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**ANALYSING THE FEMININE SELF: A POSTFEMINIST STUDY OF
WOMEN'S QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF
JASIHREE MISRA AND ANITA NAIR**

*Thesis submitted to University of Calicut
for the award of the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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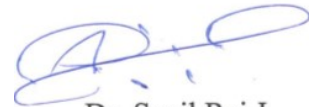
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Analysing the Feminine Self: A Postfeminist study of Women's Quest for Identity in the select novels of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair**" is a bona fide record of studies and research carried out by Hima S under my guidance and submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not been previously formed the basis of award for any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar titles. Its critical evaluation represents the independent work on the part of the candidate.

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DECLARATION

I, Hima S, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Analysing the Feminine Self: A Postfeminist study of Women’s Quest for Identity in the select novels of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair**” is an authentic record of my studies and research carried out under the guidance of Dr. Sanil Raj J, Research Guide at the Research Centre, Department of English, St. Thomas’ College (Autonomous), Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any other degree, diploma, title, fellowship or recognition.

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A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that the documentation in the thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested by MLA Handbook (9th Edition).

CONTENTS

Chapter One

Introduction	1
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Chapter Two

Indian Women's Writing in English and Indian Middle-class Society	49
---	----

Chapter Three

“Being Oneself and Pleasing Oneself”: Realising the Feminine Self	86
---	----

Chapter Four

New Masculine Sensibility, Changed Domestic Setting and Female Sexuality	150
--	-----

Chapter Five

Conclusion	184
------------	-----

Works Cited	210
--------------------	-----

Recommendations	233
------------------------	-----

Chapter 1

Introduction

Feminism and the development of women's movements transformed the perceptions of life and literature. There existed a quest for women's liberation from male oppression from time immemorial. Feminism as a literary concept tries to analyse and comprehend the conditions through which gender was constructed within languages and literature. Woman occupies a central role in the formulation of feminist theory. Adding women to literature and analysing literature in the light of feminist ideology dismantles all systems of patriarchal domination that prevailed in representing women in various literary genres. From an academic perspective, women's liberation movements raised questions regarding reading, writing, and teaching literature from a female point of view. Even though feminism originated as an activist movement to free the world's female population from male oppression and dominance, people often mistook it for an extension of the civil rights movement. Civil rights movements focussed on legislative gains and allies to end racial discrimination and fight for human rights.

On the other hand, feminist groups protest against the inequities that reigned in a male-dominated society and fight against legal, economic, and social restrictions on the fundamental rights of women. Feminism is a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that prioritised women being treated unjustly. There are efforts to overcome gender stereotyping and establish equal educational and professional opportunities for women. Feminism in the literature attempts to re-evaluate women's position within literary texts and the literary contributions of

women. Modern feminism embraces ideas of individuality, stresses the diversity of women's experiences, and redefines what it means to be a feminist.

Postfeminism can be considered an extension of feminism in a way that a postmodern society demands. This new trend tries to accomplish gender equality by promoting subjectivity and redefining notions like femininity by deconstructing discourses and stressing diversity in women's experiences. Contemporary Indian Women's Writing in English seems inclined towards this modern feminist trend. Young women writers are greatly influenced by the notions of this ideology in creating female characters. Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair, as representatives of the current literary scenario of Indian English Fiction, demand special attention. The study analyses the female characters in the select works of Jaishree Misra: *Ancient Promises, Afterwards, Secrets and Lies* and Anita Nair: *Ladies Coupe* and *Mistress* with the notion of "being oneself" and "pleasing oneself" (155) that Rosalind Gill in her article "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility" in the journal *European Journal of Cultural Studies* regards central to a postfeminist discourse. Studying these writers in the light of postfeminist ideology offers a new perspective to analyse women's writing in Indian English Fiction. The study also focuses on how the writers unfold the changing social and domestic sphere of Indian middle-class society and probe into the feminine self, identity, and realisation of self in the works.

The study focuses on the feminine 'self' and 'identity', as notions referring to these concepts seem worth mentioning. An individual's 'self' is generally referred to as one's sense of 'who I am and what I am, and 'identity' can be referred to as how one perceives and how others perceive one, 'Identity' is simply one's social face. Both these concepts are deeply interrelated and complementary to each other. The 'self' is not a thing or an entity; it is a concept, a symbolic abstraction from the developmental

process of an individual. It refers to the uniqueness that separates an individual's experience from those of all others while conferring a sense of cohesion and continuity on the disparate experience of that individual throughout their life. Erik. H. Erikson defines identity as a fundamental organising principle constantly developing throughout life. Identity involves the experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories that make up a person's subjective sense of self. This helps to create a stable self-image that remains relatively constant even when new aspects of the self are developed or strengthened over time. Identity formation involves self-sameness, which means a sense of continuity with the self in interaction with the other and uniqueness that differentiates between self and interaction with other.

The word 'identity' seems paradoxical, meaning sameness and distinctiveness and its contradiction proliferates when applied to women. In her *Reinventing Womanhood*, Carolyn Heilbrun illustrates confusion about female identity and liberation. She claims that successful women are "male-identified" but that it is a failure for "a woman to take her identity from a man." She states that women never form a self because they "need never undergo an identity crisis, yet they do not have an identity to lose. The price of wifehood is the abandonment of self (103)". The idea of self and identity has long been crucial in feminist philosophy for its vital role in questioning a woman's identity, body, and social identity. Simone de Beauvoir's declaration in *The Second Sex*, "He is the Subject; he is the Absolute- she is the Other" (301), signals the central importance of self in feminist discourses. Throughout history, women have been identified either as inferior versions of men or as direct opposites characterised by their perceived differences. Western philosophy and popular culture seemed to be derived and developed from masculine norms and values. Feminists reconsider universalising and idealising the experience of dominant,

white, heterosexual, economically advantaged men who have flourished financially and politically and dominate the arts, literature, and media. Thus, the female 'self' issues become ethical, literal, social, and political, as feminists argue. Feminist philosophical works on 'the self' have taken three main tracks: criticising the dominant modern view of the self, reclaiming feminine identities, and reconceptualising the self as dynamic and relational to individual desires and social bonds. The reconceptualisation of the self has challenged standard philosophical models and shifted the feminist discipline towards recognising selfhood.

The idea of the feminine self has always been a debated topic. Historically and traditionally, a woman's 'self' is associated with confirming the private domestic sphere. Such women's voices could be quickly neutralised, and they are often perceived as virtuous and supportive wives, vulnerable sexual partners, an empathetic and nurturing mothers. Femininity has been associated with a sentimental attachment that gives rise to compromises; thus, femininity combines nurturance, sensitivity, sweetness, supportiveness, gentleness, warmth, passivity, dependence, submissiveness, and sentimentalised and irrational aspects of 'self'.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow's explanation of personality differences between sexes has gained widespread acceptance in feminist theories. She seeks to "move beyond descriptive generalisation about sexism, patriarchy, or male supremacy to analyse how sexual asymmetry and inequality are constructed, reproduced and changed". She believes such an analysis must focus on the "social structurally induced psychological process"(32) rather than biology or intentional role training. Her insights are helpful for the study of female identity. Chodorow argues that a boy negatively defines himself as a male by differentiation from his first caretaker, the mother. He achieves autonomy as he grows, and his

Oedipus complex strengthens his separation from his mother, and he adopts the role played by his father. After that, he becomes an active, independent individual and is valued in society and family. A girl's personality takes shape differently; firstly, a girl forms her gender identity positively by becoming like her mother. Later there develops a mother-infant symbiosis, and she recreates it when she becomes a mother. As a result, women develop capacities for nurturance, dependence and empathy. Throughout women's lives, the self is defined through social relationships, fusion and merging self with others are significant, and ego and body boundaries remain flexible. "Female identity is a process, It is less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality. Writing by women engages readers in this process as the female self seeks to define itself in the experience of creating art"(57)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar found " Woman's quest for self-definition as the underlying plot of nineteenth-century writings by women". At the same time, Elaine Showalter sees self-discovery and search for identity as the central theme of Women's literature since the 1920s. The concept of female identity provides many factors through which writings by women differ from those of men. She divides feminist criticism into two distinct varieties. The first is 'feminist critique', which concerns women as consumers of male-produced literature. The Woman as Reader or Feminist Critique is 'how a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening it to the significance of its sexual codes'; historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena'; 'subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history'; 'concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience, especially in popular culture and film, and with the analysis of woman-as-sign in semiotic

systems'; 'political and polemical'; like the Old Testament looking for the errors of the past. One of the feminist critique problems is that it is male-orientated. The study on stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history do not reveal what women have felt and experienced, but only what men thought women should be. The critique also tends to naturalise women's victimisation by making it an inevitable and obsessive topic of discussion.

Showalter coined 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based on a feminine perspective. Probably the best description Showalter gives of gynocritics is in *Towards a Feminist Poetics* "In contrast to an angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (129). This does not mean that the goal of gynocritics is to erase the differences between male and female writing; gynocritics is not "on a pilgrimage to the promised land in which gender would lose its power, in which all texts would be sexless and equal, like angels" (130). Instead, gynocritics aim to understand the specificity of women's writing not as a product of sexism but as a fundamental aspect of female reality. Its prime concern is to see 'woman as a producer of textual meaning, with the historical themes, genres, and structures of literature by women. Its 'subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity. It studies linguistics and the problem of a female language in a literary text. It reviews the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career. It proposes 'to construct a female framework for analysing women's literature, to develop new

models based on women's experience'. Its study focuses on the newly visible world of female culture; 'hypotheses of a female subculture'; 'the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women.

Showalter acknowledges the difficulty of defining the unique difference in women's writing, which she says is a slippery and demanding task in *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*. She says that gynocritics may never succeed in understanding the remarkable differences in women's writing or realising a distinct female literary tradition. But, with grounding in theory and historical research, Showalter sees gynocriticism as a way to "learn something solid, enduring, and real about the relation of women to literary culture"(129). She adapts the French term 'la gynocritique' and calls it 'gynocritics' to explore more about feminist literature, which seeks an independent study of women's writing. Through gynocritics, she aims to establish a female literary tradition:

"a female framework for the analysis of women's literature". It develops new models based on the study of the female experience and replaces male-created models. It also explores the feminine struggle for identity and claims that gender is a social construct. It uncovers the female subculture and the 'internalised consciousnesses of the female. From these experiences, Showalter then begins a rough sketch of some of the elements that have characterised women's writing: awakening, suffering, unhappiness, and emetophobia, among others. She concludes with her classification of women's writing into three phases that "establishes the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman" (133).

Showalter traces the history of women's literature, suggesting that it can be divided into three phases. The Feminine phase (1840–1880); Showalter sees the first phases taking place from roughly 1840 to 1880; she calls this "the Feminine phase" and declares that it is characterised by women writing to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. The distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym, which exerts an irregular pressure on the narrative, affecting tone, diction, structure, and characterisation." The Feminist phase (1880–1920): The second, Feminist phase followed from 1880 to 1920, wherein "women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatise the ordeals of wronged womanhood. This phase was characterised by women's writing that protested against male standards and values and advocated women's rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. The Female phase (1920 onwards) is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (149). Significantly, Showalter does not offer a characteristic sign or figure for the Female phase, suggesting a welcome diversity of experience that is too broad to be encompassed in a single image.

To clearly understand the crucial political and theoretical issues of feminist criticism, it is essential to distinguish the terms 'feminist', 'female', and 'feminine'. Toril Moi defines feminism as a political position, femaleness as biology, and feminine/femininity as culturally determined characteristics. 'Feminine and 'masculine' represent social constructs, patterns of sexuality, and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms. Feminine represents nurture and female nature. Femininity can be considered a social construct. Simone de Beauvoir observes that

one isn't born a woman; one becomes one. The patriarchal social setting imposes specific social standards of femininity on all women to prove that these standards for femininity are natural constructs. A woman who does not conform to the chosen standards is considered unfeminine and unnatural. The patriarchal order makes women believe that there is such a thing as the essence of femaleness called femininity.

It becomes essential to clear the confusion regarding females and femininity. Women are female, but this does not mean they will be feminine. Under patriarchy, feminine characteristics such as sweetness, modesty, subservience, and humanity serve femininity. If feminists try to develop another set of feminine virtues, it will become part of the metaphysical binary oppositions, as Helene Cixous believes. Julia Kristeva considers femininity as marginality, which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order. Cixous' deconstruction shows femininity as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, and darkness. *The Laugh of Medusa* made her well-established as a post-structural feminist. She was the founder of the first Centre for Feminist Studies at the European University at University Paris. In her essay "The Laugh of Medusa", she coined 'écriture féminine' or women's writing. It refers to a uniquely feminine style of writing. She aimed to establish a genre that deviates from the traditional masculine style and to have a style that exposes cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and differences in language and text. Her works exert significant influence on the upcoming feminist thinkers and writers. She was influenced by the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, and the idea of binary opposition.

Kristeva, in the article co-authored by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, "Women's Time", published in *Signs*, argues that the feminist struggle must be seen

as a three-tiered phenomenon; first, dealing with women's demand for equal access to the symbolic order, like Liberal feminism focus on equality; secondly, women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference as Radical feminism, where femininity is praised enthusiastically; third women rejecting the dichotomy between masculine and feminine. Toril Moi argues that there is still a need to reclaim women's place in human society as equals, not subordinates. To emphasise the difference between male and female experiences, Moi divides Feminist criticism into two main categories. First, Female Criticism and second Feminine Theory. Female criticism focuses on women to judge whether a discourse is feminist or not and interest in woman writers aims to make women visible. Meanwhile, Feminine theory analyse the construction of femininity. Her views were prone to severe attacks and considered anti-feminist, as Moi finds Freud's works as the best illustration for this theoretical foundation.

Modern feminism seeks to update the existing feminist theory by including women outside academia and applying it to the lives of individuals. They also believe that true equality must be achieved in a gender-acknowledged environment. This stance of modern feminism initiated much criticism. Some believe that modern feminism subverts the definition of feminism by replacing the freedom to choose any life with the concept of emancipated femininity. Modern feminism faces many challenges like wage disparity, child care and health care issues, domestic and sexual violence, etc. There are numerous definitions and variations of modern feminism. In general, modern feminism questions equality and what it means to be a feminist.

The feminist of the modern era does not abandon feminist theory but holds the view that feminist theory can be applicable in many situations like women raising a family, working at a career or getting on business life, etc. Modern feminism focuses

on the notion that a united class of women (global feminism) is needed to fight oppression; at the same time; some modern feminists claim that it is a utopian concept. There is a shift towards individualism linked with freedom of choice and self-determination. Modern feminism refers to the period from the 1960s that lays the foundation for postfeminism. Postfeminism is an ideology that developed after the 1960s and a new form of feminist ideology that was popularised in the 1980s. Like poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, which means an extension of structuralism, modernism, and colonialism, postfeminism is the extension of feminism. It is different from the second and third waves and is sometimes known as the fourth wave of feminism. Postfeminism is connected chiefly with popular culture and media. It presents a genuine contrast to the ideas of second and third wave feminism.

Postfeminism was first used in 1919 in the journal *Female Literary Radicals*. The radical feminists then declared they were interested in people, not men and women. They believed that moral, social, economic, and political standards should have nothing to do with sex. It is a progressive thought without being anti-man like second and third wave feminism. The term became officially popularised in 1982 in *The New York Times Magazine*, which published an article entitled “Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation” by Susan Bolotin. This article re-introduced the term, and later, it gained much popularity. Postfeminist ideology is a new form of empowerment, individual choice, independence, consumer culture, fashion, hybridisation, humour, and sexual pleasure with a renewed focus on the female body. This theory emphasises the avoidance of depicting a woman as passive, inferior, weak, and subordinate to a man, and its primary goal is women's individualisation and assertion.

The term seems ambiguous, and it is hard to find an exact definition. Several definitions contradict each other. While adding the prefix 'post-' it acquires an extended meaning. In a nutshell, the notion behind postfeminism is that feminism has achieved its key aims, that there is complete equality for all women and a blurring of the boundaries of traditionally defined gender roles. Critics like Angela Mc Robbie, Myra Macdonald, and Sophia Phoca believe that it is a movement formulated due to the dissatisfaction with existing feminist politics, especially the second wave, because it did not consider the majority of the women population. Some critics like Susan Faludi, Tania Modelski, and Ann Brooks believe it is an anti-feminist movement, a backlash to feminist ideology. The prefix 'post' does not mean the end of feminism but is an extension that proposes a contrasting outlook to the past feminist ideologies. As it is more influenced by popular culture and is evident in the concepts that formulate the Postfeminist doctrines, Postfeminists believe that women had gained equality which was the destination of past feminist movements, so the new feminists must focus on something more. They believe that woman must use their feminine values for empowerment and not devalue traditional female roles like motherhood. They must take control over their lives and give equal importance to family and career.

Postfeminists emphasise the ideas of empowerment and liberation, even though they are considered to be anti-feminist. Sophia Phoca associates it with post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, French feminism, and post-structuralist theory. Ann Brooks argues that "it is not a question of depoliticising feminism, but of marking a conceptualised shift between the 'old' and the 'new'- from a model based on equality to debates around the revived and theorised concept of difference"(121). She says that as in a theoretical context it signifies a matured feminism in which 'post' means breaking with existing ideology. She reflects that Postfeminism is "a process of

ongoing transformation and change"(118). The term was used in the 1980s to describe a backlash against second wave feminism. It carries a label that it takes critical approaches against previous feminist discourses and challenges the ideas put forward by the second wave. Amelia Jones finds that the texts produced between the 1980s and 1990s portrayed the second wave as a monolithic entity and were overly generalised in their criticism. The term got popularised by the 1990s in academics and media and is viewed positively and negatively simultaneously. It is believed that Toril Moi originally coined the term. She was a professor at Duke University, and the term appears in her work *Sexual/Textual Politics*. There is constant confusion regarding the word 'post'. On the one hand, it announces the end of feminism; on the other hand, it has become a site for feminist politics.

Gender studies and postmodern thinking also influenced postfeminism. It gives more importance to an individual woman's experience than a collective one. It marked a return to the self and the individualist identity framing favoured by enlightenment and liberalism in popular culture. Ann Brooks suggests that there is "the conceptual shift within feminist debates around equality in postfeminism to a focus on debates around difference"(4). Postfeminism can be seen in gender studies and popular culture; it highlights individual differences and experiences and upholds the absolute feminine values, virtues, and vices that past feminists tried to deny. More focus is on femininity, so several writers, including Susan Faludi, claim it anti-feminist. In her *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, she analyses postfeminism to discredit the notion that feminism is still a valuable or relevant movement.

Ann Brooks' version of Postfeminism puts 'woman' under 'erasure'. There is a return to the 'self' favouring individual identity. Tania Modleski claims that if a

woman is put under erasure in the debates about differences, allowing men into feminism might make women disappear from feminism. Rosalind Gill comments that postfeminism can be understood as sensibility, characterising various contemporary depictions of women and feminists within popular culture. Its sensibility is not fixed or reliant on a precise understanding of the term. Instead, it emphasises the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist themes.

Postfeminism seems more associated with media and popular culture than academics. It celebrated 'girl power' and female success and promoted chick literature, glamour, and fashion. Young fashionable girls became the centre of attraction and emphasised white as the beautiful image. Self-assured and confident women are shown as having equal footing with men. Women are not portrayed as victims; they boldly proclaim their womanhood. They claim that women can also be empowered through working in the sex industry as strippers and in adult films.

Postfeminism is problematic because there is no specific definition, and everyone has their meaning and approach to it. In her book *Backlash; The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Susan Faludi severely criticises this new mode of feminism. They believe that the goal of Postfeminism is to drag society back to the days of patriarchy. There exists a debate about whether Postfeminism is the third wave or part of it. As Ann Brooks comments, it occurs mainly because 'post' means a break with the past, understood as "a process of ongoing transformation and change"(3).

Postfeminism, like other feminism, has theoretical support. Many societal factors led to the rise and development of Postfeminism. A central theoretical concept

in advancing both feminism and Postfeminism is biological determinism. According to biological determinism, biology makes the sexual division of labour. The second wave of feminism shows a harsh reaction to this concept. The second wave feminists give less concern to the biological determinism of labour. Postfeminism criticises second wave feminism for this rejection of biological differences. They give prominence to 'unique equality' and all that is feminine. It focuses on femininity to ensure power and upholds that femininity is equal to masculinity even though they are different. Another influence that can be seen is essentialism. It is similar to biological determinism that male and female identities are determined or fixed biologically, psychologically, and socially. Second wave feminism is generally considered a reaction against this biological determinism and essentialism.

Feminists of the second and third waves claim that biological determinism and essentialism are the creation of patriarchy. They believe that gender and sexual difference are historically and socially rather than biologically constructed.

Postfeminism brings back this concept but encourages and emphasises women to live in whatever manner they wish and values the importance of professional and domestic life. This is a reaction to second wave feminism which undermined women's domestic sphere. Postfeminism is also influenced by Post Structuralism, Post Modernism, and Post Colonialism. These theories rejected established truth and focused on the role of language in creating and reflecting meaning and deconstructing subjectivity. They emphasised a fragmented state and embraced diversity, and questioned fixed identity. The influence of Postcolonial theory gives voice to third-world women.

The writings of Naomi Wolf, Camille Paglia, and Kate Roiphe tremendously influence Postfeminist theory. Their writings are highly sexualised and based on the mystical power of female sexuality. They include a variety of sexual topics like rape,

prostitution, and abortion and focus on the non-victim status of women and the assertion of female power. These writers promote power feminism which is sexual and hate sexism without despising men. They acknowledge women's quest for power, money, and self-fulfilment and portray the dark side of femininity. Common themes of these writers are the rejection of victim identity and the celebration of the power of female sexuality.

As this new feminism gives importance to the power of female sexuality, it is often referred to as 'power feminism' or 'babe feminism'. 'Girl power' replaced 'girl crises' as the central theme of works produced, which gives prominence to fashion and attitude. In *Feminism and Youth Culture* Mc Robbie says:

Young women tend not to identify with patriarchy; they have the right to vote, own property, inherit fortunes, keep paychecks, buy cars, lease apartments, order credit cards, and keep jobs through pregnancy, complete with maternity leave. The Postfeminist generation of females has been raised with the idea that they could be fighter pilots, stay-at-home moms, doctors, beauticians, or businesswomen of their choosing. As such, there appears to be increasing ambivalence towards feminism as more and more women who innately agree with many 'feminist' ideals either reject the label of feminism entirely or claim feminism only to qualify then which portion is acceptable and which are not" (27).

The central issue in front of the Postfeminist aim is to create a new relevant path that describes women's life experiences and circumstances, which was omitted by the second wave of feminism.

Postfeminists believe that the victimisation of women is not an accurate representation of feminism but a white female middle-class attempt to overlook the issues like race, class, and cultural differences. Some critics argue that the reaction against victim feminism is nothing more than a white middle-class woman wanting to claim victory before the struggle is over. The 'super woman' persona is puzzled in many situations. She is considered the embodiment of femininity, and women of past decades were under its grip. Postfeminists, especially younger women, view feminism as a means to realise their desires and goals. It may include homemaking and motherhood, maybe walking out of the home to pursue a dream career. Older feminists believe that women's desires are constructed socially and culturally in a patriarchal setting. Women have different life choices, which makes them confused; where feminism dictates which options are preferable, postfeminism upholds the contradictory combination of both.

Postfeminism challenges society's views concerning gender equality. Today women are left with two messages; it is not good to be a woman, and gender equality means pretending like a man. Postfeminism defends this by acceptance of differences, differences between feminine and masculine. Previous feminist movements omitted the element of femininity and undermined the unique feminine qualities in making women equal to men. Postfeminism suggests that patriarchal differences are still there, and the increased power of women brought abandonment of many boundaries that remained historically.

Another vital factor that postfeminism stresses is femininity, which was missed in feminist movements of the past. They criticise feminist movements by pointing out that by establishing that women are equal to men, unique feminine qualities are lost from a woman. They believed that some factors in females make

them women, and some in males make them men. They believe that these factors are inherent in both sexes. Postfeminism highlights that when they become male-identified, women neglect their real identity as females. In a postmodern society with much liberation from the traditional ideals of feminism, women try to embrace womanhood's privileges and acceptable notions.

According to postfeminism, female sexuality plays a vital role in popular culture. The power of female sexuality and the female body was hidden from the past feminine movements. Modern theorist Camille Paglia asserts in *Free Woman, Free Men* that women are the more powerful gender because of their sexuality, and men are less powerful because of their unabated desire for the female body. Postfeminism dismisses traditional forms of behavioural patterns. They reject the conventional feminist concept that to be equal to men, it is necessary to be male-like and, simultaneously, forced to embrace submissiveness and repress their sexuality. As a result, society was full of unhappy women who could not adjust to their imposed dual roles. They view the female body as a sex symbol and an object of male desire. They use this notion to protest against male domination. In Postfeminism, there is a reaction against the prudish views of older feminists on sexual desires. Postfeminism encourages free love and casual sex. Later it is found to be a betrayal of truth and intimacy in relationships.

In her book *'Life So Far'*, Betty Friedan brings out a solution; she says that feminist movements had popularised women's liberation, lesbianism, and man-hating. She says the women's movement should pay attention to the real issues of equal employment opportunities, education, autonomy, and child care. Giving too much importance to sexuality may divert attention from women's real problems. Postfeminism focuses on equality for women in the public sphere and rejects the

sexual politics of past feminist movements. It underlines the importance of marriage, men, and family, which was devalued in the past.

In postfeminism, attention is given to an individual woman, choices, and freedom. It tries to view family/ marriage as necessary as a workplace. It is a criticism against postfeminism that they give much importance to the traditional role of nurturer that a woman plays in a family. It tries to bring out the change in the position of men. The writers portray more domestically conscious husbands who spend more time cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and sharing household duties with their families. There is increased participation of men in household duties. It is mainly because women with careers feel burdened by household duties compared to men. So, to run a balanced family, men, too, are compelled to share tasks and responsibilities. Some fathers parent at home full-time, and postfeminism emphasises the need for fathers and the role of men in fathering and raising a child. They held up the view on the necessity of fathers in the family and their contribution the emotional, intellectual and social growth. Postfeminism gives equal importance to fatherhood and motherhood, which the feminist movement, especially the second wave, considered unimportant.

The mother's role and motherhood have always been debated subjects in feminism. Second wave feminism tries to belittle mothering and other feminine virtues. However, postfeminism tries to highlight the role of the mother in family, childcare and nurturing. At the same time focuses on workplace and job issues faced by a woman. Previous feminist movements held a negative view of child care and mothering and ignored motherhood and genuine motherhood-related experiences. Those feminists believed there is no pleasure in raising children; time spent on it is a burden to women. Postfeminism focuses more on an individual woman's experience

and includes her experiences, delight, distress, and confusion of various life experiences that a woman passes. They elicit a multi-faceted view of motherhood and its significance. It is regarded as a means to identify a woman's self. They highlight the experience of everyday mothering experience of women and include both working and non-working mothers.

Postfeminism stresses diversity among woman's experiences as an individual experience is diverse. It is concerned with women's equality, freedom of expression, sexuality, and power and discusses differences rather than sameness. They discard the idea of uniformity of women's experiences. It also deconstructs the binary categorisation of gender and sexuality. Postfeminism intermingles feminine virtues, femininity, and achievements of second wave feminism like career opportunities and other rights. The centre of concern is shifted from women to human beings or an individual. So varied experiences and orientations get more attention into feminine discourse.

