indian middle-class society. Contemporary women writers' works show middle-class Indian women's struggle to establish a space for themselves. Women's relentless fight with impediments that confine them from obtaining emancipation became a matter for the works of female writers. The women writers picture society as too concerned about its heritage and culture than any other class. To remould it as desirable for women became a revolutionary step. Women writers struggle to bring new perspectives and thoughts by reducing the influence of culture and conventions upon the life of the female individual.

In *Ancient Promises*, the central character Janaki belongs to a middle-class family settled in Delhi. Her father is an Airforce Officer, and her mother is a homemaker. The anxieties and agonies of a middle-class Malayalee family are accurately pictured in work. When Janaki's love affair is discovered, her parents' reaction towards it serves as a suitable example. For a middle-class family, when a girl is found to be in a love affair, the only possible solution in front of her family is to marry off her as early as possible. Otherwise, it will bring severe damage to the name of the family. Nobody cares about her education, life plans, and choices. She was not ready for the marriage, and her mother's reaction echoes a typical middle-class mother " I don't feel ready for marriage. I am looking forward to going to college here. Why? So that you can waste more of your father's hard-earned money pretending to go to college while roaming all around with boys?" (54). Her marriage is according to her

parent's wishes and other family members. She is forced to agree to the wedding because being tired of fighting with her family and her firm belief that her parents would not force something terrible on her. For a middle-class family, divorce and separation from the husband seem alien. The reaction of her mother and grandmother echoes the distress that every mother and grandmother faces. They both are upset about stories that other people contrived upon her. The incidents that Janaki passed through is real-life experiences that the author experienced in her life. The whole story exhibits the real situations that an individual woman in a middle-class family strives through.

The story of a girl who is destined to marry at the early age of eighteen is powerfully pictured in this work. She is married to a wealthy Malayalee business family, and she feels uneasy with her Delhi ways of living. A typical male-dominated Kerala family and culture demand too many adjustments and compromises on the part of women. Much trouble is added by a dominating mother-in-law, an uncaring escapist, and an insensitive husband. Even though she tried to be content with her family life, she became a mother of a child with special needs. The whole responsibility of raising the child fell on her shoulders. Neither her husband nor her in-laws are aware of her needs and concerns. So, when Arjun, her teenage lover, offered some days of happiness, she accepted it without hesitation and wanted an extension of those days. This shows the changed feminine sensibility towards family and marriage in middle-class women. They demand equal space for their development in a married relationship. When a relationship fails to promise their growth of self and identity, they abandon it without any guilt.

Misra's *Afterwards* tells us the story of middle-class Indian life. The protagonist, Maya, is the wife of a successful businessman from an upper-middle-

class family. She, too, is from a well-known traditional family. She leads a tragic life because of an over-suspicious and possessive husband. He tries to confine her world to the four walls of their house, which creates many problems. Maya, who prefers to be free, feels caged in their married relationship. Her strong urge to escape from it leads her to develop a relationship with Rahul Tiwari, an NRI who came to live in their neighbourhood.

Her parents undermined the problems she suffered in her life. They like to suppose that their daughter is living a joyful life. She says, "they sort a knew, they must know maybe not the full extent of his possessiveness. But what they want to see is that I live in a nice house, have a nice car, and have a husband who gives everything. They do not want to see the other side of that" (55). Without the assistance of her parents, she leads a miserable life when others assume that she is lucky to have a life without sorrow. Her parents never tried to go deep into the real problems. This is a common situation in every married life that a girl's parents are unaware of the situations their daughters face in their husband's house, and they are less cared about solving them wisely. Individuals like Maya and Janaki feel estranged and chained in these circumstances. They find out any way to escape from the deadlock. They devise their plans and are successful in executing them thoroughly. Janaki is fortunate to have parents who understand her troubles and remain firm with her.

In *Secrets and Lies*, the writer incorporates the life of India's middle-class and upper-class. The four friends, Anita, Samira Bubbles, and Zeba, are from different classes. Anita and Samira belong to the middle class, whereas Bubbles is the wife of a wealthy businessman; Binkie Raheja and Zeba lead a luxurious life of a Bollywood celebrity. Their life in London after marriage is a matter of discussion. Bubbles and

Samira are the women leading miserable marriages life. Even though Bubbles is the wife of a wealthy businessman, she has no access to his personal and business matters. She gets less acceptance in that family because she is not educated.

At the same time, Samira is well-educated, the wife of a corporate lawyer and feels unwanted by her husband. She thinks that her husband lost interest in her after their daughter's birth. After childbirth, the alterations in her body made her obese, so her husband keeps distance from her. Both Bubbles and Samira are not employed and lead a submissive life and blindly assume the traditional role of wife and mother, which middle-class society propagates as ideal. They feel afraid to react and by separating themselves from marital relations, their existence turns into a tricky question.

Moreover, Bubbles prefers to believe that she must be thankful for the luxury she enjoys, and questioning her husband seems to display ingratitude. Both of them are afraid that they cannot move forward in their life without any job after ending their marriage. These all-show women's inner struggles due to the lack of economic independence in middle-class and upper-class social settings. These women are too dependent on their husbands and devalue them as individual human beings. Samira's words remind us of their miserable state "What the hell would I do with myself and Heer? I do not even have a bloody job." (35). When they both get assurance from Zeba that they must be part of the charity group, she intends to start giving them a ray of hope. This gave them the determination to question the injustices they experienced in their family life. Without economic footing, women of any class cannot achieve a space in the family and society.