In her book *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela Mc Robbie analyses the evolution of Postfeminism with popular culture. She says that in the 1970s and 1980s, something unexpected happened. Postfeminism is a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment that is different from simply being a question of backlash against the seeming gains made by feminist activities and campaigns in an earlier period. She discusses that two terms gained popularity: empowerment and choice. These elements of feminism are converted into more individualistic discourse. McRobbie criticises that "feminism has intervened to constrain these kinds of conventional desires. But it is surely a relief to escape these censorious politics and freely enjoy what has been disapproved of"(20). These types of thoughts seem evident in new forms of expressions related to media and popular culture. It is a kind of substitute for

feminism. She considers that the contemporary feminist movement harshly undermined feminist gains. She shares Susan Faludi's backlash thesis and considers it an anti-feminist. She says feminism is cast into the shadows.

Even though she observes it as an anti-feminist, she tries to view the change positively. She brings out some popular films and newspaper columns that gained much readership. The newspaper *Independent* has a column in the UK, 'Bridget Jones's Diary' and its film version, which is a worldwide success. It is modelled on a modern woman Bridget, living and working in London in her thirties. She is accessible, single, and childless, enjoying her life in pubs, bars, and restaurants. She is educated and earned to be independent without shame and danger. However, there are many anxieties that she passes through, like fear of loneliness and uncertainties, and she is constantly in search of the right partner. She thinks and fears that she will not be successful in finding the right man and getting married. Though Bridget represents a modern free woman, she fantasises about traditional happiness and fulfilment forms.

Next, she points out female characters in the television show *Sex and the City*, *Ally Mc Beal*, and female images in Woman's magazines. She claims that:

These young women are confident enough to declare their anxieties about possible failure regarding finding a husband, they avoid any aggressive or overtly traditional man, and they brazenly enjoy their sexuality without fear of sexual double standard. In addition, they are more than capable of earning their living, and the degree of suffering or shame they anticipate in the absence of finding a husband is countered by sexual self-confidence (21).

There is a strong sense of reclaiming their femininity. This new woman wants to be girlish and enjoy traditional feminine pleasures without any guilt. McRobbie

highlights that feminism has taken away woman's unique pleasures like romances, gossip, and concern regarding how to catch a husband.

According to Judith Butler, Postfeminism is described as 'double entanglement'. It is the co-existence of neo-conservative values concerning gender, sexuality, and family life. McRobbie says that feminism is dismantling itself; due to the impact of double entanglement with popular culture and political culture, it becomes necessary to dismantle itself. Influence of Foucault and postcolonial feminists like Spivak, Trinh, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and other feminists like Judith Butler, and Harroway, there is a shift away from feminists' interests in centralised power blocks like state, patriarchy and law. The body and the subject came to represent a focal point for feminist interest, nowhere more so than in the work of Butler. The concept of subjectivity and how cultural forms and interpellations (or dominant social processes) call women into producing themes and subjects while ostensibly merely describing them as such inevitably means that it is a problematic 'she' rather than an unproblematic 'we' which is indicative of a turn to what we might describe as the new feminist politics of the body.

Feminist cultural studies in the early 1990s mark a moment of feminist reflexivity. Charlotte Brunsdon, in her article "*Pedagogies of Feminine*", enquires about the use-value of feminist media scholarship of the binary opposition between femininity and feminism. Between a 'housewife' and an 'ordinary woman, who is now the focus of feminism. 1990 was also a moment at which popular feminism found expression. Andrea Stuart observes that the broader circulation of women's magazines and their popularity had a central point in forming women's movements against domestic violence, equal pay, and workplace harassment gained a vast readership. The influence of women's magazines and popular culture gives importance to the idea

of feminist success. There has been a gradual change in the depiction of women in mass media and magazines. It gives rise to successful female figures with a brief tide of optimism.

Female individualisation is another crucial feature of postfeminism.

Individuals must choose the kind of life they want to live. New feminism insists that girls must have a life plan. They must become more reflexive regarding every aspect of life, like making the right choice. New popular culture has a significant influence on postfeminism and new girls. It imbued the celebration of pro-western values like career, success, glamour, and sexuality. Postfeminism emphasises the centrality of family, the importance of family values, and the celebration of female power in the household. Postfeminism claims that early feminists were too anti-man, pro-lesbian, and far too anti-family and delineated ordinary women. Postfeminism says that early feminist movements isolated women from family life and cut them off from the pleasures of having children and from the meaningful community which emerges around motherhood. Popular culture, including women's magazines, the fashion and beauty industry, women's genre films, and television programs, comes forward with a new model. Women began to move out of the shadows to the spotlight of visibility. The focus is on female individuality and subjectivity.

A new form of gender power is established and offers women a specific form of freedom and a particular idea of importance. Women began to move away from being hidden and unimportant. They become observable with a new sense of self-importance. Another vital characteristic of postfeminism is gender mainstreaming. It is a unique, modernised form of feminist practice. They highlight true femininity in women, whether it is good or bad. Feminism was once rather rowdy and activist (or at least this is the inference that can be drawn). It has matured and embraced human

rights discourse. Human rights discourse has fully incorporated women's demand for equality not in the individualist sense but also includes women's collective, economic, and social rights. She claims that there are many opportunities for a new feminist movement to emerge. Women can be said to undertake a shift from the domestic sphere to the public realm. There is restructuring, reinventing, and rebranding of feminism by promoting gender equality and also ensuring that existing social policies are made effective by being expected to address gender issues.

McRobbie analyses how popular culture dismantles feminist gains. Popular culture is a space where feminism is 'undone'. One way of undoing feminism is picturing it as a rigid and frightening movement in the historical past. Another method is spreading a belief that young women and society no longer need feminism as equality is already achieved. She never claims that feminism has disappeared. She finds that Women's magazines follow popular trends, and there is a co-existence of feminism and anti-feminism. She asserts that the media has played a vital role in defining gender roles. She examines that postfeminist ideology proposes that women are free to compete in academics and the economy without restriction; the individual's merit is of prime concern.

Postfeminist ideology is an exchange process where women gain symbolic equality as they do not work for full political or meaningful equality. She says that consumer culture influences every walk of life in the modern world. Consumer culture celebrates female power and femininity. Next, she comments on accepting pornographic images in our mainstream culture. She says young women fail to condemn the normalisation of pornography. Besides, they are encouraged to show their sexual freedom as a means of empowerment by attending lap dances and pole dancing classes. She says now that women occupy many social institutions and high-

profile positions. This shows successful female figures are an essential part of postfeminism. She attempts to criticise postfeminism for giving less space to low-income, rural, and women of colour in popular culture. She says that postfeminism surrounds white middle-class youth culture.

Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* severely criticises postfeminism and contemporary popular culture and media trends. She argues that popular culture and media attempt to spread the general concept that women's liberation movements have caused many problems for women. As women have gained equality, feminism is irrelevant in the modern world. She says that women are not yet equal, and there is a counter-attack to reverse the hard-won gains of feminist movements. Our media encourages women to reject increases and struggle for genuine equality. She comments, "Postfeminist sentiments first surfaced, not in the 1980s media, but in the 1920s press. Under this barrage, membership in feminist organisations seemed problematic, and the remaining women group hastened to denounce the Equal Rights Amendment or simply converted themselves to social clubs. 'Ex feminists' began issuing their confessions" (70). There are several myths that the media produces, including fewer potential spouses for women, new divorce laws negatively affecting women's financial and professional life, women being infertile and having more mental illnesses, and daycare having permanent adverse effects on children academically, socially and emotionally.

Next, Faludi describes the effects of popular culture on feminism and examines the Hollywood portrayal of women in the 1980s. Media depict changing roles of women focusing on the fashion and cosmetic industries and promoting cosmetic surgeries. She describes recent trends in popular culture like cocooning, the new abstinence, the new feminist morality, and celibacy. She also comments on the

Hollywood screen and depiction of independent single career women. Faludi severely criticises popular television shows which arouse anti-feminist sentiment by depicting good female characters as angelic at-home moms and careerist females who lack warmth and submissiveness. She is against media whose misrepresentations of facts without examining the statistical data on women choosing home life over career, spread that women were unhappy with feminist movements. She argues that the media presents single women as defective while single men are more mature in making decisions. She claims that these myths spread by the media devalue the achieved liberties of feminist movements. She believes women's unhappiness arises because their struggle for equality is not finished. Faludi observes that the role of media was significant in framing a popular and negative understanding of postfeminism. Their views were blindly shared by some feminists who critically evaluated the potential of postfeminism with the 'backlash model.'

Another essential work related to this new trend is *Postfeminisms; Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms* by Ann Brooks. According to her, Postfeminism " facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminisms and colonised cultures for non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and postcolonial feminisms."(4). She has a positive attitude toward this new trend and analysed it through cultural studies. She tried to view Postfeminism in connection with Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Feminism, and the Psychoanalytical theories of Foucault. She also examines the influence of popular culture and representations in media, film theory, sexuality, subjectivity, and identity in her works and how Postmodern feminists engage with these notions. Ann Brooks believes there is no depoliticising of feminism but a conceptual shift between the 'old' and 'new'. "Postfeminism can be understood as critically engaging with patriarchy and

Postmodernism as similarly engaged with principles of modernism" (5). A model based on equality and theorised concept of difference. To her, "Post-feminism is understood as a useful conceptualised frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with several other anti-foundational movements including Post Modernism, Poststructuralism and Post Colonialism" (7). She emphasises the individualist framing of identity and returns to the self.

Rosalind Claire Gill, a British sociologist and feminist cultural theorist, published various articles concerning postfeminism, popular culture, and its influence on media and individuals' lives. Her primary work *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neo-liberalism, and Subjectivity*, examine the changes in depicting female experiences and representation in the twenty-first century. It also looks at the depiction of feminine sensibility in media, which paved the way for new female subjectivity. This book provides insight into understanding representations of gender in contemporary media and popular culture.

A literary genre developed by the influence of Postfeminist ideology is Chick Literature/ Chick Lit. It is a genre of fiction with heroine-centred narratives that focus on the trials and tribulations of an individual protagonist. It addresses the issues of modern-world womanhood, like romantic relationships and female friendship circles in the workplace, in humorous and light-hearted ways. The protagonist is always a single, white, heterosexual British or American woman living in the city in her late twenties or early thirties. This genre became popular in the late 1990s by publishing Catherine Allcott's *The Old Girl Network*, which is considered the pioneer of this style of fiction. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a famous work in this genre. This type of literature features a female heroine and the protagonist's womanhood, which is the plot's primary concern. Heroine's relationship with her family or friends

is as meaningful as her romantic relations. Recent trends highly influence chick literature in feminism, like postfeminism and celebrating female sexuality, fashion, and beauty.

Postfeminism includes several characterisations. It emphasises the varied ways women experience power, interact with the existing power structure, and open up a diversity of options for female experiences. It also looks at and approaches differently the inequalities that women face. An essential feature of postfeminism is about defining equality differently. They hold the view that equality should not be based on gender. It reduces human potential, and differences must be based on human elements of thought, intellect, emotion, and expression. Women shall be equal to men without looking similar to men. Quest for power becomes a common theme in many works. There is a celebration of girl power and sexuality as a means to exert influence. Postfeminism recaptured the notions like marriage, love, family modesty, and femininity which were taken over by the feminist movements and blended these feminine virtues with achievements of career opportunities and legal rights that the second and third waves provided. More focus is on what a true woman desires as a human being; there is a shift from "woman-focused" to human-focused". They aim to recognise, respect, and blend these differences in desires and interests in feminine discourse.

There are contradictions among feminists and critics that postfeminism is a support or an anti-feminist phenomenon. In the eyes of many feminists, it is a concept that has become popularised by the media. This diminishes the progress that feminism attained and creates a new capitalist social system that compels women to buy things to become more feminine. The backlash nature of this ideology is an attempt by the media to discredit the goals of feminism, and a large group of feminists argue that

postfeminism is anti-feminism. It is seen as equated with the backlash movement in the notion of differences in viewing men and women are fundamentally different, it is regarded anti-feministic because it gives importance to motherhood and the innate nurturing desires of a woman and promotes the role of women in the home.

Postfeminism is regarded as an amalgamation of feminism and anti-feminism, providing more possibilities and scope for women and women's movements.

Postfeminism, in essence, is believed to be a collective ideology that uses gender equality in a variety of manners, including an emphasis on individual behaviour and diversity, a rejection of victimhood and other perceived feminist shortcomings, and an embrace of femininity and previously discarded feminist interests.

Postfeminism has become a popular trend over recent years, even though once seen as 'anti-feminist'. It claims feminism's 'coming of age as Yeatman claims, "It presents a confident body of theory and politics, represents pluralism and difference and reflecting on its position about other philosophical and political movements similarly demanding change". When understanding some central issues, the relationship between postfeminism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism is debated. The concept 'of' 'ost' is common to all these discourses and has become a subject of misconception while interpreting the terms. Like postcolonialism and postmodernism, postfeminism is often used to indicate a complete break from the previous theoretical foundation and emphasis a new range of temporal, political, and cultural relations. The use of 'post' becomes highly problematic sometimes as post-colonialism can be marked as a critical engagement with colonialism, not to claim that colonialism has been overturned. In the same sense, postfeminism can be understood as critically engaging with patriarchy. It occupies a critical position regarding the earlier feminist framework while critically engaging with patriarchal and imperialist discourses.

Doing so challenges the hegemonic assumption that second wave feminist epistemologies hold that patriarchal and imperialist oppression are universally experienced pressure.

The concept of postfeminism seems hard mainly for two reasons. First is the widespread conception of the term, which resulted from the media's appropriation, and second is the uneven development of the concept as a movement expressing change. Alice L. claims, " Postfeminism(usually written as Post-feminism) was coined in the period between the achievement of women's suffrage in the US and the rise of second-wave feminism during the 1960s. It denoted the successful outcome of struggles by women for the right to vote, hold public office and the choice to occupy many more personal spheres" (*What is Postfeminism? Or Having it Both Ways* 7). The conceptual reference points of postfeminism are focussed on the issues of women's rights and equal opportunities and, thus, as a white western middle class, mainly of the northern hemispherical conception of feminism. Therefore in postfeminism, there is a shift from debates around equality to focus on discussions around difference. It has been accepted as a powerful successor to second and third wave feminism. It represents diversity in concepts and theoretical frameworks. It encloses a wide range of diverse political and philosophical movements. It has emerged as a result of critiques from within and outside feminism.

The paradigm shift from feminism to postfeminism can be seen differently. First is the challenges posed by postfeminism to feminism's epistemological foundationalism; second is its growth away from specific disciplinary boundaries; third is postfeminism's refusal to be limited by representational constraints. Several scholarly articles on Postfeminism and popular culture discuss the emergence of a

new type of feminine sensibility over recent years. These studies present a Postfeministic view regarding media, literature, and society.

An article by Marjorie Jolles titled "Going Rogue: Postfeminism and The privilege of Breaking Rules" published in *Feminist Formations*, and Shelley Budgeon and Dawn Currie in the article "From Feminism to Postfeminism: Women's Liberation in Fashion Magazines" published in *Women's Studies International Forum*, analyses the essential notions discussed in Postfeminism like successful femininity, self-invention, and self-regulation. It also analyses how the postfeminist ideology requires its subject to fulfil these crucial features by following and breaking the rules. The article argues that celebrating rule-breaking to identify successful femininity leads to inaccurate and dangerous notions regarding womanhood. In "Postfeminism, Popular Culture, and Neoliberal Feminism", the article by three authors Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg, in *SAGE Journals*, discusses these terms. The article is in a conversational pattern. Their reviews and perspectives regarding the terms are presented. They also debate over the impact of media and capitalism on these theories. They are concerned about Postfeminist notions of life, Girl Power, Successful Femininity, and Postfeminist Sensibility. Rosalind Gill's article titled "The affective, Cultural and Psychic life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 years On" in *SAGE Journals* examines the notions of Postfeminism ten years after its formation. She discusses it as a critical term as a part of feminist scholarship. She also focuses on current features of the theory as a sensibility. This article studies the hold of this ideology upon contemporary life as a powerful means of neo-liberalism. It stresses that the experience of white middle-class women is a belief popularised by the media. Popular culture and Postfeminism are very much influenced by capitalism, which created an environment for developing a

new form of a social system based on consumerism; when women begin to earn and come to the forefront of society and become economically independent, the way for upliftment of middle-class women.

Postfeminism is both a response and an extension of modern feminism. Postfeminism and third wave are considered contemporary movements or even regarded as identical. It is viewed as a wild extension of the third wave, seeking new insights into feminism. Postfeminism is a response to the homogenised, white middle-class feminist movement. It is an expression of younger women for more freedom of feminist expression and individual expression. Postfeminist sensibility comprises the notion that femininity is a physical property; there is a shift from objectification to subjectification, emphasising self-surveillance, self-discipline, and focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment.

Through her concept of 'Female Individualisation', Angela Mc Robbie stresses how individuals with self-monitoring tendencies prevail in this current phase:

The earlier period of modernisation (first modernity) created a welfare state and a set of institution(education) which allowed people in the second modernity to become more independent and able, for example: to earn their living. Young women are, as a result, now dis-embedded from communities where gender roles were fixed. And as these old social structures of social class fade away, and lose their grip in the context of the late or second modernity, individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their structures. Individuals must now choose the kind of life they want to live. Girls must have a life plan. They must become more reflexive regarding choice in

marriage, taking responsibility for their own working lives and not being dependent on a job. (25)

Mc Robbie illustrates *Bridget Jones's Diary* to speak about the notion of female individualisation:

Bridget Jones's Diary speaks then to female desire, and in a wholly commercialised way to the desire for some kind of gender justice, or fairness, in the world of sex and relationships. Here too, the ghost of feminism is hovering. Bridget desires to get what she wants. The audience is wholly on her side. She ought to be able to find the right man for the reason that she has negotiated the tricky path which requires being independent, earning her living, standing up for herself against demeaning comments, remaining funny and good-humoured throughout without being angry or too critical of men, without foregoing her femininity, her desires for love and motherhood, her sense of humour and her appealing vulnerability. (27).

Rosalind Gill suggests that notions of choice, "being oneself, " and "pleasing oneself" (155) are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary Western media culture. They resonate powerfully with the emphasis on empowerment and taking control that can be seen in talk shows, advertising, and makeover shows. One aspect of this postfeminist sensibility in media culture is the almost total evacuation of politics or cultural influence notions. This is seen not only in the relentless personalising tendencies of news, talk shows, and reality TV programmes but also in how every aspect of life is refracted through personal choice and self-determination. To a much greater extent than men, women must work on and transform the self, regulate every aspect of their conduct, and present all their actions as freely chosen.

Despite the criticism, third-wave participants admit there is an overlap between postfeminism and third-wave feminism since both consider second-wave feminism old-fashioned and suffocating. They situate themselves within popular culture and mention contradiction, diversity, personal and sexual pleasure, lifestyle, and individualism. But whereas postfeminism is conservative and explicitly against second-wave feminism, third-wave feminism is constructively built on second-wave's accomplishments. Postfeminism is part of the third wave because it participates in the discourses of capitalism and neo-liberalism, where women are asked to focus on their private and consumer lives as a self-expression.

Women's writing is considered a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Today most female writers are known for their strong views, and their works are a sign of protest or an outburst against the injustices they face.

Elizabeth Jackson comments:

The concept of feminism has been controversial in India and other developing nations for many reasons. On the one hand, traditionalists argue that it alienates women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities. At the same time, some on the left see it as a diversion from the more important class struggle or the struggle against the western cultural and economic imperialism (3).

The emphasis on family and community in Indian society has important implications for feminism in India. Feminism in Indian Literature, mainly Indian English, is a by-product of the influence of Western Feminist movements. The Indian women caught in the chains of tradition and modernity are favourite subjects for female writers of all ages. Their search for identity and quest to define themselves became significant

concerns among female writers. Women novelists of the modern period voice emergence of a new type of woman in Indian society who is educated and desires a rightful place, recognition, and respect due to her inner urge to make her existence meaningful.

Contemporary Women's Writing in India progresses with various experiences and powerful depictions of real-life Indian women. Their novels deal with burning issues that exist in our society. The changed women of the modern era and their experiences are very well explored by the new-age female writers of Indian English Fiction. The writers are recognised for their originality and indigenous portrayal of Indian female subjectivity. They have balanced the complex issues without degrading tradition, even though some of their characters prefer breaking traditional codes and customs. Modern writers celebrate true womanhood and aspirations in their works, the values, the qualities of women, and their role in society. Their works address issues of women as individuals more than women in general.

Struggle to establish one's identity, assert one's individuality, and women's efforts to exist as a separate entity appear to be powerfully depicted in the works of Women Writers. Modern women writers strongly show the real life of Indian middle-class women. The thesis is intended to analyse Jaishree Misra's and Anita Nair's works as representatives of modern women writers of Indian English Fiction in the light of postfeminism. The study examines the female characters with the notion of 'being oneself' and 'pleasing oneself', which becomes the central concept in a postfeminist discourse. There are numerous other studies regarding the works of these writers. A postfeminist analysis of these two authors and their works is something new. Even though the writers do not claim to be feminists, the influence of feminist movements and popular culture can be seen in the works they produce.

Anita Nair and Jaishree Misra, the authors selected for the study, belong to the modern women writers of Indian English Fiction. Both writers depict Indian society and its every aspect. Their primary concerns are women's role in the family and community. They harshly criticise the traditional marriage system, which gives less importance to individual choice and freedom. Jaishree Misra, in her works, vehemently attacks the patriarchal Kerala society, which privileges men more than women. She tries to open up the futility of arranged marriages in the lives of individuals. She also expresses strongly that the Indian/ Kerala family system gives less space for the self-development of female individuals. The works selected for the study exhibit women characters who are rebellious in the present social system and take hold of their lives to attain self-fulfilment. Anita Nair's heroines also struggle with conventions that prevent women from achieving true emancipation. She contrasts old-generation traditional women with modern, confident, free-thinking women who courageously assert their individuality. These writers delineate a new type of woman, powerful enough to rewrite their life as they desired. The female protagonists show a strong drive to escape the constraints of unhappy marriages, patriarchal society, and familial bonds that stand in the way of attaining self-fulfilment.

These writers are influenced by their Keralite surroundings, and their writings echo it. Jaishree Misra is the great-niece of famous Malayalam writer and Janapith Awardee Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. Her writings, especially her first novel *Ancient Promises*, is set in Alleppy, where she used to visit her vacations and where her grandparents lived. It is also a place that is connected to her happy childhood days. It is a semi-autobiographical work too. This novel is her life story, about a mother's efforts with a special-needs child. In this novel, she depicts the patriarchal society of

Kerala, insensitive and uncaring in-laws, and a husband. He gives the least importance to her feelings, emotions, and desires as a human being. The central character is Janaki (Janu), her efforts to escape from a married life from which she has nothing to expect. Her struggles to have a life that makes her daughter comfortable pave the way to her self-fulfilment. Her subsequent work, *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, is a novel that ridicules Indian society, customs, and arranged marriages. Next is *Afterwards*, the story of Maya, a beautiful woman caught in an unhappy marriage. To her, married life seems like a cage because her husband is always suspicious of her. With the help of Rahul Tiwari, a foreigner, she escapes to London. Her fourth novel *Rani* is a historical fiction based on the life of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. In 2009 she signed a three-book deal with Harper Collins UK, and the first one of the series is *Secrets and Sins*. Next is *Secrets and Lies*, which appeared on the Heat seekers list in Britain's Bookseller Magazines' bestseller list. The third one is *A Scandalous Secret* which was published in 2011. Her eighth novel, *A Love Story for My Sister*, explores Stockholm syndrome, and her ninth book, *A House for Mr Misra*, is nonfiction, a memoir of the life she spent in Kerala with her husband while trying to build a studio on the beach. She paints an amusing picture of the present-day life of Kerala. Jaishree Misra worked for several years in the Child Care Department of Social Services in Buckinghamshire. Recently, she works as a film classifier at the British Board of Film Classification in London. She is regular in literary festivals in India as well as abroad.

Anita Nair, too, in her works, explored Malayalee life and culture. Her first work is a collection of short stories titled *Satyr of the Subway*, which won her a fellowship from the Virginia Centre for Creative Arts. Her novel *The Better Man and Ladies Coupe'* has a wide readership and was translated into twenty-one languages.

Ladies Coupe' is about women's condition in a male-dominated society. It is the journey of a woman to liberation and self-fulfilment. It explores the theme that even though women are from different strata of society, they are united by a common problem: male domination and oppression. Her other remarkable work is *Mistress*, which explores a story from three perspectives. The story is told from the viewpoint of Radha, her husband Shyam, and her uncle Koman, a Kathakali artist. She had written poems in anthologies like *The Dance of the Peacock: An Anthology of English Poetry from India*, featuring 151 Indian English poets. Her other works are *The Puffin Book of Myths and Legends*; she had edited *Where the Rain is Born*. Other prominent works include *Malabar Mind*, *Lessons in Forgetting*, *Cut Like Wound*, *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, which is a historical and geographical work about a Somalian trader who visited Malabar in 1659 AD, *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*, *Adventures of Nonu: The Skating Squirrel*, *Living Next Door to Alise*, *Magical Indian Myths* and she had written a play which was adapted from her novel *Mistress* named *Nine Faces of Being*. Her recent work is *Eating Wasps*. She won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her contribution to literature and culture in 2012 and other literary achievements.

There are various studies regarding Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair's works as a representative of contemporary writers dealing with day-to-day problems faced by women in Indian society. Most of the studies are concerned with depicting female protagonists as a tool to express the changed outlook of Indian Women and a change in the social and domestic setting of Indian middle-class society. The writer stresses bringing back the matrilineal system that the Nair community practised. The studies discuss why she pictures Kerala women as powerful and adaptive in her works. Giving back women the power to choose their life make them genuinely emancipated. In the article "Re-assessing the Kerala Model Woman in Fiction: An Interview with

Jaishree Misra" by Maya Vinai and Jayshree Hazarika, Jaishree Misra expresses her view regarding Kerala Society and its patriarchal setup. The novels are understood as an indicator of subjugation in the patriarchal culture of Kerala Society. The writer goes deep into the characters Janaki and Maya. Their plight in a typical Malayalee family is depicted powerfully. Their struggle to escape from the clutches of male domination and the attitude of girls' parents towards domestic violence and divorce are discussed. The paper titled " The Female Self in Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises and Afterwards" by Ms Sherine Allena Joseph and Dr Ann Thomas, published in *Literary Herald*, studies women's role in these novels.

The works of Jaishree Misra probe the different roles that men and women play in our society. Indian society always prefers women to occupy subordinate position in the family. Marriage as a social institution hinders the freedom of women as an individual. The strength the female protagonist shows in her life and evolution as a bold female is discussed in the article. Janaki's search for identity and self gives new hope in her life. An article titled "Journey to the Self: A Reading of Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises" by S. A Nesamani and Dr S. Thirunavukkarasu, published in the *International Journal of Engineering and Applications* pictures the depiction of educated women in Indian society. The novels *Ancient Promises* and *Clear Light of the Day* examine the struggles that women of modern India face. These works depict their struggle between the values of tradition and current and their conflict to have an identity and a liberated self. The article seeks to analyse the development of New Woman in Indian English Fiction. There is a new awakening and a new realisation in women to redefine their place, position, and roles in society and the family. The research article "Struggling Women for their identity in Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises and Anita Desai's Clear Light of the Day by Richa Pandey and Aparajita

Sharma in the *International Journal of Development and Research* examines this recurrent theme that Women writers depict.

Most of the works of Jaishree Misra question the notions of marriage as a matter that concerns not just two persons but society as a whole. It examines and destabilises the ideal image in a patriarchal society. "Subverting the Stereotypes: A Reading of Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises*" by C.V. Abraham in the *IOSR Journal of Humanities, and Social Science* deconstructs the conventional idea of a submissive and enduring woman. *Ancient Promises* as subverting the Sita myth, Sita is considered the embodiment of all woman's virtues like modesty, chastity, endurance, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Jaishree Misra's *Afterwards* focuses on the man-woman relationship in contemporary Indian society. The novel goes deep into the inner psyche of Maya, and her quest for happiness, and urges her to free herself from a suspicious, egoistic, and self-centred husband. Maya's efforts to assert her individuality as a human being and her struggle to escape from the unhappy life of an independent individual become the way to maintain her identity. A woman's pathetic state in a sad married life where she neither gets support from her own family is pictured in this work. This idea is echoed in "The Unquenching Thirst At Life's Bay: Understanding Maya in Jaishree Misra's novel *Afterwards*", published in the *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*.

The characters of Jaishree Misra are courageous enough to defend against the suppression imposed upon their life by tradition and custom. They defend the exploitation of women in the name of the so-called custom and tradition. Women's efforts to come out of the chains that bind them are focused. The article "Feminism in the novels of Jaishree Misra, Kaveri Nambisan and Manju Kapur" by Mavidi Papinaidu and Dr Chennareddy in the journal *The International Journal of Analytical*

and Experimental Modal Analysis enquires about female characters in the works of these women authors supports the notion of rebelling against women who challenge tradition and customs which are no use to them as individuals." Journey of Woman through the home, hearth, and heart: A reading of Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* by Soumya Jose and Sony Jalrajan Raj, published in *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies* seeks to read the works from a feminist perspective. The study goes deep into the character Janaki and her emergence as a new emancipated woman. The character ultimately gains control over her life and rewrites her destiny. In her works *Ancient Promises* and *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, the writer depicts the inter-woven familial bonds in a traditional family. Both novels show a clear picture of middle-class Indian life and the problems faced by women in a convention-bound society. The study looks into the family and class differences issues still prevalent in India. A family is a place where a woman faces several injustices. In majority of her works, the writer seriously criticises the patriarchal system of the family still prevalent in India. In "Theme of Tangled Relationship in the select novels of Jaishree Misra", Dr . Stephen Foster Davis, published in the *International Journal of Research*, probes into the roles that man and woman play in the family. This article analyses Jaishree Misra's works regarding the notions like family, tradition, feminine individuality, and liberation.

There are various studies regarding Anita Nair's works too. Her celebrated work, *Mistress* stresses women's journey towards liberation and self-discovery. The whole story develops in chapters named the Nava rasas of Kathakali. Through the characters Radha and Saadiya, the writer pictures powerful female characters who have distinct selves and strongly assert their individuality. The story probes into the complex life of a Kathakali artist Koman. " A Critical Study of Anita Nair's *Mistress*

by Usha Jampana and Dr L.Manjula Davidson in *Research Journal of English Language and Literature* analyses the novel *Mistress* and its characters, especially the women characters like Radha and Saadiya.

Female protagonists' lives and efforts to assert their individuality and self have become the favourite theme of modern women writers. *Ladies Coupe'* gives a group of characters from different classes of society; they all can be united in the name of male domination in our community. Women's efforts for survival make them liberated. In the *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, an article titled "Women's struggling for Survival in Anita Nair's novels by M. Noushath and T. Charumathy examines the women characters in *Ladies Coupe'* and *Mistress*.

Anita Nair is more concerned with the condition of modern women. A woman who pursues their career and has less interest in social institutions, especially marriage, is depicted. Contemporary women who give importance to companionship than marriage are sought in the study. Sonia Firdaus's " The Reflection of Modern Women in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe'* in *The Dialogue* seeks to depict the similarities and differences that these two works represent. The similarities between these two works in plot construction and characterisation are also discussed in this article. Article by T. Sasikala titled " The Feminist Perspective in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe'* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*" in the *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities* views both these works in a feministic light. The role of women in contemporary postcolonial society is discussed throughout the article. These works are analysed based on women's relationship with men and society. *The Edible Woman* depicts another level of women's life. Food and eating become rebellious acts against a modern male-dominated world.

Anita Nair focuses on the concepts of freedom, responsibility, and the existence of the female individual in *Ladies Coupe'*. The courage and willpower the female characters exhibit while establishing their existence and free self are examined in her work. Women's struggle to discover their identity, individuality, strength, and independence paves the way toward self-realisation. An article in the *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* titled " Concept of Existential Elements of Freedom and Responsibility in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" by Nalini Saxena enquires about these notions in the work. The Research article in *Contemporary Literary Review India* titled " The Conflict Between the Individual and Society as Portrayed in Anita Nair's Fiction" by Raghuvamsi Dantuluri analyses the conflict between the individual and the outer world. The characters are in constant struggle with the rules imposed by our society. All her characters confront this inevitable conflict on their journey towards liberation. Ultimately, they evolve as successful liberated individuals.

The article "Into the Vortex: Indian Women in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" by Sushama Kasbekar in the *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture, and Society* focuses on women in South Asia/ south India. The themes that the writer explores can apply to women as a whole. The study enquires about the life of a single and a married woman. The heroines seeking different ways to escape difficult marriages have become a matter for analysis. The situations they face on their journey to liberation benefit self-realisation. The change in social setting accelerates women's liberation. A Journal article by Vasanthi Vaisreddy titled "The Indian Sensibility in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" in *Scholarly Research Journal For Humanities, Science and English Language* is about the novel's central character Akhila. Her journey towards self-realisation is deeply studied in this article. The character Akhila discusses a change in

Indian Women's sensibility. Listening to other women passengers' life stories, Akhila realised she needed a companion, not a protector. This realisation gives her the courage to deal with her future life.

The roles that women play in the social, familial, and personal spheres are discussed in the works of Anita Nair. Her works portray a woman who expresses her opinion strongly and demands attention. They assert their individuality and existence boldly. Her characters show elements of aggression in some situations while maintaining their identity. It is a means to express their uncompromising nature concerning their liberation. In the article "Aggressive nature of Women in the novels of Anita Nair" by T. Pushpanathan in the *International Journal of Research*.

GRANTHAALAYAH: A Knowledge Repository studies the aggressive nature of women depicted in the novels of Anita Nair. The protagonist's journey in search of relationship and independence becomes a recurrent theme in Anita Nair's works. She boldly attempts to voice the frustration and struggles in a patriarchal society. Her novel exhibits a clear picture of contemporary Indian society. The study aims to go deep into the relationships portrayed in the novel. Relationships in a patriarchal society never ensure equality for men and women; women always remain in a secondary position, so the writer opines that to share an equal role in the family and society, there is a need to deconstruct the roles in the relationship. Man and woman must be companions; man must rise from the role of a protector in a married relationship. An article published in the *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* titled "Resuscitation of Relationships in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" enquires about this idea, how the protagonist Akhila realises this notion, encompasses the central part of the work.

This study aims to probe deep into the women characters of these writers and seeks to analyse the works using Rosalind Gills' view of "being one self' and 'pleasing oneself"(155). The features that make the works different from previous feminist discourses are depicted in the chapters. The chapter traces the peculiar features of Postfeminism and what makes it unique from other feminism. It also analyses this ideology as a recent trend in literature that gives women more scope for advancement. This chapter views this new trend as an extension of Feminism which has a changed outlook as demanded in a postmodern world influenced by media and capitalism. The views of various authors and critics regarding the notion show that there is much recognition and criticism raised against this new mode of feminism. The chapter also seeks to discover this movement's influence on modern women writers of Indian English Fiction. Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair's selected works are included in the study. Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* (2000), *Afterwards* (2004) and *Secrets and Lies* (2009) and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe'* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005) are chosen for the investigation to examine the Postfeminist features that the writers knowingly or unknowingly depicted. The writers seem to include features of this modern trend in their writings that make these works look different.

Even though postfeminism influences media-related discourses, its impact on literature cannot be overlooked. It exerts its effect upon the lives of individuals mainly through media and popular culture. It is an influential movement in every sphere of an individual's life, especially for women. It grants diversity in opportunities and choices, which was inaccessible to women in the previous generation. Furthermore, it acknowledges the true femininity that the earlier feminist movements disregarded. This changed ideology aims to uphold both positive and negative virtues inherent in a female individual, which is evident in the writings of authors who advocate the

importance of real feminine experiences. The novels produced by the women writers of Indian English Fiction claim to bring forth the actual life of middle-class Indian women. Women of the middle class become the focus area of the women writers of the contemporary Indian scenario. The works selected for the study belong to the modern literary framework where many experiments in themes, styles, and manners occur. As representatives of the postmodern literary era, the writers moved away from the conventional depiction standards. To analyse the select works of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair with notions of postfeminism seems innovative and exciting.

Chapter two, titled ‘Indian Women’s Writing in English and Indian Middle-class Society’, examines the development of Women's Writing in Indian English Fiction. Its progress as a separate entity is enquired. Women Writers' evolution from the shadow of male cannons to an autonomous group with the influence of feminism is discussed in this chapter. The writers use new modes of narrative strategies, techniques in characterisation and humour are also analysed. The middle class is powerful in India and worldwide and occupies a more prominent part. As writers are concerned with the life of middle-class women, their role in family and society is redefined and re-constructed according to the changing trends in culture and society. Indian women authors apprehend the life of middle-class women who occupy the majority of the total population in India.

Chapter three, named “Being Oneself and Pleasing Oneself”: Realising the Feminine Self’ traces the postfeminist notion of self-fulfilment explored in the works of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair. This became a central concept that makes postfeminism different from other feminist movements. Postfeminism stresses the importance of self-realisation and liberation to make an individual successful. Space for self-development of an individual, whether male/female, is a significant concern

among Postfeminist ideology. The characters in the novels of these two authors aim to work for their liberation from patriarchal norms. The efforts to assert their individuality are a means to attain self-fulfilment. It goes through the female protagonists' journey towards self-fulfilment and their efforts to achieve liberation and maintain their identity. With their strong willpower, they redefine and reconstruct their lives lost in the traditional framework of family. Changes in roles, desires, and aspirations that modern women possess are in constant conflict with orthodox traditions and customs. The characters are powerful enough to break away from the moral codes of marital bonds and customs to have a life they dreamed of and are pleased with.

Chapter four, 'New Masculine Sensibility, Changed Domestic Setting and Female Sexuality,' examines various Postfeminist features in the works selected for the study. How the writers depict their female characters without making them victims but as survivors in adverse life situations. It seeks to analyse the changed domestic setting in the present Indian scenario. It also hints at the emergence of a new masculine sensibility and men who are more domesticated and homely and give importance to shared parenting. This chapter investigates changes in women's attitudes towards social institutions like marriage and family life. The writers exhibit different perspectives regarding motherhood, widowhood, divorce, rape, extra-marital relations, and single life. The writers try to limit homosexual relations and consider it a natural commonplace. This chapter deciphers the life of female characters who celebrate their sexuality. The characters are not hesitant to exhibit their sexual desires and aspirations. Women who are bold in these matters and have liberal perspectives are new to our tradition-bound society. They demand equal treatment as human beings in society. The writers also have a liberal tendency to frame their characters by

the influence of the popular culture they belong to. They highlight feminine sensibilities that all females present and never consider it kept being hidden. The characters are truly feminine, and the writers explore the real-life experiences that a woman pass through.

The concluding chapter five comprises the findings of the analysis, limitations and further scope of the research. While reviewing the works of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair in the light of postfeminism and the 'New Woman' concept, it can be assumed that these movements have influenced the writers. They tried to incorporate the ideas in their writings while framing their female protagonists. Through their works, the writers illustrate a model to the womenfolk on what to expect from their life, what is true emancipation and gratification in a woman's life as a human being. The study assesses postfeminism as an emerging literary trend in fiction among India's women writers. Indian women gained a new sense of freedom and the will to express themselves through this change in society and domestic setting.

space. Women began to assume that they could not adapt to the ideal state of restrained submissiveness and suffering. In a male-dominated moral code of marriage, a woman plays a secondary role. The writers highlight the real world of the so-called glorified images of women in Indian tradition. Women in life and Literature willingly surrendered to the idea of desires and aspirations and created profound conflicts in their subconscious selves.

Tradition, transition, and modernity are believed to be the stages through which Women's Writing in Indian English Fiction progressed. In the early phase, there was generally an adherence to the image of the traditional Sita, Savitri type. At that time, a male-dominated society was enthusiastic about acknowledging that idea, and that pervaded the Literature for a long time in both Regional and Indian English Fiction. The transition characterises the miseries and sufferings of women trapped between two worlds. There appeared women trying to be free from tradition and a nostalgic look back on the conventional Sita/ Savitri type. Writers like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandeya, Shobha De, Ruth Parwar Jhabvala, and many female writers brought some new life to Women's Writing. Their characters are caught in a dilemma between tradition and individual freedom. There has been an effort to push away the burden of inhibitions that women carried for ages and an attempt towards liberation.

Modernity commences when writers sketch the reality of women's experiences. Criticism against modern writers is that they curbed themselves to the sophisticated, urban, middle-class women and families. The village life, low class, and Dalits are excluded from the writings. Certain writers, including Arun Joshi, depict characters from village life. The emergence of women with individuality became a remarkable aspect of this phase, and women showed up in new roles and

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. Woman seeks 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.

Chapter 3

"Being Oneself and Pleasing Oneself": Realising the Feminine Self

Feminist movements have gained equal opportunity and dignity for women, and feminist groups generally concentrate on women's empowerment, individual advancement and self-realisation. The works designed by present-day women authors hold the view that people share equal positions and places in society and point out women's improvement, recognition of their status, and their aspect as autonomous human beings in society. In her book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan states that " for women, as for men, the need for self-realisation, independence, individuality and self-actualisation is as important as the sexual need with as serious consequences when it is thwarted " (35). This chapter deals with writers' treatment of self and the identity of female characters. The idea of self-realisation and asserting self in a postfeminist context is discussed here. The authors portray females as someone capable of affirming their uniqueness by achieving an improved sense of determining their prospects than sufferers of undesired life conditions. These writers seek to bring out disputes encountered by a woman as an individual at home and in society.

Marriage is a significant social establishment in Indian culture which affords security to the couple, especially women. Whether such a traditional concept of marriage could equip a person with conditions decisive for the individual's advancement is still a matter of much debate. Marriage in such a social set-up is detrimental to a human being's progress and realise a person's true personality. In Indian English literature, the question of identity develops into a crucial issue. In a country like India, for ages, a woman's plight is to play the role of a daughter, a spouse, and a parent. She cannot focus on a separate identity as a human being

because she has to play various roles. At present, privileged women, with their learning and material benefits, have the power to express their voice, their desire to be liberated and have a space for the expansion of identity. The idea of the feminine self has always been a debated subject. Historically and traditionally, a woman's 'self' is related to confirming the private domestic circle. It is easy to neutralise her position as a virtuous and supportive wife, a vulnerable sexual partner, and an empathetic and nurturing mother in a typical patriarchal setting. The concept of womanhood has been correlated with attributes, behaviours, and roles associated with women. It is absolutely a social construct rather than a biological or the influence of natural, cultural, and social factors. The present study focuses on female figures who realise their inner selves through traditionally acknowledged feminine roles.

Contemporary Indian Women Writers are primarily interested in individual variations and diverse issues that Indian women essentially confront. Their works centre on women personalities who are reluctant to compromise their aspirations and perspectives for familial bonds and social commitments. Those women characters possess an inner urge to obtain their liberties as independent individuals and discard what constrains them from pursuing their objectives. Discarding conventional aspects does not mean ceasing to be feminine but giving preference to feminine qualities and features as they advance in realising their goals. They aim to uphold themselves and identify a space of their own without rejecting traditional feminine ideals. This chapter analyses the female figures of the select texts with the central assumption of postfeminist sensibility 'being oneself' and "pleasing oneself" (155), as Rosalind Gill identifies. The female characters of the selected texts hold back their life; satisfying themselves by realising their feminine self through different life encounters is the study's primary concern.

Ancient Promises, a semi-autobiographical novel by Jaishree Misra, is the story of Janaki, a Malayalee girl from Delhi who is married to a typical Kerala household. She feels miserable with the patriarchal family system existing there. She encounters several problems in her life. She was in love with a north Indian boy, and as her parents discovered her affair, they hastily arranged a marriage with a boy from a wealthy business family in Kerala. Later her marriage proved to be miserable with an uncaring husband, dominating mother-in-law and other relatives. Her life became tragic as she became the mother of a child with special needs. She realises that no one, including her husband, will not help her raise a child with special needs. She develops a special bond with her child that, as a mother, only she can make her daughter better. She aspires to get a scholarship from a foreign university to continue her studies. She successfully pursues her education; meanwhile, she meets her old lover Arjun, and he offers her a happy and better life. Janaki suffering from her hopeless marriage is forced to accept a life with Arjun. Her experiences as a mother become a means to realise her inner self. She identifies the role of a redeemer to her daughter Riya as she devises her ways to make her daughter better from her disabilities. There are several instances in the story through which Janaki recognises her inner spirit, and through that life experience, she attains true emancipation.

The primary focus of the novel revolves around the happenings between two sentences "my marriage ended today" (3) and "tomorrow, the next chapter would begin" (305). The narrative in the first person opens with the separation of Janaki from her husband. Janaki's predicament about her past and future sounds like "what would you have done if someone had offered you a temporary period of happiness? Would you grab the chance with both the hands and then use every trick available to you to get an extension of sorts?" (3). She states that she had picked up the ninety-

eight days of joy and struggled for an extension. This shows an individual's yearning for a better life who endures many troubles, which makes her bold to accept a life comfortable to her as a human being. In her married life, she encounters many painful situations worth mentioning. The experiences that she passes through as a wife and as a mother of a girl with special needs benefit her to realise her true feminine self. The writer, through several instances, hints at the miserable life of a middle-class woman in the portrayal of Janaki.

The story commences with the wedding ceremony of Janaki, which turns into a significant matter in the novel. In her mind, she is too quick and unaware of marriage. Her marriage was a hurried one. She was compelled to concede to the marriage and did not know what to demand in married life. Janaki's perception of marriage is associated with her uncle's marriage "that was I thought happened after all weddings, a gradual wiping away of tears and more people to love and be loved by"(39). She fantasised that a pleasant household and generous in-laws awaited her in the subsequent days. To her disappointment, she is taken by a heartless and escapist husband, a ruling mother-in-law, and other relatives. She does not feel comfortable in her husband's household. Within days she understood that she was unacceptable in that family and that her life would be pathetic. Miserable conditions in the Indian family structure, where a woman finds less space to acknowledge her individuality echoed here. Heilbrun's idea that wifhood means abandoning a woman's self becomes relevant in this situation.

Janaki's husband's uncaring and cold attitude is evident in many incidents. A wife silently suffering in her in-laws' house is the traditional image in Indian English Fiction. The marginalised position of a woman as a wife and as an individual is pictured in the novel. Her pregnancy and the baby's birth are received coldly by her

husband and in-laws. As soon as she got pregnant and told Suresh about it." He looked confused, and I hoped a little pleased. But all he said was, "Amma and Sathi will know what to do. I'll ask them to take you to see Dr Gomathy" (113). She wondered why Suresh had accepted the news of her pregnancy with the same apathy he already displayed. Without any doubt, it could be said that he fits into the mould of a typical patriarchal stereotype. "His response to my early sorrow had been complete disbelief that a child of his could have any sort of problem"(131). As she requires support from her husband, Suresh's withdrawal from life becomes longer and longer, making her hopeless. This forced her to become highly attached to her daughter. She is confused by her in-laws untouched attitude towards Riya. "Their rejection of me, though hurtful, was something I had been able to rationalise. But Riya? She was their flesh and blood" (131). These incidents make Janaki realise that the whole responsibility of her daughter is hers, and she has to undergo so many hardships to make her daughter better.

Motherhood and extreme attachment toward her daughter become a means to improve her self-esteem to realise her inner strength. Even though her husband and in-laws are not pleased with her attitude, she could care less about it. Her duty toward her daughter binds her sole aim in her life. She transformed herself into a redeemer to Riya. Aloofness from her husband and Maraar family initiated an intimate relationship between the mother and the daughter. As a person to comfort Janaki in her miseries, Suresh proved an utter failure. She felt nobody is there to support or console her with her problems. Acknowledging the traditional role of motherhood, she can be regarded as a woman enjoying the pleasures that conventional womanhood gives; it echoes McRobbie's words that in postfeminist discourse, females are seen enjoying all sorts of traditional roles.

Later Janaki realises that the only choice in front of her to make some meaning in life is to become a promising mother to Riya. In her life, motherhood is a prospect that guarantees her optimism. After that, she realised that she alone could accomplish something for her daughter. She must discover alternatives to make her better. This determination awakened her inner self, and she speculated about ways required to better Riya. For that, she explored various schools, including special schools. To her, it is evident that there is no remedy or treatment for her. She simply requires a withdrawal from a prejudiced world. She wants to take Riya abroad, where she can ensure her better living condition.

The essential thing that makes the writing of contemporary women writers unique is their characterisation of female characters who have control over their lives. Janaki's endeavour to make Riya better turns into a way to have the life she desires. Meanwhile, she met her teenage lover Arjun on her visit to Delhi for her scholarship. Arjun assured her to set up a new life with him, bringing fresh hope and contentment to her life. When she disclosed her plan of separation from Suresh and to go abroad to pursue her studies, Suresh became revengeful towards her. Convincing others, as she has a mental illness, will make others believe that it was not his mistake that Janaki demanded a divorce. "It was preferable to have people sympathise over a mad wife than to bear the shame of one who wasn't mad but wanted to leave him!" (225). With her mother's courageous actions, she was rescued from a mental hospital. The writer shows the instances of domestic violence through this. A wife who questions her husband and in-laws suffer a lot in her life. Janaki's life serves as an example of it.

Misra contrasts an individual woman's life both in a patriarchal social system and in a domination-free environment through the life of Janaki. Her life in London contrasts with her life in Kerala. In London, she enjoys a joyful and pleasing life with

Arjun. Those ninety-eight days are the reward of God for the anguish and miseries that she experienced in her married life. Without her daughter, life turned worthless, and she yearned to have her daughter with her. When she returned to complete her studies, Suresh provided her divorce because he intended to remarry. To him, a daughter with special needs seems like a burden. At the novel's climax, Janaki is full of hope of having a comfortable life with Arjun, and the story closes with " Tomorrow, the next chapter would begin"(305). Janaki's bitter experiences in life catalyse her to realise her inner self. She is in the role of a devoted mother who discovers her virtues, and these situations provide her with a big idea of self.

Motherhood plays a significant part in Janaki's life. Mothering becomes a turning point in her life. She recognises her inner spirit and capabilities when she confidently confronts the troubles of bringing up a child with special needs. There is a solid and deep-rooted bond between her and her daughter because, to her, this daughter was the entire means of assurance to have a happy life. She was sure that both she and her daughter would be unacceptable in the Maraar family, building a sense of uniformity between them. Life without her daughter was a thing unbearable for her. The days she spent without her daughter in London shows the intensity of grief that she bears. Without Riya, she felt a large void in her life that nobody could fill. To her, motherhood is the ultimate hope to continue her life as a human being.

In Indian tradition, motherhood is a glorified position. A mother occupies a supreme position next to God. According to the postfeminist view, motherhood is a virtue that a female possesses, which makes her unique. Previous feminists relegated this feminine trait, which is considered a burden for obtaining liberation.

Postfeminists argue that women being indifferent to their innate virtues may create confusion and frustration in life. As postfeminism advocates authentic experiences in

women's lives, the experience of motherhood cannot be disparaged. A middle-class woman's struggle as a mother is accurately represented through the character of Janaki's concern for her daughter, the hardships she faced in her married life, delight, and hopes that she undergoes in her path towards self-realisation, picturise the plight of a middle-class Indian mother.

Secrets and Lies depict the story of four women who are fortunate to continue a long-term friendship since their school days. This novel comprises the story of Bubbles, wife of a prosperous businessman Binkie Raheja, Samira, wife of Akbar, a corporate lawyer; Anita, who is on BBC Radio and leads a single life and Zeba Khan, a Bollywood celebrity. Both Bubbles and Samira continues in a troublesome married life because there is no alternative to them. The tale seems attractive because it is generally believed that women often experience long-term friendships with their classmates in an Indian social setting. After marriage, most of the women's acquaintances come to an abrupt end. Women get less chance to cherish their friendship because a married woman has to abandon all her desires, aspirations, and acquaintance for the well-being of her family. The story praises the friendship between Anita, Samira, Bubbles, and Zeba Khan. They were inseparable companions at school and are lucky to maintain the same relationship growing up while having separate existences. Bubbles and Samira, devoid of a comfortable life, find solace in the warmth of the mutual relationship between friends.

Initially glancing into Bubbles Raheja's life, a pampered, exhausted wife of billionaire Binkie Raheja, her words show her comfort in the loneliness. She is presented as someone "in a state of unusual tranquillity that morning as none of the family was at home" (10). She paints her toenail, which was the discretion of a Thai pedicurist in a posh parlour. Performing these meagre tasks offers her an odd

satisfaction that she cannot describe. Frequently this task transports her to her teenage days.

Moreover, she considers it as a form of dissent against her husband and in-laws because she feels that "Binkie would loathe the sight of his wife sitting in as public a space as the living room performing such an ungainly task for all the house staff to behold." (10). Even though she lives an extravagant life, she is troubled in her married life and feels worn out. Performing the tasks her husband hates shows her feeble rebelliousness towards her husband.

The predicament of a traditional Indian household is that a wife is always controlled by her husband and in-laws. Bubbles often feel that her mother-in-law has complete control over her life over her husband. Her most essential task in life is to follow her mother-in-law in every aspect. She has no identity, nor does anyone in the family consider her an individual human being. Bubbles neither occupy a place in Binkie's personal nor business life. She considers herself a person with less self-importance in Binkie's life. Because she believes she does not possess any skill or intelligence to receive any appreciation from her husband, she never understands her husband's words when she enquires about the problems he deals with. She always recalls her mother's access to her father's personal and business affairs. She realises that her husband knowingly tries to keep his distance from her; the writer hints at the Indian family set-up, which unacknowledged a woman's role as a wife and mother in the family structure. Her mother-in-law grabbed her role as mother, and her children are raised according to her mother-in-law's wishes. In the role of a wife and a mother, she has no existence. She is viewed as an appendage to her husband and her mother-in-law. She senses a complete loss of her 'self' in her married life.

Heilbrun's concept of complete loss of self and self-worth of a woman in the role of wife can be applied to the life of Bubbles as a wife. She has nothing to regard herself as a worthy individual. Because she is married at the early age of eighteen after completing her school education, she is not an intelligent girl, and she and two younger sisters. Her only choice was to marry a wealthy man as early as possible. Her father always says, "What can college vollege teach you beti?" (147). When she informed her mother that she proposes to join college instead of getting married, her mother suggested that "All your friends will be going to college because all your friends will be getting marks. What marks are you going to get, Hanh? Zero that is what. Marriage to a rich boy is the only scholarship you are going to get beti"(151). She, too, felt that she would be in some polytechnic or textile designing with her poor marks or something lowly like that. Education and a career are essential in a woman's life. It provides women to recognise their position in the family and society.

The only preoccupation in the life of Bubbles is to be a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. She constantly feels envy when she sees independent women who have separate existences. She is distressed about business parties, and she reveals to her friends that "As for me, the last party I remember enjoying was your seventeenth birthday party Sam" (108). She generally assumes that she was undoubtedly happy when she was a teenager; her married life never assures her of the life she expects. Loss of self-worth and personal space becomes a common phenomenon in Indian marriages—an individual feel trapped in the patriarchal setup of married life.