Anita is a character who possesses the virtues of a modern woman who never compromises her dreams in life. She works at the BBC, is single, and pursues her goals while longing for a perfect relationship. She secretly envies other women spending time with children. Her relationship failure and problems in her affair with Hugh show that she represented a new woman. She boldly asserts her space in every relationship and is interested in a relationship where she can expand herself. Zeba can be considered as having many postmodern features that make her unique. As she is a Bollywood queen, her preferences are beauty, glamour, and fame. She uses her beauty for her achievements which has been a part of her character since her school days.

The female characters of Anita Nair share the same colour. In *Ladies Coupe'* there are six female characters, including the narrator. They all, except Marikolanthu, belong to the middle/upper-middle class. Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanti, and Akhila are middle-class representatives; Marikolanthu is from the working class; she possesses a more assertive personality than any other lady passenger. Janaki is a typical conventional woman who considered home and family her kingdom. She happily accepts her secondary position in married life. In her old age, she realises that she is wasting her entire life being fragile. It is only at her old age that she determines to have a life of herself. Janaki and Prabha Devi have similarities in their upbringing that both of them, from their girlhood, had internalised that marriage is a woman's destiny and their parents and relatives took much care in grooming them to become perfect homemakers. Another unique feature of Indian middle-class society was more important to marriage than education, career, and woman's achievements. Prabha Devi was provided convent education to make her more fashionable and well-suited to alliances with prosperous families.

Margaret Shanti and Akhila are bold personalities with their ways of life. When matters move wrong, Margaret Shanti recaptures her life. They both have complete control over their life. Akhila is confused at some stage in her life, but she asserts her individuality in the end. Radha in *Mistress* was a rebellious woman caught in an unhappy married life. She revenges her husband's over-possessiveness by developing an extramarital affair with a foreigner who came to have an interview with her uncle Koman, a Kathakali dancer. She represents the change in the social consciousness of middle-class women who prefer love outside marriage as an escape from failed relationships.

In the works selected for study, Jaishree Misra light hearted humour underlines the importance of the matrilineal system that prevailed among the Nair community in Kerala society. That matriarchal system furnished women with more freedom to choose their lives. When Janu is hesitant to leave her home with her husband, her mother and grandmother equally oppose and advise her to return when Suresh arrives the next day. Janu critically comments on that:

Was there no room for me in Alleppey then? What had happened to Kerala's proud old, matrilineal Nair tradition? Women rule their homesteads with spirit and verve and get rid of the men who did not live up to their standards merely by leaving their slippers and umbrella outside the closed front door. These were the stories I had been told as a child about my heritage, but everyone always laughed as though these were traditions we were well rid of. The Nair Act did well to abolish all that rubbish, they said, it's taught our men to take responsibility towards their children seriously. Best to join the rest of the country and become patriarchal instead, it seems to work for everyone else (Misra, *Ancient Promises* 215).

Afterwards, also echoes a similar belief that the old matrilineal system benefitted women more, "I remember her saying once that Kerala's matrilineal system protected women so that no other society did... before remembering how cruelly it could let women down if they strayed" (6). Both these works can be regarded as the outcome of the influence of Kerala culture, tradition, and social background. She highlights that those past women enjoyed more control over their lives than in the current male-dominated social and domestic settings. These novels must be perceived in connection with prevailing Kerala culture and the traditional setup of society and family. The writers sometimes vehemently criticise the Malayalee way of life and its patriarchal, social and domestic formulations. It may be because the writer herself had passed through similar experiences like Janaki in *Ancient Promises*. The marriage, hostile in-laws, an escapist and insensitive husband, lack of companionship, over-possessiveness, and suspicion are some of the many problems a typical woman faces in Kerala society. Anita Nair's *Mistress*, too, can be read along with these works. The writer, too, was aware of similar issues in her works. The plight of Radha, her over-possessive husband and a sister-in-law who condemns her for not having children explores the tortures that a married woman in a middle-class society faces.

One of the most remarkable social changes accomplished by the upliftment of the urban middle class is the liberation of women from their traditional disposition. The effects of industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularisation had a more considerable influence on women than men. As Vijayalakshmi Seshadri comments, "With the steady increase of women's education and employment in urban India and the introduction of social and legal rights, women have acquired a new status and new role"(28). The impact of education and employment on women diversifies their experiences as an individual. It exposes them to new values which can influence their

attitudes and perspectives regarding their choices, life, and status. The current Women's Writing in English is dominated by the predicament of urban middle-class women. Both the writers and, notably, the consumers of the texts belonging to the middle class coincided with the emergence of class-oriented fiction. The female characters in the works selected for the study can be considered genuine agents of the present-day middle-class society of India.

The confessional and informal narrative style makes the writers more acceptable in the modern literary scenario. Their use of irony and humour to ridicule the existing social system is commendable. The use of multiple narrators, especially in *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress* and *Secrets and Lies*, employs a different mode of narration that deviates from the traditional way of storytelling. The use of a conversational tone develops intimacy with readers is another feature of the current literary trend. Both these writers are excellent at developing intimate communication with their readers. Moreover, the writers use subtle humour to criticise aspects of male domination existing in present-day society. Thus with new modes of narration, humour and intimate tone, the writers highlight the middle-class life of present-day Indian society powerfully.