In the patriarchal society, a woman is taught to be shy and submissive for her well-being; the writer severely criticises this concept. Bubbles share fifteen years of married life with Binkie and find it hard to be equally confident in his business life. Sometimes she feels ashamed to expect more from her husband because she is

enjoying a fully luxurious life in all aspects, and she ought to be grateful for the money she has to lavish on herself. She blindly accepts her secondary position and values other material pleasures of luxury for compromising her individuality. Only Anita possesses a life worthy because "Anita, for instance, had in such abundance a result of the authority she enjoyed to be herself and what she wanted without seeking permission or needing approval" (193). She believed that it would be callous to question her husband and family. She yearns to have full authority over her life as Anita, at the same time, feels guilty about asking her husband for more space for her self.

Subsequently, Bubbles is fascinated by her fitness trainer Giovanni because Binkie constantly retains a distance from her; furthermore, she does not feel him attracted to her from the first days of marriage. He regularly prefers to remain out of her way because he likes the same for her. She often believes it is a means of his British sort of upbringing. One day she accidentally discovers her husband's homosexual relationship with his friend James. The writer conveys that this incident neither shocked her because it gave her a chance to go ahead with her passion for Gio.

In Indian English Fiction, the image of a woman who does not confine to the traditional roles and questions the injustices she faces is generally considered a phenomenon of contemporary writing. Modern women writers regard it as one of their favourite themes in their writings. Bubbles returns from Delhi with renewed strength and determination. She has made three firm resolutions in her mind after many speculations. First of all, she will be the individual she feels comfortable with. She will further mention to Binkie his responsibilities, and unless he admits that, she will hereafter lead a completely separate life. At the novel's climax, there is a change in her perspective; she has decided to end her relationship with Binkie. At the meeting

of four friends in Delhi, Zeba Khan, a Bollywood superstar, decided to launch a charity group to support Mumbai Street kids and abused kids. She requires a lot of travel and support from her friends. She anticipates that both Samira and Bubbles will support her, and Anita offers her help in publicity as it is easy for her. With that assurance, Bubbles returns to London because she is confident that her friends will be there for her in any situation, making her firm in her choices in life.

In Indian social contexts, the institution of marriage assigns traditional roles to women, irrespective of their likes and dislikes. Bubbles served the Raheja family as a dutiful daughter-in-law without any objection. Despite Binkie's coldness, she tried to be content with other comforts which sounded trivial to her. She resolves to move forward with what makes her 'self' comfortable and pleases her as a human being. Identifying her husband as a homosexual man added oil to it, and she felt complete relief rather than offended or annoyed. She can quickly establish her decision without remorse because the treatment that her husband and his family returned to her justifies her decision to have a better life. Her unfortunate circumstances force her to choose a life outside her family.

Samira Hussain is the wife of a corporate lawyer Akbar. She consistently appears envious while watching her neighbour Francisca who holds strict fitness management. Her neighbour is always eager to show the photographs of her holidays. Whenever Samira looks at these pictures with more fun, something arrests her heart because she cannot recollect these types of amusing moments in her life. Akbar is not a bad husband, but they seem to have a chance of less fun than couples like her neighbour. She could not recall Akbar ever doing something absurd solely to make her laugh.

Women caught up in the self-sacrificing role of an Indian woman is drawn through the life of Samira. She is constantly seen as struggling to win her husband's admiration. She often assumes that she never got a chance to win her husband's appreciation from the early days of marriage. She had given up her part-time job in a library due to the enormous disparity in their income because Akbar earns more than her and does not need any financial support to run the family. Akbar develops a sarcastic attitude towards her because of her being overweight. Initially, he shows his scorn through little jokes that he hates being married to an obese woman. He occasionally underestimates overweight individuals, but she has given less care to this criticism. When her husband gives her a gift of an exercise kit as a birthday gift forces her to become too conscious of her weight and realises that she further cannot win her husband's mind. In the characterisation of Akbar writer attacks the general notion that if a wife fails to meet the standard of a husband, she will lose her importance in his life. Samira accepted her inferior position as a wife from the early days of marriage. She allowed Akbar to oppress her needs and aspirations by undiscerning her individuality. The complete subjugation of herself made her a mere shadow of her husband.

In the role of a perfect homemaker, Samira is calmly admitting to Akbar's unmindful stance toward her emotions. As he is a busy corporate lawyer, she cared not to make him worry about her stupid issues. She is highly delighted with her friends Anita and Bubbles indeed. When these three friends chose to visit Delhi in December, and when asked, she suggested it to her husband; she replied that Akbar is friendly to her, "Akbar has been quite sweet this past three or four days. Coming home usually early in the evening and asks after her day. He had even suggested they have dinner in a restaurant together tonight, not something they had done in a long

time why I spoil his mood unnecessarily" (161). From this, it is evident that Samira avoided opening up her mind to her husband. She is caught in a dilemma about her relationship with him, and she cannot fully assert her needs and discover limited space for herself in their married life. She is in perpetual fear of losing her husband's interest in her after increased weight.

The conventional 'pativrata' image of an Indian housewife is pictured through the character Samira. The writer violently criticises those who find fake pleasures in these traditional roles. She is of the judgment that her husband had loved her absolutely for four and a half years. It was the time around she was pregnant with Heer, their daughter; he appeared annoyed and irritable as she became a mother and put on weight after the delivery. At first, she believed her husband concentrated too much time in his office due to his crucial career. Once Anita had told her that he might change when their daughter grew a little bit and enjoyed their company. She must give him space and time for it, but things worsened over the years, and she accepted his fleeting visits. "Sometimes nearly to pick up a fresh set of clothes, for an evening appointment. And when did he pop in, she felt sure it was more to check on Heer than on her" (265). She felt unwanted by him. "Sam has just been shunted further and further into the fringes of Akbar's life, eventually becoming someone who turns on the lights of an evening and arranges the flowers and drew the curtains on the world... and even such that symbol things she did not always do very well"(266). She has turned into an instrument in his mind he is never concerned about her feelings. She identifies a complete loss of herself and dignity in her married life as an individual.

In patriarchal ideology, a wife is treated as merely a sex object and an inessential thing. Samira's life serves as a suitable example of this concept. She tries

to recall "when Akbar had changed from being the charming suave man, she had fallen in love with to the remote stranger she was now married to. She could not understand why his main source of entertainment seemed to lie in belittling other people especially her"(65). He invariably carries a harsh attitude towards her friends and makes unfair remarks about her gang of friends. Samira never questions or expresses her hatred towards him for his unfair comments. She, with despair, endures his humiliation and personal tortures on his part.

Akbar's attitude to Samira's vacation trip to Delhi with her friends is utterly ruthless. He abruptly revealed his plan for a Kenyan Safari with their daughter. She sorrowfully realises that it provided Akbar with an excellent chance to exclude her from the trip. Akbar looks much relieved that she already has separate plans. "But why would the thought of taking me be so unbearable for him? Had I really become so hateful? Was I too fat, maybe to haul herself easily into jeeps? Why or why had she allowed herself to become a figure of embarrassment to her husband rather than someone he could be proud of?" (270). When she further disputes with Akbar, he puts his chair back, scratches the floor, and leaves the house; she feels that he is silencing her. When Samira tries to question him, he violently leaves the house as a means to silence her. Akbar is a typical example of a dominant and insensitive husband who never considers a woman to have a separate individuality and self.

Economic independence is an essential factor that makes a woman liberated from subjugation and oppression. Samira's trip to Delhi promises her the courage to choose a better life. While in Delhi, she admitted to her friends that she was happier with them than with Akbar. Her miserable situation as a woman without economic independence is expressed in her words, "what the hell would I do with myself and Heer, I don't even have a bloody job" (375). She fears that by separating from her

husband, she could not support her daughter and find ways to meet her needs. So that she sticks to her troublesome family life. Generally, women endure all hardships because the harsh realities after stepping out of married life may be unbearable without an economic footing. Samira's situation suggests it. Zeba Khan assures Samira a place in her charity organisation, which asserts her convictions regarding a better life.

In the postmodern world, women are very progressive in overcoming patriarchal values with their new perspective. Samira, back in London, plans to establish a new life, and she prefers to know about the role she partakes in Akbar's life. "She would stay calm and peaceable for both her and their own. She was sure that Akbar would get agitated and storm wherever it was" (380). She demands that Akbar be more serious about her and her family than his regular withdrawal from home in the name of his busy career. If he does not transform into a better person, she is courageous enough to break her married life and initiate a new way of life that satisfies her.

The experiences of Bubbles and Samira in the role of wife echo Beauvoir's concept of women in patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir observes that "Man can think of himself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him, she is sex absolute sex, no less" (54). Kate Millet shares a similar view that women occupy an inessential part of patriarchy. In the role of wife, both Samira and Bubbles are regarded as inessential things by their husbands.

Anita's single life serves as a comparison with Bubbles and Samira. Bubbles and Samira are worried about their family life; on the other hand, Anita is annoyed

with her single life and hopes to initiate a relationship with Hugh, a colleague. She already has a broken relationship and is critical of men. She is a brilliant girl from her school days, so her parents were not anxious enough to prepare her to do commonplace things such as housekeeping. When Anita decides to invite Hugh to her house, she seems ashamed to realise that she is a lousy cook and cannot excite him. Bubbles and Samira constantly perceive Anita with the eyes of envy that she is independent to do what she pleases as Bubbles frequently think of what she is devoid of and what Anita has. "Anita, for instance, had in such abundance a result of authority she enjoyed to be herself and do what she wanted without seeking permission or needing approval" (193). She is single and has complete authority over her life. Anita fits into the image of a self-possessed female individual with her ways of life. She becomes a comfort for both Bubbles and Samira with her assertive personality.

Anita is a woman who never sacrifices her personality and identity for anyone, and she experiences several relationship breaks due to this. She could hardly adapt to an individual who never considered and respected her identity as an individual. Before the trip to Delhi, she had a terrible exchange with Hugh. She sensed that this relationship too is moving to an edge like the previous ones. She is not reckless about him as in earlier relations and prefers a solid relationship with him. So, she confesses to him for her rude words. In contradiction with Bubbles and Samira, she initiates a perfect companionship with Hugh.

Meanwhile, Bubbles and Samira are more or less on the brim of ending their marriage. Anita's disposition as an autonomous individual gives her complete control over her life. She can be regarded as a perfect example of a postfeminist woman who leads a life as satisfying to her self. Her confusion regarding her relationships,

relationship breaks, and her longings as a female sound that of a postfeminist woman Bridget as Mc Robbie identifies in *Bridget Jones' Diary*.

Zeba Khan is a celebrated Bollywood actor who leads an extravagant lifestyle. She cunningly employs her charm to obtain her requirements from others. This trait was evident from her school times; she built up a romantic affair with her chemistry teacher Gomez to extract chemistry question papers for the exam. This attribute goes on while she turned into a film star, and she procured significant roles from the directors like Shiva Mirchandani. She belongs to a highly conventional Muslim family. As she becomes a film star and hears about scandals concerning her relationships, her parents keep their distance from her. More or less, she lives a life of solitude. When she and her friends visit Miss Lamb and realise the tragic history of Lily, she is sorry for her. After that, she plans to launch a charity group to support Mumbai Street kids; she includes exploited children. She finds out different paths to make her life meaningful other than that, she yearns for her friends to support her in this new endeavour. For Samira and Bubbles, this affords some optimism in their dreary life.

Afterwards is, the story of Maya narrated from the perspective of a male character Rahul. Maya is the protagonist of the story. Her dejected married life and her attempts to escape from it become the tale's main thread. Maya suffers a lot in her life due to her husband Govind's suspicious nature. She is drawn toward Rahul, a foreigner who resides in her neighbourhood. She absconds from her family life and runs off with Rahul with her daughter Anjali. This incident made her parents disown her. They performed her death rites similar to 'padi adachu pindam vekkal', a terrible punishment conventional families perform when a woman causes serious disgrace to the name of an old established family. She starts a life with Rahul in London, and

after three years, she dies in an accident. The whole story is narrated through the flashbacks Rahul recalls.

Afterwards is different from other works of the writer because it is entirely told from a male perspective. Rahul Tiwari narrates the whole tale. The story commences with the death rites of Maya, which were performed three years before she died. Maya belongs to a traditional family named Pulayil Veedu. She was alive when her death rites were performed. She and her daughter escaped from her married life with a north Indian guy (Rahul) who was her neighbour. This brought tremendous shame and dishonour to the name of an ancient and noble family. So, her parents, notably her father, asserted to renounce her by conducting the death rites. As Pulayil Varma's is an ancient distinguished family from which Maya belongs, she repeatedly claims that belonging to an old family is a burden, which hinders her autonomy as an independent individual. Maya feels trapped in her undesirable married life from which she cannot escape.

Rahul recalls his life in Trivandrum. He arrived there to join for mridangam class and resided next to Maya's house. Rahul's words highlight several events to show Maya's pathetic condition. His encounters with Maya brought her close to him. She often creates situations to get in touch with him. Rahul often wonders about her intention to be close to him. Maya finds a suitable way to escape from her married life by getting too much close to him. For that, she creates situations to develop intimacy between him. By initiating a friendship with Rahul, she seeks his help to slip away from her marriage life. To a woman having a relationship outside marriage is regarded as a disgrace. She is always stigmatised by society and considered a person with loose morals. In Maya's life, too, this caused so many troubles.

Maya invites Rahul to her home when her husband is away for a business trip. Rahul's hesitance towards her invitations shows that he does not prefer to be in trouble with his neighbours. Late Maya assured him, "don't worry, my husband is away. Touring again, she said the last bit with an air of resignation" (36). She suggests that her husband is not an evil man; he is not pretty friendly. From Maya's words, it is evident that her pitiful existence as the wife of a suspicious man forced her to behave unfairly to a stranger. Her desire to have a comfortable life and rage towards her husband in words," then he cannot control me forever he has to learn that" (48). Her revolt against a life that hinders her freedom as an individual is displayed here.

Incidents that lead Maya to agree to her parent's decision to her marriage seem worth mentioning. An individual girl who has no choices in the decisions regarding her future life is still relevant in the Indian social milieu. Sometimes, a girl feels muted in expressing her distaste and obliged to obey her parents; in Maya's life, too, these repeats. The writer criticises arranged marriages which provide limited space for the likes and dislikes of an individual.

Maya's marriage dropped her education and her desire to complete her course. She said, "I had thought I would be able to as it still is in Trivandrum. But Govind was not too keen"(44). She, without much education, cannot pursue a career and have a separate existence. Later she seeks help from Rahul to acquire a job so that she can support herself and her daughter. Her attempts to break away from a monotonous life are evident here. Govind's real character is clearly expressed in the words of Maya, "he is just...just suspicious." (54). He is sceptical about her, which makes him never let her go to college or the shops or make friends or anywhere except to see her

parents. He prefers that they come to see her in their house. Maya's circumstances in her married life unfold the miserable life woman caught in unhealthy relationships.

The writer stresses domestic violence issues and physical and emotional tortures an Indian wife endures through the character Maya. Maya's parents are unaware of the fundamental problems she passes:

they sort of knew, they must know maybe not the full extent of his possessiveness. But what they want to say is that I live in a nice house have a nice car a husband who gives me everything. They do not want to see the other side of that. Do you know people think I am so lucky? They think I have everything a woman can want. But I can imagine how all that can frame utterly meaningless when you have to deal with this thing everyday suspicion (55).

Rahul consoles her and assures her that it might become better over the years. She, too, assumes that by becoming a father, his attitude might change, but nothing gets better as time passes. Sharing a relationship with a man with over-possessiveness and suspicion leaves her in complete trauma.

Misra's violent criticism of male-dominated Kerala society can be seen in the characterisation of Govind, Maya's husband. Govind is depicted as a man with a suspicious attitude towards his wife. He is like a tyrant who prefers complete submission to the part of Maya. Govind is a self-made businessman, and his parents are so reliant on him for everything, and they will never mention anything against him. Not only that, Govind prefers to maintain a bit of distance from them. He does not encourage his family's interference in his family matters. He tries to create a fake image that he is so dutiful and extremely anxious to show off his role as a responsible husband and son.

Govind's excessive pride in life was his reason for choosing Maya. He married her, and she laughed sarcastically and pointed out, "good looking girl, good family, convent educated... But once he got me, he did not know what on earth to do with me" (56). Rahul replied, "so he put you safely away into a little cage." (56). Maya admits ironically, "you must admit it is a nice cage the three bedrooms three attached bathrooms stainless steel sink in a full tile kitchen" (57). Maya feels caged in her married life. Later she decides to free herself from her miserable condition through her firm determination to continue her studies.

Like Janaki in *Ancient Promises*, Maya too escapes with a man from her hopeless married life. For her, in a critical situation, there seems no other alternative. In Maya's situation, she is compelled to act likewise because she longs to escape from a tragic life. As her parents are not ready to accept her anxieties, she has no other choice. Maya's situation can be applied to Indian women who most often endure such problems in their lives.

As a representative of the new woman, Maya chooses her destiny. With the help of Rahul, she initiates life in England. She embraces her way of life by not negotiating to lead a frustrated life, and she liberates herself by adopting what makes her comfortable. She renounces her life with Govind because of his possessive and dubious nature. She feels caged in that life. As an individual, she gives prime concern to her autonomy. She is fearless enough to liberate herself from anything that impedes her liberties as a human being. Rahul is a means to get away from her married life.

As the title indicates, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* offers a narrative concerning the chance encounter of six Indian women from different backgrounds and vocations in their train journey. The novel opens in a lively railway station where

Akhilandeswari (Akhila) waits for the train to arrive. For her, the trip is a withdrawal from her old life and to recover a better new one. She is a single woman who works in an income tax department. She realises that it is her first journey alone on an express train, expecting the train. For her, the journey is to find an answer to a question that constantly disturbs her mind. She, in the coupe, meets other women passengers and expects that her fellow passengers will provide her with an answer as the journey ends. Six women passengers, including Janaki, an older woman, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanti, Sheela, and Marikolanthu. Each passenger narrates their observations regarding their life in marriage and women in general. As the journey ends, Akhila is transformed into a person with new perspectives on life.

Akhila reflects that she has never gone up on an overnight train to a place she has never been before. She is introduced as " So this then is Akhila. Forty-five years old sans rose-coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect" (2). She prefers Kanyakumari because it is the meeting place of the three seas. The Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea, a silent male ocean and two restless female seas on either side. She chose this place because she had put her life on hold, like the Goddess Kanyakumari. The multi-coloured sand of the beach was regarded as the remains of a never-served wedding feast.

The quest for identity and self are dominant themes in *Ladies Coupe*. Contemporary women writers consider the search for identity and self a suitable theme to express the new type of women in Indian English Fiction. In search of her 'self' as a human being, Akhila plans to embark on a single journey. There are five other women Sheela Vasudevan, Prabha Devi, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Shanti, and Marikolanthu. As she waits for the train, her attention turns toward the elderly couple

many a time. To her, they seem like "they belonged together". Many questions cross her mind "What is it about marriage that makes it possible for men and women to match their lives, dreams and even their thoughts in such a complete fashion?"(10). This shows her constant dilemma in marriage and relationships. She cannot figure out the role an individual woman plays in marriage.

The writer simultaneously depicts traditional women and women with modern outlooks. Akhila's mother is a typical portrayal of the conventional 'Sita' and 'Savitri' type woman. Her mother is devoted and submissive to her father in all aspects. After her father's death, her mother's grief seemed only to increase with every passing year. In Akhila's words, her mother has lost more than a husband. Her mother married her uncle as per the Tamil brahmin custom so that Akhila's father is a part of her mother's life from the moment she was born. That drove them too intimate and together in every aspect. Her mother is highly devoted to her father and detested dominating her husband. To Akhila, the idea of marriage is always related to her mother's blind convictions.

The novel progresses with the narration of each woman passenger's life experiences and their perspectives regarding marriage and women's life. They are voiceless women of the male-dominated world and feel free to express themselves in a place exclusively for females. The women break the silence and communicate with each other. They long for a sympathetic listener and a longing to be heard. In the coupe' fellow passengers share their words regarding themselves. As they overcome their strangeness, Akhila shares her confusion regarding marriage and the question that haunted her. The question regarding her identity always torments her. She constantly fears that she will be lonely in the future and that nobody will be there to take care of her. More than that, she is disturbed by the thought that " Can a woman

stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?"(13). She needs answers to all these questions. She expects her fellow passengers to help her find a better solution to her confusion. The journey is also a self-discovery and transformation for Akhila and all women.

Prabha Devi is the first woman to introduce herself. Prabha Devi's question regarding her single life puzzled Akhila because she does not have a correct answer. Here, Akhila represents a single working woman who shoulders the entire responsibility of the family. The other women passengers are from different life situations. They are suitable enough to give essential information regarding their experiences. The thought that the other women passengers are from different life situations gives Akhila new hope. She is forced to remain single because she has to look after her family; it is too late for her to marry when she settles with her siblings. After her father's sudden death Akhila had to accept the role of a family caretaker. Since her father had died in harness, she is offered a job in the income tax department. She was hardly nineteen at that time. She has to look after her two brothers, a sister and a widowed mother. Hence, she takes up the responsibility that her father left. The life of Akhila mirrors the identity conflicts that a single woman in Indian society confronts.

The journey turns out to be a means to get answers to the questions that consistently torment Akhila. She adopted the position of the guardian of the family when she was nineteen years old. As years went by, her brothers Narayan joined a tank factory as a machinist, and a postgraduate Narsi found a teaching job. She seemed highly relieved as her obligations were minimised. "Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?"(77). When Narsi expressed his wish to get married, no one could find fault. Akhila was surprised "why doesn't he think of his

elder sister, who was still unmarried and working for the family. Doesn't she have dreams? Akhila waited for Amma's and Narayan's attitude, but they did not speak about her marriage. Every member, including her mother, is silent about her future. "Even then, amma and her brothers never asked what about you? You have been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don't you want a husband, children, a home of your own?"(77). She understands that she has transformed into a spinster in their minds, and they are oblivious to her emotions. Subsequently, she had to marry off her younger sister, Padma too, and she was thirty-four years old. In the eyes of her family members, Akhila is devoid of emotions and aspirations, and they regard her only as a family supporter.

The monotonous routine life of an Indian woman is pictured through the life of Akhila. After Padma's wedding, she felt a vacuum in her life. Until these years, and she was utterly restless for her family as her liabilities were over, she appeared uneasy and bored. Every day she had the same way of life, travelling to the office, coming back on the same train, the same route, and was exhausted from a daily routine. She and her mother visit the Shiva temple every Monday. She is captured by the statue of Nandi at the temple entrance. To her, Nandi reminds herself, "unlike all other Nandis, this is rested with its back to the sanctum sanctorum. An aberration like me. She told herself with a wry smile every Monday"(78). This Nandi secures the devotees from enemies. Like Nandi, she too shelters and holds care of her family and everybody regards her like a stone statue who never has any feelings or desires. This Nandi, by turning back to his lord, had desanctified the temple. Like this, Akhila turns away from her instincts to have a husband and family complete her obligations. She feels cold and hard like that stone statue without any tenderness towards life.

From Margaret's observations of life, Akhila reflects that she is entirely liable for her life and justifies the failures she committed. Margaret's concept of love and marriage is strange to her. Akhila had a love affair with a man named Hari, who is younger than her. She drops that relationship in fear of her family and society. Whenever she thinks of him, a thought of a mistake creeps over her. When her mother died, she remained alone, and agreeing with her brothers and sister, she managed to get a transfer to Bangalore. She stays with her sister Padma and life with Padma seems disturbed. Padma looks at her as old enough to take care of her and announces it to her neighbouring friends. She had given a distorted picture of Akhila to the neighbouring ladies and repeatedly informed them that she was strange to them, and she endured her merely because it was her duty towards her. Akhila yearns to be separated from them to lead her content and calm life. Akhila is already disgusted with Padma's interference in her life. An individual woman who leads a single life is always perceived as abnormal by society. The community constantly scrutinises them, and Akhila is much concerned about it.

Prabha Devi can be considered a woman belonging to the transition phase towards liberation. She is neither too much conventional as Janaki nor as modern as Akhila. Her perception of marriage is pretty similar to Janaki's. Akhila regards her as a confident and comfortable woman. She sounds like an individual fully assured of her likes and dislikes. At forty-five, Akhila recognised that she is still experiencing life from the side-lines. Her childhood friend Karpagam showed her how her life must be. Karpagam is a widow who is extraordinarily independent and fearless than Akhila. Karpagam is despised by Akhila's selfish family, who don't acknowledge her desire and happiness. When Karpagam sought her if she is contented with her life, Akhila had no answer. Later she said, "happiness is being allowed to choose one's own life to

live in it the way one wants, happiness knows one is loved and having someone to love. Happiness is being able to hope for tomorrow" (200). In Karpagam's view, Akhila doesn't feel what happiness is. She does not have a life and family of her own. When Akhila thinks of her identity, she cannot find out because "she was always having an extension of someone else identity Chandra's daughter, Narayan's Akka, Priya aunt, Murthy's sister-in-law. She wished for once someone would see her as a whole being (200). She yearns that Karpagam will be able to sense her real suffering. Her inner conflicts are expressed in these words. By living for others, she lost her identity as a human being.

The expression of repressed desires and longings of an individual finds new manifestations towards the novel's climax. Akhila yearns to be with a man, to release her senses to explore and seek gratification. She does not require a husband but a person who can cherish her and fill her silence and share all of himself. Karpagam advises Akhila must choose to remain alone and that her sister is mature enough to look after herself. She is educated and employed, so she should look at life for herself. Karpagam is determined to recommend that she must not think much about the world and be firm in her decision to live a happy life. The first thing is to ask her sister and family to leave her home. However, Akhila is not sure about settling alone because she is afraid to think about how she can manage things independently. Karpagam persuades her that if she can get along alone, why cannot Akhila. Karpagam says she is married but is a widow and has a daughter who is twenty-three years old, and they managed to settle a living of their own. Akhila cannot accept it because she still has the kumkum and colourful clothes. Karpagam added that she detests the manner of a widow and ignored what her family and others assumed. Akhila senses a hopeful and self-susceptible woman in Karpagam, and she presses her to have a world of her own,

where her needs appear first. Akhila thought Karpagam is like a goddess who has shown up to bring her out of her dilemmas. Karpagam is a woman who is rebellious against traditional conventions and societal behavioural patterns.

To become a free individual is a strenuous task in a convention-bound society. The job is much harder for female individuals because society has prescribed some behavioural patterns to its individuals. The individual who does not conform to the set patterns is ostracised from society. For Akhila, it takes one month's preparation to become ready to declare her plans for a separate life. She discloses to Padma that she proposed procuring a single-bedroom flat which is sufficient for her. Padma is stunned by her intention and claims she has taken care of Akhila's house all these years and says Akhila is envious of her having a husband and children. She further asserts that Akhila must seek the approval of their brothers. Akhila replies that she is forty-five years old and elder than all of them and knows what to do and does not care what everyone else feels about her then Padma demands that they are the men of the family; their words must be regarded.

A single woman is generally considered as a person with some defects by society, and this concept is vehemently criticised through these incidents. When Akhila's brothers learned about the plan, they opposed it vigorously because they believed that a woman could not manage to live alone. However, she is sure about her actions; she gives her whole life to the family and seeks nothing in return. No one ever asked about her desires and dreams. Nobody ever thought about her needs and longings, similar to any other human being. When she chooses a life of her own implies nothing improper. Padma reproved her by adding that she may have a love affair and did not want anyone to spot it. Akhila could not bear Padma's words, and she slapped Padma. Her brothers demanded that she should follow other people's

views before going ahead with her plans. Only then would she understand how challenging it is to be alone as a woman. They wanted that she may change her mind about this, but she is glad about her intentions and already determined to work for it.

Akhila reached Kanyakumari with revived vitality. Now she is not a helpless woman, and she is clear about her intentions. She won't let her family use her anymore. She has discovered the real woman in her. As she spends her time, she is planning for her future. She determines that she still loves to be alone, but needs some experience, so she decides to woo a man named Vinod and tries not to get acquainted with him. She craves to recapture the lost Akhila, who once was a spirited young woman when she was in love with Hari. She invites him to the hotel. She does not require another adventure with a man, but she prefers to set a little game that is competent in initiating a new relationship. she spends a night with that young man. That night she felt that she had let lust reign over her. " A lust that radiates the heat of the fire. The energy that defines life Akhila is lust. Akhila is Sakthi"(274). She feels that she is transformed into ten entities of Sakthi like the Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvanewari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumati, Bagala, Matangi, and Kamala.

That night showed her many things, including insight into her true feminine self. Now she notices that her body goes through a catacomb of sensations. She had regained the invisible Akhila and her feminine spirit that remained doomed for many years. She suffers no more fears and is not ready to walk with a downcast head. The following day, she awakens with Hari on her mind. Last night had proved that the thought that she could not love any other men like she had loved Hari was wrong. Anything is possible, and she dares to pick up her life from where she had left behind. She seeks Hari and her life equally. She opens the address book and decides to connect with Hari; she picks up the phone and places a person-to-person call to

Madras. As he is unavailable, she remains for one more hour and is determined to leave for the railway station. After some while, Hari calls back, and the novel ends.

Akhila, towards the end of the novel, is the image of an individual who oversaw her life and peace of mind. This journey is a route to her self-realisation. As she attended to other women passengers' stories, she felt that to have completeness as a person, she must open life to different experiences, which gives her new visions to handle her life skilfully. She decides to contact Hari to regain the lost happiness that she had forsaken for the sake of her family. She is never going to settle for others. She is now ready to acknowledge everything she renounced earlier to fear others' concerns.

Janaki opens her story very slowly with deliberately chosen words. She mentioned she is a pampered woman; first, there is her father and brothers to look after her. After marriage, her husband picked up the position. When her husband passes, their son will look after her from where his father left. She sorrowfully adds, "Women like her end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that, we look down upon strong women who can cope by themselves (23). She had been brought up with the idea that a woman's duty was to get married, be a good wife and mother, and home is a woman's kingdom. She has tried hard to build one for her. One day abruptly, she lost enthusiasm in her life. Now she senses an emptiness in her life and in her convictions. She never gets a chance to be a capable, independent woman and is exasperated with being delicate. Now she reflects that her life will be better if she is alone. She feels distressed about all that drives her powerless.

The limited role of a woman in an arranged marriage is highlighted through the character Janaki. She got married to Prabhakar at the age of eighteen. It was an

arranged marriage. She does not know "what to expect of marriage. All through her girlhood, marriage was a destination she was being groomed for" (25). Her mother and aunts took excellent care to make her skilled in marriage by perfecting cooking, cleaning, sewing, and pickling. However, she does not know enough about the married way of life and does not need a yearning to know it.

The writer mixes up different phases of women's development. Janaki can be considered a conventional woman who happily accepts her subordinate role as a wife in the family. Under the care and protection of a devoted husband, she did not choose to feel critical about men because her husband would constantly be there for her support. He upholds her in all her flaws and considers her a delicate woman who cannot manage without him. After long years of marriage, their relationship paves the way for friendly love, which is her sole relaxation in life. She loathes her husband's attitude that he makes others feel that she is a woman with less strength. One day, their daughter-in-law said she is fortunate to have a husband like him because her husband helps her in everything. She realised that she could not do a single thing without his help; this thought left her with a sense of inadequacy. Her husband tells their daughter-in-law about an incident that happened years back with much delight. Janaki rescued their pregnant neighbour by courageously admitting that lady to the hospital with the help of a truck driver. Whenever he mentions it, she feels that it is the only worthwhile deed she has ever done in her whole life. Being a weak woman, Janaki cannot express her desire to be treated as an equal partner. She blindly follows the ideas that her mother passed on to her.

The loneliness and instabilities that an older woman suffers are portrayed in the life of Janaki. When Janaki's son suggests her lonely situation after her husband's death, she manages to ward off that conversation. He held on that she could settle

with him after his father's death. She appears not to wish to think of it either. She feels like being in her husband's security every moment and yearns to die first. She is alarmed by thinking of sleeping alone, waking up alone, and staying alone. From these incidents, it is apparent that she requires a man to feel complete. She wants to transfer this perception to Akhila. However, after her conversation, Akhila looked distracted. She did not get a clear picture of the situation. So, she expected others to explain their story. As she is still confused in her questions regarding single life, she desires to hear other passengers' words. She confesses her desire to get liberated and, simultaneously, longs to be under the care of her husband. A confused woman with a conflicting identity is seen in Janaki.

The views of Janaki are not sufficient to give a satisfying answer to Akhila, so she assumes that other women passengers will help her to find it. Next, it is Margaret Shanti's turn to speak about herself; from her first remarks, it can be assumed that she has similar views about marriage as Akhila. When Akhila replied that she is an unmarried woman, Margaret admitted why should one marry if a person is contented with one's single life. Hearing Janaki's story, she appears very annoyed because it left Akhila to assume that she was committing a huge mistake by living alone. To her, "they are nice women, but they are the kind who do not feel complete without a man. They might say otherwise but I know them, and women like them. Deep in their hearts, they think the world has no use for a single woman" (95). She is of the view that a woman needs a man. Still, it has nothing to do with making a woman complete. After hearing her story, Akhila will realise why she says it. "when I have, you will understand why I say that a woman doesn't need a man. That is a myth that men tried to twist into reality"(95). Margaret's words is an eye-opener to Akhila. She gained the

strength to face her life courageously by discarding other people's opinions regarding her life.

Margaret is a chemistry teacher; she has a unique manner of classifying people with metals and minerals. She analyses herself as water, the universal solvent, "Water that moistens. Water that heals. Water that accepts. Water that flows tirelessly. Water that destroys"(96). As she is water, a very familiar thing, her husband dismissed her as someone of no significance. So, to her, life's sole objective was to show him " what the true nature of water is and how magnificent its powers are." And " that water is to be weighed carefully, or it will weigh upon you! That was the first lesson I had to teach him"(96). Until these years, she was in a frozen solid state. She gets transformed; in her words, there occurred a chemical change.

Generally, a girl is flooded with advice before marriage. Elders take a particular interest in advising women to become the perfect wife. But no one ever cared about informing boys about their role as a husband. This double standard of society is criticised violently through the character Margaret. The night before the wedding, her mother turns to advise her on how she must be a perfect wife. "She told me what it meant to be a wife. Of the loyalty that was demanded of me. Being faithful and putting more effort than a man would make a marriage a successful partnership. She told me how divorce often resulted when a woman did not make that extra effort"(102). Her mother further told her about 'sex', which her mother called the physical side of marriage. "How a good wife never say 'no' even if she isn't in the mood" (102). After her mother left, her father showed up with advice, and she wondered what he had to tell her. Her father said Ebenezer was a good man and would make her happy. Even though he looked strong and capable, he was soft-hearted and sensitive. So she must take much care not to hurt him. It would be

unbearable for him. She thought she would never even dream of hurting him, so the advice was useless, and they would be happy together. The advice from her parents reminds her of the popular make-believe that a woman has to look out for her husband's welfare primarily.

Extreme devotion to a husband who never considers his wife as an individual is a recurring theme in the works of Indian Women Writers. Margaret's early days of marriage show this; she describes her marriage as "she was so drunk on her feelings for him, that all she wanted to do was to be with him. Please him. Show him in thousand ways how much she loved him. Everything else was unimportant" (104). When she got pregnant, everything got changed; his words "Maragatham (as he calls her because Margaret and Shanti were common names, she deserves a more lyrical one and also 'Maragatham' means Emerald in Tamil, a precious greenstone) I'm not so sure if we should have a baby now" (104) shows uncertainty in being a father. He suggested that she might work for her doctorate or do B. Ed as they were not settled. Before having a baby, they must be appropriately established in their career. Till then, they have themselves, each other and what more is required.

A complete surrendering of her desires and aspirations, Margaret doesn't have a choice of her own all was according to her husband's wish. To his preference, she cut her hair, ceased going to church every Sunday, avoided eating bhelpuri from the roadside stalls, and entirely for his own sake, had an abortion too. He added that there was nothing to worry about and everything was arranged; all she had to do was to go along with him. She is uncertain about the decision and worries the church would not permit it. Regardless, she wants to ward off this and feels guilty about it. He said many things to prepare her to believe that it is not a sin and justified his intentions. He secretly arranged everything and forced her to have an abortion despite her reluctance.

She felt enormous regret and remorse at the hospital for this cruel deed. She consoled her inner self by thinking that he knew what was best for them. This echoes that her husband's over-emotional attachment degraded her role as an individual. She is entirely under her husband's control as the traditional woman in Indian culture.

The authoritative and dominating attitude of males deprives women of their basic instincts. Men prefer women to be like dolls who play according to their wishes. A woman does not have personal space for her advancement in a married relationship. Men prefer women to be their shadows. Margaret's husband's authoritative nature is an example of it. Ebenezer always calls her 'My little girl one night in his sleep; he fumbled that he loved her calling 'Ebe' and it reminded her to be a little girl, and he hated her change and wanted to remain like this all her life. This is the reason he forced her to have an abortion. He does not prefer her to transform into a woman with a woman's changes after motherhood. He is selfish enough to make her conform to his needs by aborting their baby. This left a shock in her she thought, "Where is I in all this? Margaret Shanti, the woman. In Ebe's eyes, had I ceased to be? What did he see me as? A little girl, he could rule and mould, make love to and jolly around? It was as if he negated all that was grown-up and womanly about me... What would happen to us when I changed? When does time catch me and leave its marks? (111). This incident changed her devotion, affection, and everything towards him. She indeed thought of separation. Her innate desire to become a mother is marred in this situation. As an individual, she feels unjust for denying her privilege as a human being.

Ladies Coupe' raises many questions which are still relevant in contemporary society. The novel discusses confusion and conflicts in the mind of a woman who wishes to get separated from her husband. Her acceptance in family and community

after separation. Margaret was baffled by these questions when she thought of leaving her marital relationship. She had so many questions in her mind. What should she do after leaving him? Where shall she go after it? Is there anybody to convince her that she has done the right thing? Is she able to place all the things behind and initiate a new life of her own? Will anyone be there to offer support to hold and a shoulder to cry upon? These questions troubled her much. Her family's admiration and respect for him had deepened over these years. It would be tough to convince them about his true nature. Her real consolation in her present life was that despite her defects, overweight, barrenness, and melancholy disposition, he has still stuck by her; for this, she thanked god. When she informed her mother about her sadness in her life, she replied that "it is a woman's responsibility to keep the marriage happy. Men have so many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of marriage oiled"(112). This leaves her exasperated to think that marriage is exclusively the female's responsibility. Everybody considers males as busy, and women have nothing to do. She was sure that her parents did not wish to hear anything that spoils their harmonious retired life. Hardly anyone had ever been divorced in their family. So, by separating from her husband, she must be prepared to leave her family. Though she never conceived, she always longed for a baby and became a mother.

By leading a life without any self-worth, Margaret's sourness towards her husband intensified as time passed. There are more complaints, and she feels estranged from him. She loathes all related to him. Earlier in their life, she used to love every little thing and shared every thought in her mind with him. However, as years passed, she noticed that he didn't listen or had no concern about it. They battled over silly little things. She ceased to talk to him, and when they communicated,

everything ended in quarrels and complaints. The thought of the unborn baby tormented her mind. Every time she thinks of it, she despises him vigorously and repeats, ' I hate him' numerous times in her mind.

Rebelliousness and conflict in Margaret's self are relieved by doing what Ebe hates. She secretly buys big chocolate bars and eats them when he is not in the house. When she is not contented with it, she opens condensed milk tin and has it. The pleasure of having these things made her neglect discontentment in her life. When she became fat, an odd sort of pleasure sneaked into her mind that she no longer is his 'little girl. He always has to show off his interest in music and everything. Even though he did not own any fondness for it, he exposed his passion for Mozart, Beethoven, and great masters before everyone. He boasts that the efficiency of a school principal requires too much imagination. That is why most schools have principals who are English or History teachers. The subject, he believes, is the driest and most boring is chemistry. When he thinks of it, he remembers the odour of rotten eggs. Margaret regards these remarks as an insult to her identity.

A woman enduring all sorts of suffering without any choice is pictured through Margaret. She hates his pervasion of drawing human genitals in book margins bearing his signature. She felt suffocated by marriage; anger and hatred bubbled in her daily. She understands that he had wiped out that good and noble about her life. He made her life devoid of hopes and dreams. Every time she thinks of him, she hates herself and her life. As she deals with everyone similar to a chemical substance according to their different characteristic attribute, she treats him as "concentrated sulphuric acid, H₂SO₄, Hydrogen Sulphate, King of chemicals. Oil of Vitriol. Given to extreme, capable of wiping out all that was water, fluid and alive" (120). By these years, she is fed up with his commanding attitude in school toward innocent children

and at home. Her attempts to get separated from him will not work out, and she is confused about what to do with her life. Most commonly, women encounter similar problems in life. Their dilemma concerning life after separation forces them to endure all sorts of troubles in a relationship.

For all that he committed to Margaret and her disgust and resentment drove her revengeful against him. Her first blow to him is on his self-esteem about his physically fit and magnificent figure. At first, she transformed herself into that 'little girl' that she ceased to be and wooed him as before. Morning, she cooks tasteful dishes which she once used to cook. Ebe can be flattered easily, and she made him eat big breakfasts, lunches, dinners, evening snacks, and late-night snacks. She treated him like this for a year. The change she expects in him begins to work out "Ebe slowly became a fat man. A quiet man., An easy man., A man who no longer needed the coterie or defaced books" (134). Thus, he turns into the man whom she loved before.

Afterwards, Margaret becomes a mother of a girl. This way, she took an act of sweet vengeance upon him. She says, "when you add water to sulphuric acid, it splutters at first. But soon it loses its strength; it loses its bite. The trick is to know when to add it, and how much"(134). This is the strength of water, which is ever undermined. Like this, a woman's real potential is buried elsewhere; when a person understands it, the actual renewal takes place.

Before leaving the train, Margaret encouraged Akhila that "if there is one virtue I have, it is immunity to what people think of me. Naturally, this makes them dislike me even more. People do not like to think that their opinion of someone means nothing to that person. And when it is a woman... the thought is intolerable" (136).

She advised that Akhila must suspend what others would think of her; life will become accessible to her when she drops it. She has to look for herself, and no one else will undertake this for her because her family is insensitive to her needs and aspirations. When Margaret's marriage turned out to be against her expectations, she skilfully managed to drive her life according to her wish by artfully taming her arrogant husband. She relates a woman's power to water, which is capable enough to destroy the king of chemicals. As water is everywhere, without shape, colour, odour, and taste, it is flexible to any circumstances. So, people assume water is incapable of power. However, its actual capacity is hidden; it will be evident to everybody when the moment comes.

After Margaret's story, Prabha Devi begins to talk about herself and her views concerning marriage and relationships. Prabha Devi belongs to a large, prosperous family with a Jewellery business. Her parents have four sons, and herself against her father's expectation of a baby boy. But her mother was pleased and convinced her husband by saying, "we have four sons. A daughter can do no harm. Besides, when it is time for her to be married, you can choose a family that will aid your business interest" (169). Her father says, "a daughter is a bloody nuisance"(169). Her mother's assurances sounded better to her father and gave him many prospects to expand his business, and he felt glad that his daughter would provide enough profit to him. He was a man who expected life was a means of profitable business. Her mother was thrilled to have a daughter, but she never openly affirmed that because it was against her husband's views. To her, "a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell. To be shunned" (170). She is acquainted with obedient women who are shadows of their men. Her mother and other older women in her family belong to this category.

For a woman, education becomes a means to make her perfect in the eyes of her suitors. A girl's self-advancement is not stressed at the time of teaching. Prabha Devi had been given a convent education because it would groom her well and make her fashionable to speak excellent English and fit to enter a good alliance in the future. Her mother took particular care to preserve her charm and complexion so that she would be fair in her future husband's eyes. When she turned eighteen, her father came up with a proposal from an only son and heir of a prosperous diamond merchant. His name was Jagadesh. Her father can also open a diamond section in their four jewellery stores with this marriage. After her marriage, she had to do what all other women do after the wedding. Wait for her husband to come home, for the babies to be born, their first step, their first word. she felt fortuitous to have a steady life of her own. Her words indicate that a woman has nothing more to do in family life. She felt trapped in the mould of conventional family life.

A woman's urge towards liberation and freedom is evident when Prabha Devi gets complete control over the house. Her in-laws have to go to a funeral; she and her husband remain at home, and her mother-in-law gives control of the household to her by handing her the keys. As she was in complete control of the house, "she walked towards the pond where white lilies bloomed, goldfish swam, and frogs lived, all in perennial wetness of content. She pulled up her sari to above her knees and stepped into the pond" (178). She enjoyed switching on a bit of fountain and splashing, rippling the water. When her husband comes home, she takes him to the pond. He feared his father because no one was allowed to play like this in the lovely lily pond. She relished every moment of her freedom, which she had never been able to celebrate. He, too, followed her despite his mother's advice that wives often make husbands take the wrong path, and it was up to the husband to accept or discard the

suggestion. She is overjoyed with the autonomy she longed for and thinks how lucky she is. She is a woman with an unquenching thirst for freedom.

In Indian society, an autonomous individual, especially a woman, generally believes in liberal attitudes towards everything. Prabha Devi's life after her New York trip indicates this. A woman who possesses a modern outlook is sometimes mistaken for her liberal attitude. After the trip, she ceased to be the woman she was. She wears trendy clothes and discarded sari, which she used to wear, a new Prabha Devi is seen in every aspect. She prefers to be a woman she had seen in New York, "Their lives were ruled by themselves and no one else. Such poise, such confidence, such celebration of life and beauty. Prabha Devi wanted that for herself"(177). She had to practice the walk: upright stance with squared shoulders pulled in the belly and gentle but provocative swing of the hips. She began to wear three-inch pointed heels, which made the whole process easier. Then she made several trips to the beauty parlour to learn how to apply makeup. She packed away her saris and preferred silk kaftans. These incidents show her thirst to become a free individual with complete control over her life.

This novel raises many questions which are considered taboo by society. Prabha Devi's preference for delaying motherhood shows her control over her life. She suggested to her husband that she does not want to be a mother soon because when a baby comes, nothing will be the same, and she was young too. She demands that he must use condoms to avoid pregnancy. The conversation about sex leaves her husband embarrassed because, according to him, sex is something people do beneath the cover of the night and a thin sheet. It was not meant for conversation. This forced him to think that he had committed a huge mistake by taking her abroad. Her husband

objected as his parents were impatiently waiting for a grandchild, and they had been married for a year.

A woman has to encounter so many undesirable circumstances while proclaiming her individuality. A man named Pramod misbehaved with her because he mistook her for her liberal attitude. This incident hit her and shook the dignity and self-esteem that she carried with her. She resolves that she must suppress all her looks that pass erroneous messages. Sorrowfully she locks away that gay energetic young woman and unlearns every manner she acquired. She decided not to ask for anything and must be contented in her way of life as it appears. She must go back to being the woman as in her earlier days. She locks herself in the role of a simple homemaker as her mother aspired from a confident girl with passions and needs that she turned into a woman who demanded too little and devoted all of herself.

In Prabha Devi's concept, there are three types of man-woman relationships. First, a woman must show her man that she is incapable of doing anything beyond the periphery of home. Her man will manage all things. At first, he will care for and protect you. But it will not last for long, and he turns to be a tyrant and will control your every thought. Next is if a woman is independent enough to manage things herself, and when a woman needs her man to hold and cherish her or share her sorrows, he might not be there. Because he thinks she will cope alone. So, an intelligent woman must choose a middle path that is more suitable. She wants to advise her daughter about this path which her mother had not told her about while grooming her to be a perfect homemaker. Her ideas show her excellent understanding of her role as a woman in the family and society.

Prabha Devi is determined to learn to swim by herself and told her husband that she had enrolled in a baking class for three weeks. Her husband is surprised to see the woman she had once been:

She prepared to learn by watching the kids learn at the pool. For three days, she did nothing but kick the water in arcs. She struggled to dive underwater to keep her eyes open. On the fourth day, she did not find the need to cling to the bar but held it with just the tips of her fingers and tried to remain afloat and keeping her head in the water and held her breath. On the fifth day, she moved away from the bar and rested a leg on the pool's sidewall, gathered as much air as she could in her lungs, and moved forward to reach the rubber ring the pool attendant had given her. But she sank and felt like drowning, thinking she was not ready to get into the water. On the sixth day, she tried to float on the water with the help of a ring. As the pool is only four feet in depth, she does not need to be alarmed by the thought of drowning. So she, without the help of the ring, tried it and was successful. On the seventh day, she took a rest and that she felt she had regained her lost spirit and femininity, which she had locked away many years ago. On the eighth day, she had new speculations about life: “desire spawns desire; fulfilment begets fulfilment (195).

Prabha Devi understands that what one gives to life comes back manifold. Her suggestion to Akhila is that she must confidently choose what makes her pleasant and must know a woman's self-worth; only then she will be able to find actual gratification in their life.

Marikolanthu is the last remaining passenger in that coupe'. She is excluded from the group of other women for no reason. She is thirty-one years old and works as

a servant for a foreigner, an English woman who is a doctor. The doctor is posted to Nagercoil, so she will set up her house before she arrives, and her son is accompanying the doctor. When Akhila inquired about her family, she said; that Akhila is extremely curious about others' families. She says she is unique from others "because you have all led such sheltered lives, yes even you. I heard each one of them tell you the story of their lives, and I thought, these women are making such fuss about little things. What they ever do if real tragedy confronted them? What do they know of life and the toll it takes? What do they know of how cruel the world can be to women?"(209). She is slightly embarrassed by other women in the coupe' because they all assume that she is different and does not fit into their group because of her low and uneducated look.

Marikolanthu is of the notion that women are powerful and can perform everything as men and, indeed, much more. For this, a woman must seek that vein of strength in her that is hidden and does not appear itself naturally. When women realise it, everything will be more accessible. She narrates how she discovered her inner strength. She was born in a village named Palur, near Kancheepuram. Her father was a farmer; they were not rich but were peaceful. She had two brothers. A few days after her ninth birthday, her father died of some disease that even doctors could not cure. Her mother has to seek the work of a servant at Chettiar Kottai. Chettiar Kottai is an enormous house with countless rooms, annexes, and a wealthy family. Her mother's culinary skills are well known in the village, and on special occasions, she was often called in to help at Chettiar Kottai. She began her life as a housewife before she became an adult. When her mother leaves for work and returns late in the evenings, she has to take care of the home and perform every duty. Her mother constantly grieves that she had robbed childhood from her.

The miserable condition of girls in rural villages is pictured here. From their childhood, they have to face the harsh realities of life. Later her mother decided that she, too, is required to support her in Chettiar Kottai. Therefore, her schooling came to an end. Moreover, her mother could not afford to send her to school along with her brothers. They have to find a new school in town; her mother fears letting a young girl go to school every day by herself to the city. So, she was forced to drop her studies and set up her life as her mother's helper in that huge house. She quickly became friendly with Sujata Akka, the wife of Chettiar's son who adores her very much. Marikolanthu's main task is to take care of Sujata Akka's son. She says she spent all maternal love on this child, and when she became a mother, none had left for her own. Her world revolves around Sujata Akka and her son; nothing was significant than them. She served them for three years.

Marginalised life of rural people is portrayed through the life of Marikolanthu. Sujata Akka discovered that it is not desirable to have her there as young men walk around with her husband and brother-in-law. So, she sent her to Vellore, where Sujata Akka's aunt lives. She had to serve two lady doctors searching for a young girl to be their servant there. Vellore is a different experience for her with two foreign ladies, Missy V and Missy K, and their old gardener Periaswamy. She served them happily for three years. She seems delighted at Vellore. The missies taught her English and assures her that they will offer her a job as a helper in the hospital when she turned eighteen. So, she must finish her SSLC and can do a nursing assistant course. She is equally surprised and suspicious of the improbability of the relationship between Missy K and Missy V. Every night, she sees Missy K leave her room and walk to Missy V's room.

Women belonging to the lower class have to face many problems compared to middle-class or upper-middle-class women. The life of Marikolanthu is an example of it. When her mother fell and cracked a bone, she had to take up her mother's role as a helper at the Chettiar family. She unwillingly takes up the job. She longs to get to Vellore; when her mother is all right, she decides to go, but her mother insists on waiting till Pongal. The day before Pongal, something tragic happened to her. She is raped by a man who is a distant relative of the Chettiar Family. She fears her mother's reaction to the incident. So, she keeps it a secret. She assumes that once she is back to Vellore, she will be capable of dismissing the incidents from her mind. She will not return to her village after that. Nevertheless, she cannot return to Vellore because she has to take care of Sujata Akka, who caught up with jaundice. Later she too becomes ill, which everyone mistakes as jaundice, but actually, she is pregnant. Her mother cannot believe her story, "you were raped, and you kept quiet about it. A man steals your virginity, and you think nothing will change. You expect me to believe that?" (243). Afterwards, she mentioned those events to Sujata Akka. She sought her help because the man who raped her belonged to the Chettiar family. Her mother insisted that Sujata Akka must find some way to arrange her marriage with that man, which is the only solution to the problem.

A woman denying her victim status and against general notions of society is seen in Marikolanthu as she is not ready to marry him. She does not bear setting up a relationship with that man. Her mother cannot tolerate her coldness towards this issue. Her mother pathetically grieved about her future, that nobody would marry her, and her daughter's life was over and have nothing left behind. Marikolanthu tried to soothe her by stating that though her life paused on its path, she did not need to restart it with the help of a person who was responsible for the entire problem. So, she

determines to go elsewhere to someplace where no one recognises her and will kill herself. Sujata Akka came up with a plan to terminate the pregnancy, and after that, she could return to Vellore. There she will be able to get a job. As there will be no marriage arranged for her, that job will be a security for her.

While hearing the word 'husband's protection,' Marikolanthu felt cringy because she felt that her mother and Sujata Akka didn't know its meaning. The men in their lives had done nothing; to make them fulfilled. She regards a man's protection like a cobweb floating through the air. If she opened her mind, it would be considered arrogance, so she kept quiet about it. She was taken to her mother's aunt Periyamma who lived in a village near Salem. She is an older woman and lives alone. She knows some traditional methods to terminate the pregnancy. However, she gives birth to a baby boy, and she does not want to see the child and told Periyamma to take the baby away or kill him. She is uncaring and aloof towards the baby and returns home. On some days, she left for Vellore leaving her baby with her mother. When she reaches Vellore and discovers some tension between Missy K and Missy V. She does not feel anything wrong with the strange relationship and assumes that nothing could be worse than a man raping a woman. Later she has to leave Vellore because Missy V left Vellore, and Missy K is going to Bangalore, and she cannot get a job as a helper in the hospital. She returned to her village. She joined the Chettiar family to care for Chettiar Amma, a mad woman. When Chettiar Amma died, she became an assistant to Sujata Akka, the mistress of the house. Back in her village, she hesitated to see her son or even didn't care about his love. Her duty ends with the money she provided for his care, and she warns her mother not to expect anything better from her.

Opening a different and secret relationship with Sujata Akka becomes a turning point in her life. Sujata Akka is distressed about her relationship with her

husband. She felt disdain towards him, and a physical relationship with him is displeasing to her. She is doubtful that her husband goes to other women and does not want to be mad like her mother-in-law. Subsequently, they built up a relationship where her task was to please and satisfy Sujata Akka. This continued, and she began to reside with her mistress in the Chettiar Kottai. Her prime concern was to make Sujata Akka contented and harmonious. She accepted her husband Sujata Akka's husband to her body when he was at the house. She does this because he will not seek another woman as she shows inclination towards him. If she is available, he will not trouble Sujata Akka. She is sure that they neither loved her nor needed her. After her mother's death, everything went upside down.

The tragic life of poverty-stricken people of rural India is evident in the life of Marikolanthu; her son is left behind uncared after her mother's death. Her brothers disowned their responsibility, but when she returned to Sujata Akka. She discovered her husband's relationship with her and demanded to leave the house. She calls her a strange woman who acts as a friend to her in the morning but feeds on her husband's lust at night. The justifications and confessions were out of place. She leaves the place without accepting the salary that Sujata Akka gave her and feels devastated. Things got worse as she identified growth in her womb. She first decides to ask Sridhar Anna, but while she accepts some money from him, she is more likely to be a whore, who gets money for letting a man use her body, so she gives up that plan. She took her son to a loom and mortgaged the boy for the next two years for five thousand rupees. Thus, she found the money for treatment. She underwent surgery, and when the pain disappeared, she worked for various households as a cook. Later, she decides to find money to procure her son back, so she goes to Missy K in Bangalore.

Marikolanthu insisted that Akhila must seize the management of her destiny. She must have authority over her happiness. She has been a surrogate homemaker, surrogate mother, and surrogate lover throughout these years. These years she lived for other people and gave prime concern to others' pleasure and aspirations. Her life had taught her that living life to satisfy others is utterly insignificant. She is beginning to live for herself, and others are unimportant. Marikolanthu demands that Akhila must focus on herself and her happiness.

Karpagam is a childhood friend of Akhila. She is pictured as a character who directs Akhila toward the right path when she is at an impasse in her life. Meeting with Karpagam becomes a turning point in her life. Karpagam is a widow but never appears in a pathetic state of a widow. There is a confident, independent, and self-reliable woman in her. She feels hatred toward Akhila's family when she knows that Akhila is still leading a single life. She vehemently condemns them, and why are they not regarding her as a human being with desires and hopes. She considers Akhila's family selfish as they failed to realise that she deserves some happiness of her own. When Akhila mentions that though she had passed the age for marriage and did not require one and is staying with her sister Karpagam held the view that she did not live alone because she is educated and employed. By doing so, she can have a life of her own. She encouraged her to stop looking around every few minutes and stop bothering what others think if she pursues her 'self' honestly.

For Akhila, Karpagam is a real inspiration to establish a new life. She regains the courage to voice her likes and dislikes, and her impulse to choose a life that makes her peaceful is from the confidence that Karpagam passes to her. Akhila acknowledges her as some goddess who has come to lead her out of the dark life. Karpagam maintains a critical view of society's attitude towards widows. When she

became a widow, she was not ready to follow the custom codes. She detests the idea of wearing white clothes, which remind her of looking like a corpse ready for the funeral pyre. In her view, it is an essential feminine trait that women like to wear colourful clothes, jewellery, and kumkum. It is not a privilege sanctioned by marriage. It has nothing to do with whether a woman is married or not, whether the husband is alive or dead. In her words, these laws were made by some men who couldn't bear the thought of their wives continuing to be attractive to other men after his death. So, when she became a widow, she didn't give much relevance to the custom which denies a woman her basic instinct. She did not care about what her family or anyone thought of her. As an individual, she has the right to choose how to live. This view changed the life of Akhila, which provided her with a new perception of how her life must be. Karpagam has a vital role in modifying Akhila's life and happiness. She is a survivor, not a victim of problems. She prefers Akhila to be like her.

Akhila's decision to have a solo trip to Kanyakumari is after her meeting with Karpagam. Persuaded to live a life of her own, she determines that she requires answers to some questions that torture her. Her journey to self-discovery starts after the meeting with Karpagam. Karpagam showed her that life will be beautiful when her needs and happiness are given primary importance. So, for making Akhila a woman who singles out her self-worth and autonomy, Karpagam deserves considerable appreciation. Karpagam acts as a driving force in Akhila's life and opens a new world of confidence and self-reliance in front of Akhila.

Mistress is a novel narrated from the point of view of three individuals Radha, her husband Shyam, and her uncle Koman. As the study concentrates on a female character, considerable attention is provided to the characters Radha and Saadiya. Radha is a depressed and confused woman. She detests her existence as a wife to

Shyam. She owns many reasons to despise Shyam and condemn everything regarding him. Shyam is the owner of a resort Near- the Nila; the whole story is set in the background of the river Nila. Shyam, a businessperson with enough cunningness, uses every opportunity to advance his business.

Radha always takes a derisive approach toward her husband's likes and dislikes. She regards him as mean and a pretentious person who is pleased to show off his possessions. Their personalities never blend; they move as two parallel lines that never meet. Her attitude towards her husband was evident from the very beginning itself. A foreigner named Christopher Stewart visits their resort; he carries a cello, and Shyam inquires what it is when Chris explains it; Shyam tries to joke with his words; that time, Radha's reaction is expressed as " I turned away in embarrassment. He was not just a sham; he was uncouth boor, this husband of mine" (9). She hates his exaggerated sense of self-worth and his habit of blaming her family often.

Shyam shows off his list of things like a shopping complex, a rice mill, a row of houses, a rubber plantation, a mango orchard, and a line of coconut trees to everyone, leaves Radha embarrassed. She detests the importance he gives to money in his life. Radha is of the idea that money is not everything a man needs in his life. With strangers, he likes to picture himself as a glorious man. Sometimes when Radha feels low and sad, she prefers his support and consolation, but it never happens. She sometimes thinks he will do anything, even if she asks for a moon, and hates asking him to do what she likes. They have been married for eight years, and she says their physical relationship is a mere routine ritual. She cannot say that she is unhappy with him, but she is not happy. "I can't say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no highs, there are no lows either. Some would call this content even"(53). She knows that she is a possession to him, a much-cherished one. He does not need an equal, he

wants "someone to indulge and someone to Indulge him with feminine wiles"(53). She contrasts her married life to a butterfly that she caught as a part of a biology project at school. She caught a butterfly and pinned it as if it were alive. Its wings spread to display the marking that she was insensitive to its yearning for freedom, and she feels that now she is like that butterfly devoid of individual liberty and choice and clings desperately to her married life.

From the very initial sight of Christopher's foreign traveller, Radha appears to be fascinated by him. Christopher (Chris) had visited the place to have an interview with Koman, Radha's uncle, a Kathakali performer. She regularly meets Chris while at her uncle's house and feels more interested as the days pass. They have conversations regarding her uncle's interview, Kathakali, Hindu mythology, and her uncle's life as a performer and a human being. She shares her opinions and views concerning various subjects that she never does with her husband. Through all these, she becomes more drawn toward him. As she seems attracted to Chris, she wants Shyam to love her more. She appeared guilty for thinking of another man lying in her bed with her husband. Shyam frequently expresses exaggerated comments about her beauty and likes her being beautiful and charming herself for him. He wishes her to be a more beautiful simple homely girl than a sensible woman. He considers that she delights in his extravagant compliments about her, and it will make her suppose that their marriage was a blissful one. She always feels despair in their marriage because she regards herself as not suited to him. He deserves someone better, a woman who enjoys his pride and sugar-coated words.

Shyam repeatedly complains about her lack of concern in his pursuits. They often encourage a conversation about the early days of marriage. She asserts that they two have two diverse opinions on everything: music or films, political parties, and

even the choice of plants in the garden. As the years pass, they avoid the topics they dispute; thus, they have no conversation. She assumed that if she was busy with something, she must be able to get rid of the thoughts about Chris. She forcefully tries to drive him from her mind. As the interview progressed between Chris and her uncle, he asked her to transcribe her uncle's voice because of his difficulty in interpreting his tone. She acknowledges it cheerfully because she gets an excuse to visit him regularly, and if Shyam knew about it, she would say that she does not wish her uncle's words to be distorted. The moments she spent with Chris were seen as extremely glad because she felt certain intimacy while they were together. When Shyam asked her about how long do the interviews last. She says she is unaware of it. She wished "it would never end. As long as Uncle tell his story, Chris was his captive"(107). She expects Chris to be there for a long time. Her interest in Chris can be considered a rebellious act towards her dominant husband.

The pathetic situation of a childless woman and society's insensitive attitude towards them is severely criticised in the work. Women are often stigmatised in these situations even though a couple shares equal responsibility. After two years of their marriage, Shyam's sister Rani Oppol inquired about her plan to get pregnant. She said they would have one when they were ready. She constantly expected that a child would bridge the distance between them. Nevertheless, she would not get pregnant. She sadly recalls an incident when she visited Rani Oppol's house, and there was a ritual named 'seemantham' in their neighbouring house, but Rani Oppol openly forbids her by saying, "I don't think you should come with us. You know how people are; they think a married woman who hasn't had children for so long is a macchi. They will not like it. It is inauspicious to have a barren woman at such function... the evil eye" (114). She went through extreme bitterness of this incident.

Radha's marriage to Shyam is a bad memory for her. She suspects that Shyam accepts her despite realising her lousy past, maybe because of her father's offer of a considerable dowry. She believes that his love for her is connected to her wealth and considers this marriage a profitable business deal. He regarded her as a delightful possession, like owning other things like a hotel, shopping complex and a plantation. She always feels an absence of genuine affection and concern in their relationship. Shyam's intense urge to possess her more than love is the essential thing that builds their relationship. So, she explores the fantasies that a love affair offers with Chris. Their meeting became frequent, and her Uncle and Shyam were equally suspicious of her. She spent late nights with him in her husband's absence. Uncle warned her that there is no justification for infidelity, but she said she loved him and that he is a fire in her blood. She regarded her marriage as something hopeless and exasperated by his over-possessive and outrageous attitude of forcefully taking her liberties as an individual.

Women showing rebellious attitudes toward their husband's domination by indulging in love outside marriage is a recurring theme in many novels by recent writers. She sought comfort in Chris, which became an exclusive means of liberation from her unhappy married life. Her mind was free of remorse while thinking of Shyam, which she had experienced earlier. She feels torn between two men, and she thinks this feeling is similar to her mother, who married both her father and her father's brother. She never tries to love her husband and thinks Shyam always considers her possession which he tactfully earns from her father. Shyam is her cousin, but she does not even have a closeness towards him, even though they knew each other before marriage. She does not give much importance to him after meeting with Chris. She feels spirited, happy and complete only in the company of Chris.

Extra-marital affair with a foreigner manifests her desire to show vengeance toward the patriarchal domination of the family structure. A woman with sexual autonomy and liberal ideals can be seen here.

The characterisation of Radha is different from other female characters that usually appear in recent novels. She feels guilty about her deeds when she discovers Shyam is a sterile person. Later Chris discloses himself as the son of an earlier foreign lover of her Uncle; Radha feels betrayed in her life. If Chris is his uncle's son, she has made a massive mistake by having an incestuous relationship with him. A sense of guilt engulfed her mind as she betrayed Shyam and Chris. When she learned that Shyam is sterile, she felt sympathy and hated herself for not understanding him. As a penalty for deceiving Shyam, she keeps away from Shyam's life. She neither chooses a life with Chris nor continues a married relationship with Shyam. She wants to lead a life of her own because she felt humiliated by behaving so callously in her married life.

Saadiya maintains a unique personality compared to Radha. She is presented through Koman's memories. Koman is the son of Saadiya and Sethu. She belongs to a very conservative and orthodox Muslim community of Arabipatanam. They are the descendants of Arabs and are proud of their ancestry. Women of their community lead secluded life. They are not allowed to step out into the common alleys without the accompaniment of their men. They had secret alleys used only by female folk of the community. The male community impose specific rules: "None of you shall go out unless we are with you. No man may look at a woman unless she is his wife, sister, mother or daughter. If a woman comes in his path, he must turn his head back on her and let her pass"(97). They built secret alleys connecting a side door or a kitchen door. Women can use the secret alleys and men the common alleys. Common alleys

are not meant for women. They can only step into the common alley only with their men. Saadiya belongs to a Muslim community ruled by religious officials, including her father. They set some rules for the women in their community and make them accept blindly that all these rules are for their welfare.

Saadiya, the daughter of Haji Masood Ahmed, a religious official of Arabipattanam, is a girl who yearns for freedom and has an inner urge to experience the outer world:

Saadiya stared at the square of blue above her head. Twenty feet by thirty feet. That was the measure of her sky, the peripheries of her life. She touched the grey walls of the terrace roof. Even if she stood on her toes, she could not look over the wall. It stood a solid six feet and two inches high, ensuring she would never see what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone. Saadiya felt what was by now a familiar sense of despair. Would she like her sisters and every other woman born here to live and die hidden by these walls? Was there never to be a way out from here? (99).

Her father constantly cautioned her that Arab blood ran through their veins; they were navigators who had crossed the blue seas and established their path there. Whenever she understood her confinement, she wished to tell her father that " if it is their blood that runs in our veins, then it is inevitable the way I feel. There is singing in my head that says there is so much to see, so much to do, so much to know. It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want; see and do whatever you like, and I am expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys"(99). This shows her frustration in leading a secluded life. She is the only person who questions her underprivileged plight as a woman in the whole community.

A woman's life confined in four walls of her home and longing for freedom is pictured in Saadiya. She craved to step outside the secret alley and explore the world outside. When she visited Nadira, her sister's house, she was fascinated by the pictures she had seen in a book that Nadira's husband acquired on his trip to Singapore. " Saadiya couldn't read the words, but there were pictures in it. Of places, blue seas, and green hills. Of roads that ran endlessly and gardens that had no walls. Saadiya could not stop looking at the pictures. They gave her yearning a greater edge, a sharper definition"(101). The picture of the world outside Arabipatanam gave her more dreams about the beautiful world outside. These pictures accelerated her desire, and she wanted to enter the world outside.

When she reaches Nadira's house and finds it locked, a secret desire pulls her feet. She decides to reach the common alley with the thought that there would be no one and no one would know it. She took away the black fold of cloth that covered her face at the secret alley. While she reached the common alley and enjoyed the blue sky, she accidentally bumped into a man on a bicycle. With horror, she realises that her face is exposed and to her misfortune, she is spotted by Zuleika, her family's servant. The servant did what was expected of her. She informs her family, and her father does what Saadiya anticipated. "He had Zuleika heat an iron rod till it blazed a fiery orange, and with tears in his eyes, he laid it on my calf. This hurts me more than it will hurt you, he said. But I can't let you go unpunished for risking the honour of my family"(130). Her father placed it three times on her leg and said, "it is your age. You feel the need to break the rules. This is my Saadiya; good girl is still the restlessness in you. The next time you feel the need to break your reins, remember how your flesh melted and how my heart broke"(130). Even though she faced brutal

punishment, she did not feel guilty about her deeds. She does not cease fantasising about the sky with no end.

The women living in Arabipatanam are allowed to see the sea once every year, but all the men there go to the beach every day as they go to the mosque. Women of the Muslim community of Arabipattanam lead tormented life, and they have no communication with the outer world, so most of them believe that these rules are for their security and well-being. It is Saadiya who felt the urge to break out of this confinement. All the other women unknowingly enjoy the oppression as a blessing to them. They fear their men and the harsh punishments meted out to them if they protest, only Saadiya showed the inner strength to combat the ill-treatments.

The man she meets in the common alley is Sethu, an assistant to the doctor. Sethu fell in love with her at first sight, and she, too, is fond of him. As she is a person who explores new experiences in her life, she decides to continue the affair and decides to face courageously all hardships that come. She has a strong and unbending attitude which she does not compromise. She took bold decisions about her future. She challenges her father when he arranges a marriage for her. When she took a rigid stand against her father's decision, her father disowned her, and she married Sethu. When she became pregnant, she decided to name the child a Muslim name and bring him up as a true Muslim. However, Sethu opposed it violently; he agreed that their son would choose his ways when he is a grown-up. " You keep saying my, my, my... He is my son as well. My blood is in him. What's wrong with you, Saadiya? You sound like a fanatic, you should like one of the idiots in Arabipatanam. you choose to give it up, so why are you inflicting it all on this little child" (228). It is a severe blow to her inner self. Sethu said if she thought that she had made a mistake by marrying a non-muslim, she could leave and go back to her family, leaving the child with Sethu.

She left the house with a broken mind and committed suicide. She does not want to compromise her identity as a faithful Muslim and her attitude at any cost. When she felt that her identity is questioned, she defended it by taking her own life. She cannot resolve the confusion that if Sethu too disowns her, there is no place for her to go; the only comfort is death which she sought.

By a close evaluation of the texts, it can be assumed that each of these characters doesn't choose to be the victim of destiny or fate, but they struggle to rewrite their life in such a fashion as desired. By examining the life of Janaki, it can be understood that even though she had a love affair, she acted according to the wish of her parents. After marriage, she decided to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. However, due to her husband and in-laws' cold and negative attitude, she senses her married life is an utter failure. Her efforts to become acceptable by becoming a mother are also futile. From that life, she has nothing to hope for. So, she tries to live that life as she desires. She continues her education by completing her degree and post-graduate courses.

Meanwhile, she met her old lover Arjun. As he offers her a happy future life, she chooses it happily. She has nothing to think about when shown a life that she dreams of and gets rid of her unhappy and desperate life. She has no other option, and it is quite natural to accept what makes one happy thus, she rewrites her life according to her wish—more than anything, she chose that life for the well-being of her especially needed a child. Life with Arjun is a bonus; she gets in the way of her efforts to build a better life for her and her daughter. For the sake of her daughter, she acts courageously and boldly. Her acts are a means to bring about her inner strength and individuality. The journey to a new life is a path to her self-realisation.

Though Maya seems flirtatious at first, the real reason behind it justifies her act. When she shares her sorrows with Rahul, she concludes that only she can help her get out of her miserable life. So, she decides to resume her education, if her husband likes it or not. When she gains a job and can stand by herself, she will escape from her married life. She felt caged in her life as a married woman. Her husband tramples her freedom and liberties. As a free-willed individual, her yearning for freedom becomes the motivating force towards accomplishing her individuality. She is not ready to compromise her identity for the sake hopeless marriage.

Secrets and Lies is the story of a group of women who have been friends for a long time. Each of these women faces different problems in their life. Bubbles, the wife of a millionaire, is bored of her monotonous life and has no reach to her husband's personal and business life. On the other hand, Samira is disillusioned by a dominant husband, who lacked interest in her as she grew oversize after being a mother. Her individuality, personal interest, wishes, and opinions are devalued daily. She tolerated it because she had no other choice. On their visit to India, both she and Bubbles was offered a job at Zeba Khan's charity organisation. They felt a new sense of courage by this that they could live by themselves even if they left their family. When they become fearless about their life and risk their married life to gain new happiness, they realise their space and individuality. Her fundamental transformation occurs when Bubbles decides to be comfortable for herself and not others. She chooses to go ahead in her relationship with Gio as she discovers her husband is gay. Samira, who has no choices in her family life and is a mere shadow of her husband, acts boldly by questioning her husband. She wants to know about her worth and place in his life. She dared to forego that relationship if he is not ready to change his attitude.

Anita and Zeba lead single life in contrast to Bubbles and Samira's. Anita can only adjust to a person who accepts herself and her individuality. That is why she has unsuccessful relationships earlier. With Hugh, she is happy as she has enough space to express her personality and flower her identity. Even though Zeba has many drawbacks, she is a person with some responsibilities toward society because she feels she has more to do in the community as an actor. She decided to begin a charity group for Mumbai Street kids and abused kids. These two women had found their own space. However, Samira and Bubbles had only started their efforts to identify their space by the end of the novel.

Women characters of Anita Nair share similar aspects. The female characters in *Ladies Coupe*: Akhila, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret, Marikolanthu, and Karpagam, are powerful enough to transform their lives as they desire, though they are considered powerless by menfolk and society. All of them have an individuality of their own. The stories they share make readers realise that the life situations and problems they faced inspired them a lot to become empowered. From the age of nineteen, Akhila has been the guardian of her family. She is responsible for bringing up her siblings, settling their life and taking care of their needs. Both she and her family cared less about having a life of her own. Later she realised that living for others' wishes is a worthless life. So, she chose a life where her happiness and desire came first. As she is bold enough to lead a single life, or she may reunite with her old lover or find another man, the choice is absolutely hers. She is no more reluctant to discard her wishes and desires for the sake of others. By the end of the journey, she realised what she lacked in her life. The journey is a quest to identify her 'self' and identity.

Janaki and Prabha Devi have broadly similar views about life and relationships. They depend too much on their partners and have a shared individuality. However, in their inner self, they crave for freedom. Prabha Devi has her own choice of space that she draws out from her life. She can quickly become assertive and self-reliant when she wishes to be. She has her likes and dislikes in everything, but Janaki contrasts her. She is emphatic in associating with her husband. She was made to believe and internalise it by her husband. Her life experience made her think that she is fragile and had lived someone else's life. So, she longs to be strong and independent. She feels that she can do things better without being dependent on her husband.

Margaret is a clever woman who wisely handles her controlling and selfish husband. She is powerful as water, which dissolves everything. From her, Akhila must gain the courage to not care for others too much in her life. Marikolanthu's life becomes an inspiration to Akhila. She has faced so many more hardships than any other woman in the couple. Despite these, she tries to be happy in her life by designing it in her own way. Marikolanthu's life motivated Akhila to develop a strong individuality of her own. Karpagam is a woman with liberal ideas. Her words and ideas are the driving force for Akhila's urge for freedom. Karpagam insisted her to have a life of her own, where prime importance is given to her happiness. Karpagam is a widow but has her views regarding her life. She focuses less on others' attitudes and cares less about what others think. She says her life is easy because of her confident stance, and she wants Akhila to transform herself. Karpagam has a special place in making Akhila a self-reliant personality.

Radha in *Mistress* is different from other women characters selected for the study. She carries a rebellious attitude throughout her life. She has her own choices, but her marriage is not her happiest choice. From the shock of a betrayed love affair,

she had nothing to do but agree to marry Shyam. Due to this, she felt a vast space that nothing could bridge. Real love and understanding are lacking in their married life. That is why she falls for the foreigner. She lived alone when she realised her mistakes, neither with her husband nor Chris. She is content with being alone and wants a free life without personal ties. Saadiya carries a different personality than Radha. She is stable and has a determined attitude which forces her to embrace death. Her identity conflict of being a true Muslim is strong enough to take bold actions when Sethu challenges her. She realised that she had failed in her choice by marrying a non-muslim and continuing in that relationship would be miserable to express her individuality. She had no place of shelter; the only option in front of her was to take her life.

In all these works, women do not try to act within the frames of being intelligible women. They uphold their feminine roles to make their life fit and suitable in society. Though they have rebellious attitudes against different societal notions, they show how much success will be a woman when she becomes a strong-willed individual in society. They never deny what is feminine but perceive it as a valuable tool to realise themselves. The characters never try to repudiate their role in the family as mothers, wives and daughters but make it more desirable as suited to discover themselves. Their primary concern in life is to make themselves comfortable by recapturing their life as pleasing to themselves by realising their feminine roles and self. Even though they break family ties and indulge in relationships outside marriage it can be assumed that they prefer to move to a more comfortable zone. From a failed relationship, they move to relationships which offer them space to assert their self and a life pleasing to them.

Chapter 4

New Masculine Sensibility, Changed Domestic Setting and Female Sexuality

One of the remarkable features of postfeminism is acknowledging the importance of the role of men in the familial and domestic sphere. Postfeminist writers generally concentrate on the status of men and the role they perform in a family structure. A deviation from the conventional perception of dominating men to domesticated men is manifested in postfeminist writers. A renewed perspective on the necessity of fathers for the emotional, psychological, intellectual and social development of a child. Postfeminist writings stress the unique contribution that a man as a father endows to the well-being of family and home. Fathering and fatherhood are equally valued with the role of a mother in bringing up a child. Such an essential aspect was looked down upon by the past feminist movement. Postfeminist writers portray an advanced type of menfolk in a supportive role who willingly undertakes domestic chores and child-rearing, and undertake the responsibility of making a perfect home. This type of new characterisation, different perspectives regarding widowhood and a changed outlook on female sexuality are discussed in this chapter.

Jaishree Misra's works are outstanding for the presentation of male figures like Arjun, Rahul, and Hugh, who fit into the category of contemporary men. Arjun serves as a comparison to Janaki's husband, Suresh. Suresh is an individual who escapes from all his responsibilities as a husband and as a father. From the early days of marriage, Janaki realised that her husband is a person who played the role of an escapist as well. He fails to serve as emotional support for her in problems with her in-laws. He always engages himself with business tours and meetings, and Janaki

feels lonely and secluded in her husband's home. She desperately wants to get rid of this situation and the only alternative in front of her is to become a mother. Becoming a father transforms men into more responsible individuals, however, here too, Suresh does not score anything. When the child was discovered to be mentally handicapped, he seemed unaffected. He neither becomes support nor a consolation for her. He became more aloof and colder towards her and the child.

A child with special needs requires care from both the father and mother. In Janaki's situation, Suresh and his family consider the child's care as her sole obligation. In this critical situation, they do not offer to help her or assist her in her difficulties. It is with her knack that she tried different schools for her. She worked as a part-time helper in a school for children with special needs. Her struggles to handle a child with special needs forced her to acquire a scholarship to higher studies in London, where she met her old lover, Arjun. Arjun treated her with compassion and tenderness, which was sufficient to soothe the mental troubles she faced in her life. Arjun turns up to be much more responsible for her because he does not want to lose her as before. He promised her that he would wait for her in the future.

Janaki realised she could prefer to remain as wife to Suresh and lead a futile life or have a happy life as she dreamed, and she determined to spend her life with Arjun. In her relationship with Arjun, she is doubtful; her daughter is a child with special needs and needs much care. Can Arjun cope with her. However, her fears and suspicion were out of place. Arjun reassures her that by welcoming Janaki into his life, he accepts her daughter too. A life without Riya is inconceivable for her. Arjun seemed caring towards Janaki and Riya, which was lacking on Suresh's part. As the novel ends, Janaki designs life with Arjun. The story ends with the remarks that tomorrow's next chapter will begin, implying a happy life.

A significant reason for Janaki's desire to resume her relationship with Arjun is the absence of understanding on the part of Suresh. Suresh fails to help and support her physically, mentally, and emotionally. He is a failure as a husband and as a father. Janaki cannot expect anything from him or can share the agonies and responsibilities. There are instances of how cruel and heartless he is towards his daughter. Once he took Riya from Janaki, no one knew where he went. He plans to stop Janaki from going abroad. He tried to play a trick with their daughter. He considers the child as a tool to tame Janaki when she claims a divorce. Suresh only agrees to give back their daughter when his marriage is fixed with another woman. He proved himself to be a person who does not possess paternal care and genuine affection towards the child. He regards Riya as a valuable means to take vengeance against Janaki. At the time of schooling their child, Suresh seems uninterested and unresponsive. His irresponsibility towards the child is something that Janaki cannot bear, which makes her more attached to Riya. This disposition of Suresh leaves her thinking that he is unsuitable to be a father figure for Riya. These incidents serve as a strong reason why Janaki seeks the help and support that Arjun offers.

In the novel *Afterwards*, there is a considerable disparity in the personalities of Govind and Rahul. Govind is a dominant, suspicious, and ruling husband. Maya is tired of her husband's attitude of denying her freedom as an individual. She suggests that her married life is a beautiful cage she cannot escape from. Govind's impertinence drives her rebellious towards married life. She is drawn to Rahul, a foreigner who is her neighbour. She visits him frequently, and she invites him to have dinner at her home when Govind is away on a business trip. Before dinner, Rahul helps her place dishes and food items on the table; after dinner, he helps her clean the kitchen by performing some domestic chores, leaving her surprised, and she is new to

this kind of male figure. She thanks him for his company in the loneliness she felt in her house. With Rahul's presence, she overcomes her solitude in her husband's absence by planning a short trip. In Rahul, she finds a man with whom she can share her sorrows and confusion in life.

Maya seeks Rahul's help to escape from married life. As Govind is a man with suspicion, he misinterprets Rahul's visit to his house. He is violent toward Maya; in that critical situation, she cannot do anything but pursue Rahul's help from her parents. When Maya is with Rahul in Delhi, he takes enough care and responsibility than exploiting her. In London, too, he became a suitable life partner. His attitude towards Maya's daughter Anjali was worth mentioning. However, he was not her biological father of her; he offered enormous care and affection to the child. When Maya and Rahul establish a life of their own, he never regards Anjali as another man's daughter. He graciously gives his fatherly love and care to the child. After Maya's death, his only comfort in life was Anjali. He is shocked and desperate when he knows he wants to part with Anjali very quickly because he does not have the biological father's claim over her.

To leave Anjali is immense misery for Rahul, and he seemed empty after Anjali's return to India. He indeed resolves to end his life after completing Maya's death rites. His relationship with Anjali is strong even though he took care of her only for three years. Even Govind appears jealous of their intimacy. He affirms to Rahul that he will send Anjali for a short visit to him and never lose her. Maya's mother, too, is moved by Rahul's consideration for her. She, too, promises him that she will never let Anjali forget Rahul. In the characterisation of Rahul, there is some newness. When a woman writer pictures a male narrator, the character often echoes feminine sensibilities. Rahul quotes the temperament more of a woman rather than a man, or

the writer may be showing the readers how a man should be from a woman's perspective.

In *Secrets and Lies*, the writer portrays two dominant and tyrant husbands. One is Binkie Raheja, Bubbles' husband, and the other is Akbar, Samira's husband. Hugh, Anita's lover, sets out to make a difference in it. He possesses broad views concerning female individuality and space. Anita tries to impress him by inviting him to her flat and thinks ashamed of herself for her incompetence in cooking delicious dishes to please him. Hugh is a man with exceptional skills in cooking and prepares food for Anita several times. So, Anita feels sorry for not being proficient in cooking food. When Hugh visits her flat, her kitchen is messed up; he cleans it and cooks for her. Here Anita lacks the sense of cooking and home care, but Hugh is immense with this ability.

Hugh is a person who provides sufficient space for Anita's identity and expressions. This is a quality that Binkie and Akbar lacked. Those men do not even recognise that their wives have an identity of their own. Such male figures seek to force their rules and words upon their wives. These traditional men hardly show concern and respect towards their wives' opinions, attitudes, and desires. Bubbles and Samira feel a significant gap in their relations with their husbands, which cannot be bridged. They feel happy and content only in the company of their friends. Lack of understanding and companionship make their married life bitter and miserable.

When Anita had a violent debate with Hugh before she visited India, she felt that he was like her earlier companions of unsuccessful relations. However, when she returns from India, Hugh is present to receive her at the airport. Even though Anita misbehaves, he is so generous and values his relationship with her. Anita feels sorry

for her harsh words and seeks an apology for them. From this, she is sure that he can be a perfect companion for her. Anita can adjust to someone who approves of her individuality and respect her space. In Hugh, she finds a man according to her wish.

Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* and *Afterwards* possess some similar characteristic features through which the author attacks the prejudices of the male community of Kerala. The patriarchal family structure is considerably condemned in both these works. The presence of a North Indian male figure who serves as a comfort to the female protagonist is a common feature in both these works. A renewed male personality who acknowledges a woman's individuality and self is seen in her works. Such men possess new perspectives and set different dimensions in man-woman relationships. The writer severely denounces the Kerala system of marriage and relations, which gives no room for the individual advancement of women.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe'* does not emphasise a new type of male character, but in *Mistress*, Christopher Stewart from London, who comes to Kerala to interview Radha's uncle, a kathakali performer, can be an illustration of it. Even though Radha feels physically attracted to him earlier, she becomes more attached to him as she picks up chances to interact with him. She shares her views on Kathakali, and Indian Mythology and has talked on various subjects. She even shares her confusion and sorrow regarding her parents with Chris. Moreover, she feels certain intimacy towards him. She lacks a similar understanding and warmth in her married life with Shyam.

When Radha and Christopher's relationship uncovers different aspects, she seems disgusted with her husband. She speculates how mean her husband is, who makes her believe that her married life is blissful with his flattering words. In Chris, she finds a perfect companion because Chris does not carry prejudiced views about

her. The two sounded similar opinions and thoughts regarding everything. She affirms this different attitude toward everything, and most often, their conversation ends in a quarrel. So, as years passed, they ceased to talk to avoid such disputes. Radha acknowledges that she is not suited to him because Shyam prefers a submissive woman who fascinates him with her feminine wiles to a strong independent woman.

As time passes, couples may develop a sense of togetherness in a married relationship. In Radha and Shyam's life, that understanding never works out. They both cannot sense each other's feelings mutually. When Shyam tries to impress Radha, she condemns him badly, which leaves a sense of resentment in him. Radha never tries to get closer to him or to have a deep feeling of intimacy with him. It may be because of the shock she received from her early love- affair and a constant feeling that Shyam married her only for the vast dowry offered by her father. Shyam, in turn, tries to force his love on her, which she cannot bear. Till the arrival of Chris, they share a cold relationship. Radha is detached from Shyam and feels a considerable gap that a child can fill.

Nevertheless, Radha does not get pregnant after eight years of married life. With the arrival of Chris, the gap between them increases. She does not feel guilty about committing infidelity to her husband. She discovers real love and passion in Chris, which Shyam lacks. Here the writer tries to hand over the woman her sexual autonomy. These writers contrast two types of men, one who fits perfectly into the traditional roles and the other a new type who is more domesticated and compassionate to a woman's feelings. The works produced in Indian English Literature rarely portray men with sympathy and care towards the woman and male characters who accept a responsible role in bringing up children. The works of modern women writers manifest a new type of woman and a new type of man.

In *Ladies Coupe'*, the author attacks the old conception of marriage that a happy marriage is the sole responsibility of a woman. Akhila's mother, Margaret's parents, Janaki's parents, Prabha Devi's parents, and Marikolanthu's mother maintained this view and made their daughters internalise it. This belief is infused into their minds, apparently from their girlhood. Girls are given guidance in acquiring skills to make a perfect home. From childhood, elders try to groom their daughters to become proficient homemakers. They are trained on how to make an ideal home by their skills and to bring up children, which are the essential duties of a married woman. Marriage is an integral part of a woman's life, and a woman must devote herself to making a marriage successful.

Akhila expresses the idea of marriage as she waits for the train watching the elderly couple at the railway station. She feels, "what is it about marriage that makes it possible for a man and woman to mesh their lives, dreams, and even their thought in such a complete fashion?" (10). Her mother's concept appeared in her mind whenever she thought of it. She always has both likes and dislikes in her parent's relationship. She describes them as too much made for each other. It may be because her mother married her uncle as per Tamil Brahmin custom. Their taste, features, and thought match each other. Her parents took great pride in this sameness. Akhila's father has been a part of her mother since her birth. Her father is not merely a husband to her mother but a part of her, and she is much devoted to him.

From childhood, Akhila internalises her mother's theory of marriage and the woman's role as a wife. Her mother has her assumptions regarding a good wife.

First of all, no good wife could serve two masters- the masters being her father and her husband. A good wife learned to put her husband's interest

before anyone else's, even her father's. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he said. There is no such thing as equal marriage, Amma said. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. When one wants to prove one's equality, there is warring and sparring all the time. It is easier and simpler to accept one's station in life and live accordingly. A woman is not meant to take on a man's role. Or the gods would have made her do so. So, what is all this about equal in a marriage. (14)

Her mother does not have many choices in life; everything is left to her father. Her mother is of the idea that her father knows everything best, so his decisions will not be wrong. Her mother never allows Akhila to say anything against her father's words.

Akhila's mother despised women who earn and behave independently. When Akhila wished for a pencil, like her friend Karpagam, her mother was angry because her father found it challenging to meet both ends every month. Her mother does not want to waste money buying such useless things. Akhila suggests to her mother that she could teach music classes to children like her friend's mother, who takes dance classes. Her mother's reaction is surprising; though the family is not in a good financial state, her mother did not even think of being an earner. She says, "Do you think your father would allow such comings and goings-on here? Don't you know how strict he is? Anyway, do you think your father would let me? If I wanted a working wife, I would have married someone like that; he told me when we were first married. "I want my wife to take care of my children and me. I do not want her so caught up with her job that she has no time for the house or taking care of my needs" (13). Her mother's solid and blind faith in conventions and male domination is evident here.

After Akhila's father's death, her mother's life is pathetic and miserable "with every passing year, her mother's grief seemed only to increase" (11). Akhila grows up watching her parents' relationship, and when she becomes a woman, she is confused about her views on marriage. When Akhila completed her pre-university course, her parents ceased her education and expected her to learn housekeeping skills. To make her fit to get married. Her mother always insists on drawing the kolam outside the front doorstep every morning, "that's how a home is judged". She is never tired of telling Akhila, "Do you know what Thiruvailuvar said? A true wife is she whose virtues match her home" (49). Her mother has a collection of kolam designs to match every occasion. Akhila ironically says, "Good housewifely kolams brimming with all housewifely virtues that made mothers-in-law refer to their daughters-in-law as the family's guiding light" (50). Every morning her mother's first task is to evaluate Akhila's kolam. She hated all kolams, their preparations, and the time it consumes.

A kolam indicates the woman's attitude toward the house in her mother's words. So she must be careful while drawing it, "your kolam should reflect who you are: a good housewife"(50). One day when Akhila asked her mother's permission to go to Sarasa Mami's house, her mother insisted she not spend too much time under the sun. Akhila was old enough to get married, and she must be careful about her complexion. All men preferred fair-skinned wives even though they were black as coal themselves. The writer gravely criticises patriarchal notions of marriage through her mother's convictions. Her mother's perception regarding a woman's role and status in a family is challenged by the sudden death of Akhila's father. Since her father died in harness, Akhila is offered a job in the income-tax department. Thus, Akhila has to take her father's role as the family's caretaker.

For Akhila, the journey is to get an answer to the question, "Can a woman live by herself?" (21). For a long time, she has been haunted by this question in her mind. When she meets her friend Karpagam, she forces Akhila to have a life and family of her own. She suggests that Akhila start a life for herself by ending her sister's dependence on her. So, she decides to embark on a journey alone to find answers to her questions. When she gets a berth in the ladies' coupe,' she is pleased that she can find out the solution to her dilemma. There were six passengers, including her. She thinks that by asking their opinion on does a woman needs a man to complete a woman's life, she can find a solution to her question. As she approaches them with the question, they agree to share their views concerning life and what, according to them, marriage means.

In a patriarchal society, women's role is minimal, and the conventions perpetuate the idea that women are inessential and only for the well-being of the male community. Janaki's life echoes this belief; she says that from childhood until now, she has been cared for and protected. As a daughter, she was under the care of her father and brothers. "Her mother and aunts took great care to perfect what they called marriage skills- cooking and cleaning, sewing and pickling" (25). Her marriage is an arranged one "theirs was an arranged marriage; the horoscope matched, the families liked each other, and they were considered perfectly suited for each other" (24). She was eighteen at that time. She is not curious about marriage and does not know what to expect from marriage. From her girlhood, she has been trained and groomed for the destination of marriage.

Janaki says they share forty years of marriage. She believes that "a woman's duty is to get married. To be a good wife and mother. I believed in that tired old cliché that home was woman's kingdom" (23). Till these years, she ruled her kingdom

well. Her husband was there to take care of her in everything. She cannot do anything without his help in these years. Being fragile and demanding her husband's help in everything, Janaki feels tired in her life. She says, "If I ever be alone, I would manage perfectly. I was quite confident about that. I think I was tired of being this fragile creature" (23). She realises that by accepting what her mother and elders taught her, she becomes a woman with less courage and looks down upon accepting what her mother and elders taught; she becomes a woman with less courage and looks down on strong women. She tries to be strong and does not want to assume that her son will take care of her after her husband's death. She wants to live a better life alone. She values her relationship with her husband. She believes that a woman needs a man to make her feel complete in her life and holds her mother's view that a woman cannot live alone. When she reaches a certain age, there is a change to this assumption. She feels that she spoils her freedom and individuality by being fragile and unconfident. She makes her mind strong and manages to survive alone. When her husband dies, she prefers to stay alone than depend on her son.

From Janaki's story, Akhila does not pick up a definite answer, so she waits for others to express their views on marriage and life. Next is Margaret's turn to suggest her views on marriage. As she is a bright student, her parents are not keen on marrying her at a younger age. When she is recognised as having an affair, her parents happily agree to it; because the man is well-educated and from an aristocratic family. The night before the wedding, her mother comes to instruct her on how she must be a good wife. It is clear to Margaret that her family's admiration and respect for him had increased over these years, and it would be challenging to convince them about his actual character. When she informs her mother about the unhappiness in her life, her mother's response is surprising. She said, "it is a woman's responsibility to keep the

marriage happy. Men have so many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of marriage oiled" (112). This left her to think that marriage is solely the responsibility of women and that don't men have anything to do with it. She is critical of why everybody thinks a man is busy and a woman has nothing to do.

The writer severely criticises the patriarchal notion that marriage is for the sake of a woman and man has no part in it. In the words of Margaret's mother, the whole responsibility of a happy and unhappy relationship is in the hands of women. Such a notion means that a woman must not create unwanted problems which society considers trivial. In most situations, disputes occur when a woman questions her husband. In her mother's words, a dutiful woman possesses the patience to make her life happier to this view, Margaret showed much disagreement. When she realises that her family will not support her in divorcing her husband, she devises an intelligent plan to teach her husband what she can do, thus recapturing her happy life. From Margaret's words, Akhila gets new perspectives on how her life must be. Akhila understands that she shall seek what makes her life happy; other things are irrelevant. She has to look for herself, and no one will do it. Akhila also learns to care less about other people's thoughts and attitudes.

Prabha Devi's story convinces Akhila that only she can change her life into a happy and peaceful one, and no one will be there for her in that pursuit. According to Prabha Devi, her training for marriage was from her school days. She was given a convent education because a convent would groom her well and make her fashionable to speak perfect English and fit to get a good alliance in the future. In her opinion, there are three types of man-woman relations. First, a woman must show her man that she is incapable of doing anything beyond the periphery of the home so that her man

will manage all things. At first, he will care for her and protect her. However, it will not last long, and he turns to be a tyrant and will control even her thoughts. Next is if a woman is independent enough to manage things herself, and when she needs her man to hold on and cherish her or share her sorrows, he may not be there. Because he thinks she will cope alone. An intelligent woman must choose a middle path that is more suitable. She wants to advise her daughter about this third path which her mother did not tell her about while grooming her to be a perfect housewife.

In Prabha Devi's words, she would not be like her mother because her mother had left many things untouched while grooming her. She says that she could explain her daughter to become more confident and independent than her. She realised that what one gives to life comes back manifold. She encouraged Akhila that she must confidently choose what makes her happy. She must acknowledge her self-worth; only then would she be capable of finding absolute gratification in her life. Prabha Devi is a person who knows to act independently according to the circumstances.

Marikolanthu is a woman who, from her early girlhood, familiarised herself with the homosexual relations of Missy K and Missy V. When she is raped, she feels much humiliation. She thinks that nothing can be more wrong than a man raping a woman. After this incident, she feels much hatred against the menfolk and disagrees with marrying Murugesan, who raped her. As she is traumatised by the experience, she hates marriages, protection, and care from a man. She prefers to stay single than marry a man who is the reason for her tragedy.

A homosexual relationship with Sujata Akka and an adulterous relationship with Sujata Akka's husband creates many problems in Marikolanthu's life. She welcomed Sridar Anna Sujata Akka's husband for the sake of her mistress. She

discards all these relations and starts a new life as a single mother to be happy and content in her life. She finds a homosexual relationship more meaningful than a man-woman relationship. She notices nothing wrong with Missy K and Missy V's relationship after the incident of rape. In her view, there may be less chance for pleasure in a man-woman relationship. Most often, it turns into a routine and an obligation. She identifies that in a homosexual relationship, more attention is on pleasure and happiness, which is the proper way to love someone. From Marikolanthu's words, Akhila realised that living for others is absurd. She gets new insights from the terms of Marikolanthu. With that energy, she reaches Kanyakumari and gains many experiences in life, which enables her to pursue her dreams.

Widowhood is a much-discussed concept in these works. There is Janaki's mother, grandmother, and Maya's mother in Jaishree Misra's works, and in Anita Nair, there is Akhila's mother and Karpagam. One thing noteworthy is that the authors employ contrasting views on this notion. The old-generation women like Janaki's mother, grandmother, Maya's mother, and Akhila's mother hold highly conventional opinions. They uphold the view that a widow occupies the margins and must lead a secluded life of peace and calmness. Joy and celebration are swiped away from their life. Such women must behave according to societal norms and be expected to observe the rules that customs and traditions enforce upon them. Widows are isolated from every occasion and often considered unlucky and face much discrimination and are not allowed to enjoy a mainstream life.

Many women consider widowhood a pathetic state, the end of their good days, and feel cursed. Their physical appearance revealed it; they often chose white or faded colours with fewer accessories and decorations. They find solace in prayers and old recollections of their life. They are the least essential and are regarded as incomplete

without their men. When Janaki's father died, her mother accepted her widowhood as an inevitable thing in life and agreed with what society demanded from a widow. The novel *Ancient Promises* portrays the pathetic life of two widows, Janaki's mother and her grandmother. She describes her grandmother's house as "my grandmother's house was already a joyless place of prayer and old memories, without menfolk..."(144). Jaishree Misra sensitively mentions that "women deprived of men are like sad little shadows that had lost their bodies. There was nowhere to go. Only women had the good fortune to still have a life with their men went out after dark to the cinema and restaurant and other people's houses"(144). Janaki says that her grandmother's house is "now lurked with half shuttered windows and a forty-watt bulb shining behind to huge mango tree" (145). Widows and divorced women occupied fringes of life; they were respected when they chose a life gracefully and spent their time in prayers and reminiscence. The pathetic state is described as "a widow could not give her child away in marriages receive a new son or daughter-in-law even is the first to fondle grandchild. Such joys were reserved for that happy band of sumangalis, or those-blessed- by- marriage" (144). Miserable life of widows and society's attitude towards them is violently scrutinised here.

One incident presented her mother's grief-stricken life after her father's death. Her mother and grandmother have accepted widowhood with enthusiasm born of practical good sense. When she asks her mother why she wears a white saree as her grandmother does. Her mother replied that why they were struggling against it, and silk sarees reminded her of her father and the good life they had. One day while visiting the Maraar family, she is ignored by them. Janaki feels that she has been welcomed in their house only when she has been the wife of a highly placed official. Society's attitude towards divorce is seriously criticised in the novel when she decides

to get a divorce. Her mother is very concerned about what other people speak about it; she fears this will mar her daughter's name. Society seems deeply critical of women when a married relationship breaks. Both couple shares equal responsibilities in ending a relationship; in most situations, women bear more amount of blame for it.

After her husband's death, Maya's mother seeks to resort to a temple and ashram far away. She finds peace and comfort there. Without men, they thought of them as mere shadows and ceased life and happiness. When Rahul visited Maya's mother, she said that after Maya's father's death, she was in the hope that someday Maya would come to her. However, as she never returned, her sorrow grew hard, and she felt that Maya only wanted her new life, so she decided to live with herself. She was busy with the ashram duties, felt at peace, and did not feel lonely.

When Akhila's father died, her mother lost a part of her. After her father's death, "with every passing year, her mother's grief seemed only to increase"(Nair, *Ladies Coupe'* 11). In Akhila's words, her mother had lost more than a husband. Her father was a part of her mother's life from birth. That made them exceptionally intimate and together in every aspect. Her mother was much devoted to her father. When Akhila suggested to her, "I do not care what anyone says; Akhila told her. But I will not let you shave your head or exchange your pretty madisars for a saffron sari. Just because Appa is no more, you do not turn yourself into a hideous monster" (Nair, *Ladies Coupe'* 70). When she said this, Akhila saw relief in her mother's eyes. Widows fear the thought of their appearance and how society wants to look at them. Akhila's words provide comfort and relief to her mother, who is scared of her appearance after her husband's death.

There is conflict and surprise when Akhila listens to the words of Karpagam. Karpagam is a widow but never appears in a deplorable state of a widow. Akhila sees an independent and self-reliable woman in her. Karpagam retains a decisive view of society's attitude towards widows. When she is a widow, she is not ready to adhere to custom codes. She detests wearing white clothes, which reminds her of a corpse prepared for the funeral pyre. According to her, it is an essential feminine trait that women like to wear colourful clothes, jewellery and kumkum. It is not a privilege sanctioned by marriage. It has nothing to do with whether a woman is married or not, whether the husband is alive or dead. In her words, these laws were made by some men who could not bear the thought of his wife continuing to be attractive to other men after his death. When she is a widow, she does not show much relevance to the custom which denies a woman her basic instincts. She does not care about her family or what anyone thinks of her. As an individual, she has the right to choose how to live. This view changes the life of Akhila and provides her with a different thought of how her life must be.

Views of Karpagam are different from what Akhila believed in these years. Even though Karpagam is a widow, she leads a happy life as an average person. Akhila is ashamed of her plight; from Karpagam, she learns how to design a life for herself. Through these contrasting views, the writers try to picturise a change in women's attitudes over the years. Women become confident and assertive in challenging social norms and customs that bind individual liberties and rights. More importance is devoted to individual needs and aspirations than yielding to traditional values and codes.

There are occasions in which women indulge in extramarital relations in the works selected for the study. A person chooses a relationship outside the marriage

because of the failure of the married relationship. Marriage is expected to give love, mutual understanding, a feeling of togetherness, companionship, space for individual development, and sharing responsibilities and problems. These factors become essential for the advancement and success of a healthy relationship. When a relationship fails to offer what is expected, individuals may find themselves forlorn. To remain in that relationship leaves them frustrated and disillusioned. When they get a chance to escape, they employ it cleverly. It is pretty common for individuals to renounce something that is not useful to them; this is applicable in relationships.

In *Ancient Promises*, *Afterwards*, and *Secrets and Lies*, there are women characters seeking contentment in extramarital relations. The writer, to some extent, justifies that Janaki starts the relationship with her old lover because her marriage is a hopeless business. She has nothing to feel happy about or hope for. More than that, her husband neither takes up the responsibilities of a husband nor a father. His irresponsibility and escapist attitude left Janaki inclined towards her old lover. Despite her love affair before marriage, she keeps up her mind and wholeheartedly agrees with it when her marriage is fixed. She gives her best to the relationship, but her husband's aloof and uncaring attitude pushes her to utter despair. She is in a state to expect nothing happier from her married life. The cold attitude of her in-laws and a mentally disabled child add more pain to her life.

As a husband, Suresh is a complete disappointment, and by the birth of Riya, he proves he is a failure as a father. From the early days of marriage, she feels the loss of companionship and understanding from her husband, which she gets from Arjun within a brief period of life in England. Her only hope in life is a future with Arjun and Riya, so she is forced to accept it "what would you have done if someone had offered you a temporary period of happiness?" (Nair, *Ancient Promises* 3). It is fairly

reasonable that no one would refuse a happy life. She does not get what she expects from life, so she tries to create a new life with people who can make her happy and understand her 'self' and individuality.

The life of Maya is not different. She is in a helpless whirlpool of married life, and no one is there to support her; her parents are not with her, and they are not keen on her problems. Because everyone likes to accept the bright side of her life and undermine the actual issues, Maya cannot endure Govind's possessiveness as a free-thinking individual. His suspicious attitude hinders Maya from continuing her education. She cannot go to shops, make friends, or even see her parents. He preferred her parents to come to their home. In Maya's words, Govind even keeps a distance from his family; he is a dutiful son and a husband. He always wanted to show how good he was to other people. He wants a good-looking girl from a good family, a convent-educated girl. He does not know what to do with her when he gets her. Maya sarcastically says, so he puts her safely into the relationship cage. Her marriage and family life seem like a cage she cannot escape from. So, she seeks the comfort of Rahul, a foreigner who came to live in their neighbourhood.

At the beginning of the novel, when Maya never misses a chance to get closer to Rahul, readers may feel that she is a woman with loose morality. Her acts can be justified because she wants to find a way out of her torturous marriage. She asks Rahul to help her get a job in Delhi or somewhere. Later she changes her attitude that whether Govind prefers it or not, she will enrol in a course on interior design and when she is in a position to support herself and Anjali, her daughter, she will go. She does not want to be a burden to Rahul. She likes to be independent of Govind forever, and she cannot adjust to his behaviour for so long. She constantly feels that she wants to run away with Anjali elsewhere.

When Govind saw Rahul walking out of their house, he became outrageous and attacked Maya violently. To escape from him, Maya had only one option to seek Rahul's help and run away from there. Without realising her actual situation, her parents, too, were displeased with her. Suppose her parents had tried to find a solution to the problems by understanding the extent of Govind's possessiveness, Maya would not have eloped with Rahul. Thwarting the real issues and hiding all these troubles under pretty things of material pleasures is a curse of most happy-looking families in society. It seems beautiful when glancing from the outside but is a prison for those insides. So, when an individual gets a chance to escape, they make full use of it, like what happened in Maya's life, and society could not blame her for her wilful conduct.

Bubbles develop a passion for her fitness trainer Giovanni an Italian in *Secrets and Lies*. Gio's admiration towards her, his caring glances, and his touches were unique to her; she lacked these things from her husband. The time she spent with him was enjoyable for her. For Bubbles, her husband remains an unattainable person. She plays no role in his personal and business affairs. Subsequently, she discovers him indulging in a homosexual relationship with his friend. She does not feel shocked but makes up her mind to go ahead with Gio. Her married life only offers monotony and loss of self-worth with Gio; she is revived. She decided to continue that relationship and discard her married relationship, which did not provide anything for her self-development.

In Anita Nair's *Mistress*, Radha is afflicted with her marriage because she and her husband Shyam occupies two separate poles. They lack mutual understanding and respect, which is essential in a relationship. She regards Shyam as an uncouth boor who only emphasises money and business. She hates everything related to him. They possess diverging views on everything and always indulge in disputes. When

Christopher Stewart, a foreigner, comes, Radha is attracted to him. Thus, she receives a chance to assert her views and opinions, and they share similar sensibilities. She is drawn toward him, which she lacks in her marriage. Her distaste towards Shyam adds oil to the desire for Chris and his company.

In the works of Modern Women Writers, an extramarital affair is a commonly used theme. This shows a woman's freedom in choosing her sexuality and sexual inclinations. In most situations, an unhappy marriage is crucial for women to indulge in relationships outside marriage. For them, it is a means of escape, to find themselves or to regain their feminine sensuality. The writers never tried to judge these affairs as unhealthy practices but justifies them. Writers consider these relations as a means to attain their self-worth and freedom. These authors challenge society's attitude towards infidelity too. Modern women writers uphold the view that if a woman is dissatisfied with a married relationship, she should move away from it rather than passively suffer everything.

In postfeminist writing, there is a deconstruction of gender roles as practised according to our tradition. In society, men and women are attributed with specific duties which remain unchanged over the years. These writers challenge this notion. According to Indian tradition, customs, and culture, women occupy second positions to men. This idea is questioned in the works of modern women writers. The woman characters are rebellious enough to overthrow the patriarchal concept. They are not submissive and passive to oppression but act confidently to gain their status and assert their individuality strongly. They even cross-examine and subvert positions that society attributes to them.

In *Ancient Promises*, Janaki acted intelligently for her daughter's welfare when she realised that Suresh, as a father, was a failure. A man in the role of a parent must

tend to share the responsibilities in bringing up a child. Both father and mother share equal responsibility for the growth of a child. Here Suresh always blames his busy business life for not being responsible for his family. He is blind to the problems Janu faces in his house. As a husband and father, he is an utter disappointment to Janaki. He does not realise how to manage her or what her needs are. He does not even try to get attached to the baby or care for her with his fatherly love and affection. To take their daughter to a better place and give proper training are left to Janu. Suresh does not partake in any role in it.

When Janaki says to Suresh about Riya's schooling, he is cold and unaffected. "He thought that at home, she will be protected and looked after. We can employ someone specially to care for her so that you won't have too much to do"(135). He is unaware of the requirement to give her better training. So Janu has to take up the role of both father and mother. She is sure that she is the only person to help Riya, their daughter. Before admitting Riya to a special school, she experimented with an ordinary school assuming that mingling with normal children could improve her skills. However, it did not work out and left Janu in much mental agony. She suffered a lot to seek the help of a particular school that was essential for Riya. Suresh seemed less interested in all these activities, and sole responsibility was on her. She performed it flawlessly, and her efforts are appreciable.

The life of Akhila in *Ladies Coupe'* is not different. The sudden death of her father forced her to take up the role of caretaker and guardian of the family. She is only nineteen at that time. It is a time generally believed when girls have romantic dreams about life and marriage. At that age, she is destined to shoulder the whole responsibility of the family, which her father left. As she is the elder of the children and completed pre-university education, she is offered a job in the income tax

department. She claims that she has turned into the man of the family and is responsible for looking after a widowed mother, two brothers, and a sister. She has to provide for the needs of a home, her sibling's studies and conditions.

Akhila sacrifices her needs, desires, and dreams for the family. She cares for her family as her father did. On Sundays, she used to sit on her father's chair to release tensions that she faced while handling the family. Later, when her siblings grew up and became old enough to be independent, she felt much more effortless. "Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest loosen: Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again?" (77). When her brother expressed his idea to get married, all, including her mother, were blind to her needs. They never consider her to be a woman. They consider her a spinster or a person with no feminine feelings. She has ceased to be a woman in their minds.

The family often replaces Akhila with their father. They regard her as a person with no wishes, dreams, or desires but only has responsibilities and duties to perform. According to traditional concepts, a woman can never be the head of the family. Her mother, too, carried a similar view about it. This concept is challenged when Akhila accepts her role as the caretaker and head of the family. Even her mother obeyed her and acted according to Akhila's wish. It is evident when Akhila starts to devour eggs. Her mother may forbid her if she is not the head of the family. Even though her mother hates it, she places a separate pan for her to cook the egg and keeps it secret. Nobody in the house knew about it. Her mother respected her words and her decisions. As she supports that family, every member is bound to behave according to Akhila's wishes.

Akhila's trip with Hari is not objected because, as Akhila was the head of the family, she could make decisions independently. As Akhila enjoyed the status of a

guardian in the family, she could do whatever she liked. Later, when she is with the Padma and decides to leave for a long journey to Kanyakumari, Padma insists that she must ask for the consent of her brothers. Akhila is not ready for it, and she courageously takes up the decision. She rejects the idea with much disdain.

In the case of Margaret Shanti, there is a shift from the stereotypical representation of women. A woman is considered submissive and passively suffering all the hardships in a family. She must succumb to the wish of her husband. When a woman cannot adjust to her husband, she may leave him. She tries to end that relationship, or she may adapt without complaining. Here Margaret sought comfort in taking an act of sweet revenge upon her husband. She devised her plans and executed them well. She compares herself to water which dissolves everything. Taking vengeance upon an individual by seeming friendly to that person is a strange character trait associated with femininity. A wife taking revenge on a husband in an intelligible way is new in our society and against the virtues attributed to the woman.

With the emergence of the feminist movement, women in the present century gained new insights and perspectives to make their lives more meaningful and live in new ways. The concept of 'new woman' challenged the stereotypical portrayal in the past decades. A most common feature of the writers selected for the study was that they picture a change in the domestic scenario of an Indian household. A new approach to the picturisation of Indian homemakers can be observed in their works. According to the Indian concept, a housewife is the epitome of devotion, patience, and responsibility towards family. They sacrifice their needs, desires, and individuality for their family's well-being. They consider their family their world and do not have a life outside it. Their sole aim in life was to bring happiness and

prosperity to the family. These are the traditional roles a housewife plays in our society.

Modern women writers try to confront this idea in their works. Their homemakers are women with powerful individualities. Though they give importance to housewifely virtues, they focus on individual development too. These new women dare to break away from the codes of the family if the family does not meet their expectation. Such women execute their ways to make their lives at ease and as they prefer. These types of liberated women give importance to self-development and space for the flowering of their personality. They look for an equal partner to share their emotional, intellectual and physical fantasies and desires. They are not scared to reveal their distaste and displeasure if something goes wrong in their journey towards realising individuality and self.

The homemakers portrayed by Jaishree Misra are Janaki, Maya, Bubbles, and Samira share something in common. They do not believe or try to fit into the space of stereotypical homemakers. They gave equal importance to their family and the development of their individuality. At some point in their life, they realise that they are living a meaningless life and seek to make the best out of their identity and self. Janaki as a mother of a child with special needs, realises that only she can take care of the child's needs. So she tries to make herself skilled in bringing up the child. She even plans to discard her family life for the sake of her daughter. Her efforts to gain a degree in special education and travel abroad to continue her studies are for her daughter. She also wants to escape from her hopeless family life by doing so. The strong urge to find herself a space is a driving force behind it.

For Maya, her life as a housewife is nothing better than imprisonment. She says, though she has everything a woman wants, she does not feel happy because the

essential thing is lacking in her life. That is the freedom enjoyed by an individual. So she seeks the help of Rahul to get out of it. Later she realises that only she can help her. She decides to continue her education, and when she can rely on herself and provide for her daughter, she can give up her marriage and escape from it. Somehow, she wants to get away from her wedding. There is no one to help her, including her parents.

On the other hand, Bubbles and Samira serve their family dutifully and obediently till the climax of the novel. Bubbles are described as a dutiful mother, daughter-in-law, and wife. Nevertheless, she is bored with her life; she never expresses her distaste before her husband and in-laws. She continues to be obedient and sincere towards them despite her husband's callousness. Her husband's passivity towards her never torments her much because she considers it a busy businessman's natural behaviour. She even thinks it is a huge mistake to expect more from such a luxurious life. Later her interest in her physical trainer Gio and her visit to India marks a turning point in her life. After her return from India, she has made up her mind to make some crucial decisions in her life. While realising her husband is gay, she decides to continue her relationship with Gio and firmly stays away from her married life.

Samira is also pictured as a perfect homemaker devoted to her husband and family. She even sacrifices her individuality for the sake of her family. After her marriage, she gives most minor importance to her likes and dislikes. Everything is according to her husband's wish. She does not have a choice of her own, even in the dress she wears. To her, everything is surrounded by her husband's tastes and desires. Becoming a mother and altering her physical appearance made her a thing of ridicule by her husband. She considers it her mistake to be overweight. Her husband's lack of

interest is seen in every action toward her. He makes her believe that he is unavailable due to his work for not paying attention to her needs. He even plans a trip to Kenya with their daughter avoiding Samira. The incident opens her eyes to realise her position in the family and that she must no longer be obedient or submissive to the injustice that her husband shows to her. After returning from India, she courageously makes up her mind to ask her husband about her role in their married relationship. She even thinks of getting separated from him. She is not frightened by his reaction or the thought of what happens to her while separated. She is firm in her decisions. She and Bubbles are asked to be a part of the charity group that Zeba Khan opens. Samira and Bubbles must take up charge of it in London. That job will help them to gain economic independence from their husbands and are never feared of their plight after separation.

In Anita Nair's writings, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanti, and Radha are homemakers. Janaki and Prabha Devi share similar traditional views. They consider home as a women's kingdom. They have much devotion to their family. At the same time, in their way of life, at some point, they realise that being submissive and passive, they are living an empty life. Being pampered daughter, wife, and mother, Janaki never gets a chance to enjoy a free life as an individual. After marriage, she has been a shadow of her husband. She yearns for a free life devoid of protection and care. When her husband dies, she wishes to stay alone than live under the supervision of her son. She thinks she can manage things better when she is alone. It will not be the same as she handled it with the help of her husband.

Prabha Devi has her likes and dislikes in everything. She realised freedom after her marriage and was excited about it. She used her space to become a more fashionable individual but later realised that others took advantage of it. So, she boxed

the free and stylish Prabha Devi for a certain period in her life and became an entirely devoted housewife. Later, when she became bored of being passive, she unboxed herself and regained her freedom and individuality. She possesses a unique ability to become autonomous when she wishes to be. She recovered the liberated individual in her.

Margaret Shanti is another powerful character in the novel. She is a careerist woman, a chemistry teacher. She is fed up with her monotonous life. She has a dominant and tyrant husband, Ebenezer, the school's principal where she works. Her hatred towards him starts with the realisation that her husband does not prefer her to be a woman and hates the changes that may occur as she becomes a mother. She decides to avenge him for making her life a hopeless thing. First, she hits her husband by dismantling her husband's false self-esteem and pride. Ebenezer is a person who gives much importance to physical fitness. She makes her husband obese by providing him with too much food. Here there is a reversal in the traditional portrayal of devoted homemakers. She regained her lost, happy life. She courageously retrieved her joy and her life back.

Radha in *Mistress* does not serve as a model housewife. She has neither devotion nor love towards her husband and family life. Her relationship with her husband is a mere routine of habit. She is not happy or unhappy in that relationship. She hates everything related to her husband. Their personalities never meet at any point. She considers him a snobbish and money-minded person. At the same time, her husband considers her a long-cherished possession that he gained by his luck. The feeling of love and togetherness are absent in their relationship. Even though it was infidelity, she never tried to get rid of it or feel guilty about her action. When she discovers her husband is sterile, she feels sorry for being cruel to him. As a penalty,

she continued her life to be a single mother as she was pregnant with her baby by Chris.

The writers try to portray free-thinking individuals as housewives. A woman with a family is always seen in connection with her family members in every aspect. She does not have a life outside the family. She is bound physically and emotionally towards it; this traditional concept is challenged in these works by women having a personal space outside the family. They try to create their world, which provides the space for self-development and asserting their individuality. There is a shift in domestic settings and the portrayal of domesticated housewives in the works produced in past decades.

Postfeminism covers a large area that includes issues related to Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Queers. These writers also try to have some of these aspects in the works. They considered these relations and sexual inclinations as a part of individual choices. They hold a different attitude towards these choices apart from society. Though said to be developed, our community holds shrewd and narrow-mindedness towards these notions. Society's culture and custom neither provide room for these types of individuals. They are often looked down upon and have to face contempt and disdain. They are constantly mocked and humiliated based on their sexual orientation. The writers try to view them as a part of our society and give equal importance enjoyed by male and female individuals in our community.

In *Ladies Coupe'*, in her early days at Vellore, Marikolanthu is unaware of the strange relationship between Missy K and Missy V. There are instances when Marikolanthu feels surprised when Missy Miss K walks into Missy V's room at night. She mistakes that maybe Missy K is afraid of being alone in the room. Later, when she became a grown-up individual, she realised that it is not a common type of

friendship; there is some secret. She never feels any disrespect towards them. She accepts that and considers it may be a character trait of foreign ladies. She does not have a liking or dislike for it but has a neutral attitude. After being raped, she began to feel disgusted about starting a relationship with a man. She thinks that rape is a severe mistake toward a woman. That incident made her hate the whole male community, which gives her new insight into that a relationship between a woman and woman will be more meaningful and pleasurable. When Sujata Akka feels down in her marital relationship and asks for her help, she offers herself for her. She is pleased to do anything to make Sujata Akka happy. Marikolanthu feels that it was easy for her to please a woman with her caressing touches. She makes all her efforts to delight and entertains her mistress to regain her lost femininity and sexuality. If she does not help Sujata Akka, she might be like Chettiar Amma, who turned mad because of the extramarital relationship with her husband. For Sujata Akka, Marikolanthu is a tremendous comfort and a perfect companion. She also feels that she needed a relationship of this kind to regain her lost womanhood. She starts to think that the relationship between Missy K and Missy V is a perfect kind of relationship and that others are fake. She considers the relationship between a man and woman imperfect and disgusting. As she is a maid to Sujata Akka, she is not taking advantage of Marikolanthu, who is so fond of her and does anything to gratify her. It can be assumed that Marikolanthu is not compelled to obey Sujata Akka's orders; she willingly and joyfully gives herself to solve Sujata Akka's dilemma.

In *Secrets and Lies*, the writer only hints briefly about a gay relationship. Bubbles accidentally discover her husband's homosexual relationship with his friend John. Both John and Binkie are intimate friends. She often feels that she has less space than John in Binkie's life as a wife. John is Binkie's personal assistant in his

business. They share more than a relationship between an officer and an employee or two friends. When Bubbles realises it, the writer portrays it as an everyday normal thing. There is no fuss or violent conversation, or dramatic performances. It may be because she already started a relationship outside her marriage and badly needed a reason to escape from it. The writer's attitude is never scornful but treated as an everyday situation. The writer tries to consider it a regular thing in our society and not perceive it as an alien phenomenon.

The women characters portrayed in the selected works are unique in every aspect. They have their views and attitudes on everything, including desires and possess a liberal outlook toward sexual preferences. The taboos of society never inhibit them. Those liberated women considered these desires as a part of individual freedom and will. They show more confidence in exhibiting their sexual inclination, impulses, and fantasies. They are not reserved in expressing their personal choice in it. In *Ladies Coupe'* Akhila's longing for the touch of a man clearly express liberal attitudes. As the train is crowded, she chooses to travel by bus. Even though the early bus was complete, she preferred it because she got the masculine fragrance close. "There were a few women in that mass of skin and scents. However, what caught her throat and filled her senses was the smell of hair cream and coconut oil, lifebuoy soap, and tobacco. After Appa died, Akhila had not smelt these masculine fragrances from so close. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply" (139). Once she felt a hand brush against her waist, she did not object; she stood there willing enough and let the hand send a thousand messages to her almost dead nerve ends and wake her up as she did not object to that hand encountered for a fortnight.

When Akhila got off the bus, she brushed away the sensations that had aroused. She feels that she is behaving like a woman without self-respect at the same

time, "there was gratification for her as well. She felt desired. She felt as safe she had felt a hunger. Akhila felt like a woman" (140). Through this incident, the writer is not negating the desire a female yearns for as an individual. This can be regarded as a feature of Postfeminist writing, where women seem free to express their sexuality and desire. An erotic dream she experiences on the train indicates her longing for sex and an intimate relationship with a man. It also describes her confusion regarding her relationship with Hari, a person much younger than her. At the climax of the novel, Akhila feels full of lust and lust has triumphed over her. After Hari, it has been so long that she indulges in a sexual relationship with a man named Vinod. Her repressed sexual desires find a way out there and with revived femininity, she regains her self.

Through the courageous act, Akhila regained her lost femininity. She feels "her a need satiated. her past purged" (275). she had her life where she wanted to be. As her name signifies, Akhilandeswari, goddess of the entire universe who controls everything, had now complete control of her life and happiness and firm decisions on how her future life must be. A new energy that she gains after her gratification of sexual desire is a driving force to her coming settlement in life. By analysing the female characters in the works selected for the study, it is clear that the writers are deeply aware of the changing social and domestic circumstances of Indian society. Women's writings over these years depicted a gradual change in the perspectives of Indian men and women. Feminine consciousness has been a crucial subject in most works produced by recent women writers.

The writers are often influenced by the current social trend in our society and frame characters suited to the changed social milieu. Both men and women in present-day society possess revised outlooks and perspectives, which became matter to the

writings of present-day Indian writers. Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair try to bring newness to their character by picturing individuals who uphold new ideas and attitudes and cling to old traditional beliefs. Male characters like Arjun, Rahul, Hugh, and Christopher belong to contemporary male sensibilities that provide space for the betterment and development of their female companions. Meanwhile, characters like Suresh, Govind, Binkie, Akbar, and Shyam represent traditional patriarchal beliefs. In the depiction of female characters, there are such similarities. Janaki's mother and grandmother, her mother-in-law, Maya's mother, Janaki in *Ladies Coupe'*, Prabha Devi's mother, Marikolanthu's mother, and Akhila's mother belong to the conventional frame.

The writers bring to light the changed social and domestic setting of Indian families and society; the writers were aware of the importance of family as a social institution. The characters, too, reflect this idea that they neither reject its importance; even though they indulge in rebellious moves, they never disregard the role of mother, wife, and daughter in the family. The writers stress the importance of companionship as an essential quality for a healthy relationship, and man and woman must complement each other for their well-being of themselves. Both authors reject the traditional patriarchal Indian marriages, which give less space for the flowering of the individuality of women. They accept these roles to realise their identity and true feminine self. Without denying the traditional roles that women play, they strive towards emancipation which makes the works of these writers distinct.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Postfeminism has developed into an influential concept among women writers, providing varied experiences and scope for different perspectives in their writings. As feminism has been debated in the postmodern world, a changed vision matches the present world's needs. Feminism, to some extent, cannot solve the varied problems that modern women/society face. In her essay *Postfeminism*, Sarah Gamble quotes Sheila Tobias' words from *In Faces of Feminism* that "if feminism is going to survive the coming decades, it has to be different". Gamble continues that "the question is what form, exactly, will this difference take? I don't think it is difficult to see the attractiveness of popular Postfeminism, its rejection of theoretical language ensures that it remains widely accessible. Its repudiation of victim status seeks to empower its readers"(Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* 43). In her view, Postfeminist debate tends to take shape around issues of victimisation, autonomy, and responsibility. It is critical to define women as victims who cannot control their lives. Gamble outlines that postfeminism embraces a flexible ideology that can be adapted to suit individual needs and desires; it has a heterosexist orientation and seeks to develop an agenda that can find a place for men as lovers, husbands, and fathers as well as friends.

Postfeminism focuses on the real-life experience of women, women as human beings and as an individual in society. They try to view gender as unworthy and regard an individual's potential and intellectual skills. They believed that absolute equality could be gained by acknowledging gender differences. They try to view males/females as different in every aspect, but these differences do not make one

superior and one inferior but complementary to each other. They also consider the presence of other gender orientations like transgender, gay, lesbian, and queer people. Post Feminism tries to give voice to them through their writings. They give importance to the diversity of experiences in an individual's life.

Postfeminism is an ideology that encountered much criticism from every part of life for its subversion of the rigid notions of previous feminist movements. A primary interest of this new ideology is its concern regarding feminine nurture instincts. Such instincts and desires were formerly considered anti-feminist by second and third wave feminists because childbearing and rearing would force women to be domestic and minimise the chances of getting out of the house and finding a career, and would confine women to the four walls of a home. However, Postfeminism argues that a woman's mothering instinct cannot be undermined. This makes them unique and powerful, and females' qualities like love and care towards other beings are instinctual a distinctly feminine trait. Earlier feminist movements consider motherhood, sexual desire, and emotion impeding women's liberation. They even consider marriage as a social institution where patriarchy exercises power over the female individual.

Another focus area of postfeminism is femininity, which earlier feminists have ignored. They identify that to be equal to men, women must reject the traits that make them feminine. They are against the glamorous representation of women. They seek to be masculine to become more acceptable in a male-dominated world. They moved away from a woman's feminine identity by turning away from feminine attributes. Previous feminists want women to be more like males, with a strong sense of freedom and an uncaring attitude. They demanded utter rejection of family, marriage, and motherhood that obstruct women from being independent human beings.

Postfeminism emphasises successful female individuals. Angela McRobbie observes that every girl should have a life plan to make her life successful in a Postfeminist world. Although Postfeminism epitomises motherhood, at the same time, it promotes single-living individuals who have complete control over their lives. Postfeminism is disapproved for its contradictions; some Postfeminist writers hint at the search of single women for a perfect partner, their anxieties in single life, loneliness, and alienation. The writers present a glamorous and colourful life of single women enjoying their life at parties and pubs. A criticism against postfeminist discourse is it's focuses on white middle-class women with careers and earnings. Women of the third world, of colour, and the low class, are overlooked in most Postfeminist writings promoting popular culture.

Postfeminism advanced preferences and choices for women. They can choose to be homemakers and motherhood or exit from home to pursue their dream career; otherwise, they can balance both career and home. The harmony between work and family is a significant concern in some postfeminist works. Female sexuality has become a crucial area of interest in Postfeminist writings. They try to view women as powerful images of sexuality and express them in several ways by portraying strong and seductive women: the female body is used as a sex symbol to exercise power, a conception against traditional feminists. Postfeminism shows that individuals have the right to define their identity, and society must respect it. Their choices and decisions regarding their desires and sexuality are entirely theirs, and society does not play any role.

Postfeminism redefines the role of men in the private sphere. The position of men in families has become an area of consideration. Both men and women show equal concern towards family and profession. Men appear to share the burden of

domestic activities; fathers who parent at home full-time show the emergence of this new trend. It stresses the necessity of a father in children's emotional, intellectual, and social growth. Postfeminism values family and companionship between men and women in building up a family. Motherhood and fatherhood are perceived with equal importance. In Postfeminist writings, one thing became unique, the change from 'woman focussed' to 'human focussed'. Postfeminist discourses reinforce the notions of love, marriage, family, and femininity that are taken over in earlier feminist movements.

Critics like Angela McRobbie, Susan Faludi, Ann Brooks, Rosalind Gill and Judith Butler oppose and support this new trend in popular culture and media. They are conscious of the change in culture and media over recent years. These transitions are much more noticeable in literature as well as in society. Many writers believe that Postfeminism discredited the achievements of feminist movements. Susan Faludi considers it a backlash to feminist gains that the previous generation of feminists achieved. McRobbie views it positively as a progressive movement which can attain greater equality for women. Multiplicities of meanings are attributed to this current trend, which confuses literature. Postfeminism deals with how young woman constructs their identity in late modern society. Shelley Budgeon tries to view it with some merit and appraise its focus on individualism. Postfeminism broadens and opens feminist concepts within popular culture. Postfeminism defends itself by saying that feminism is irrelevant among the younger generation of women.

In the progress of feminism emergence of the 'New Woman' is a remarkable feature. New Woman gained much popularity among male and female authors feminist movements guaranteed education, equal working opportunities, and other rights to women, which enabled women to rise to the forefront of society. When

women became the earner, they became economically autonomous individuals. This was a significant factor in the development of 'New Woman'. New Woman is an educated, careerist woman in Europe who is rebellious towards social systems like marriage, family, religion, and other conventions. They prefer to remain single and have a strong urge for liberation. Even though they lead a family life, they work for self-development and emancipation. This concept strongly influenced literature and is often criticised for its licentiousness. Writers portray women with an intense sense of freedom, desire, and sexuality.

By analysing the evolution of Indian English Fiction, it is visible that women's status and liberation are the favourite subjects of writers of all ages. The works of early writers provide us with women who were traditional and submissive. They believed that home was women's world and family was their destiny. Education helped women to think freely and act according to their wishes. The transformation of Indian women appears as a laborious task because of the stronghold of age-old customs and traditions upon the lives of individuals. For a long time, educated and careerist women occupied the domestic sphere and were expected to act within the strict frame of traditions. Women's journey outside the home is a phenomenon of modernism. The process gains acceleration and popularity with the emergence of women writers. Women writers with different perspectives and a deep understanding of the feminine psyche pictured the emotional and psychological depth of the female inner self. They delve deep into women's minds and probe the actual needs an individual woman yearns for.

Women writers are also conscious of the feminist movements in the west. The women writers of Indian English Fiction are critical of patriarchal Indian society and its ways. With the rise of Women's Writing, the concept of female identity attained

much importance. Writers like Nayantara Saghal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many other women writers exhibited exceptional courage to develop a new type of women, who are free-thinking individuals and assert their individuality within the domestic space and outside it. They are individuals who prefer to compromise with tradition, even though some of their characters show rebelliousness a neurotic.

Modern women writers develop a new type of protagonist who need more space for their self-development. They challenge the customs, conventions, and beliefs that hold women from attaining true liberation. They develop their female protagonists as their mouthpieces to share their views regarding female identity. The writers want women to shatter the chains that bind them. Depiction of present-day women by the writers shows efforts towards self-development by asserting their individuality. They have their perspectives on what they need, their dreams, aspirations, personal and emotional life, and sexuality. In a convention-based family system, they feel caged and want to escape from that. In the journey towards self-fulfilment, they show the least importance to marriage, familial bonds, and social codes. They value individual freedom and will and take revolutionary steps in their life.

The writers are anxious to develop a unique type of female and hint at the transition in social and domestic settings favourable for the self-development of a female individual. They present a new domestic setting where women share equal status as men. Their works promote women who are educated, balance their homes, and work perfectly. The writers also exhibit the agonies' aspirations and efforts female characters endure during their journey towards self-realisation. Writers projected the struggles and tensions they pass through when repudiating social codes and customs.

A female individual's inner consciousness is often the focus in the works of modern writers. The writers candidly discuss themes like feminine sensuality, extra-marital affairs, and homosexual relations in their works. The writers are critical of marriage and the patriarchal social setting prevalent in Indian society. Its mission is to make female individuals find their own space to express themselves strongly. They portray powerful women characters who dare to break away from these conventions and give secondary importance to family, marriage, and familial bonds than their individual development and dignity. Writers like Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair represent postmodern women writers who made noticeable Indian English fiction changes. Their writings are about the challenges that a modern woman faces in her personal and social life as an individual. They try to redefine the roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Their female characters are distinguished for their brave decisions that could change their lives and open new spaces to explore.

In *Ancient Promises*, the central character Janaki is an ideal example of the new woman. Through her life story, Jaishree Misra stresses the importance of motherhood and fatherhood equally; more than that, the writer shows that becoming a mother to a child with special needs made her life fruitful without perishing in despair. The writer also stresses the futility of arranged marriages. Janaki is forced to get married when her parents discover her love affair. This shows that a woman cannot have the freedom to decide how her life must be. She feels tired of fighting against her parents and believes that her parents will not choose a life that is awful to her. An insensitive husband and dominating mother-in-law make her married life miserable. Her only hope in her sorrowful life is to become a mother, and her hopes become vain when she gives birth to a child with special needs. Janaki's sole aim in life is to make her daughter feel better. For that, she gains a degree in special

education from London. Meanwhile, resuming her affair with her lover adds optimism to her life. For her, it is a relief from her loveless and comfortless married life.

To her, motherhood becomes a means to accomplish her inner strength and power. It benefitted her to realise her identity as a powerful woman who could recapture her life as she desired. As a mother, Janaki's efforts are significant. Her determination to move abroad with Riya, her daughter, is ultimately for her daughter's well-being. To her, society around her seems unfit for a girl like Riya. Her real journey to self-realisation starts as she becomes a mother. Her mind became vacuum when she realised her child was mentally disabled. However, the belief that only she could take care of her made her strong. This provided her with the courage to move forward in life by ignoring people who ridiculed and condemned her. The writer not only celebrates motherhood but poses severe attacks on Kerala/Indian community for their patriarchal marriage system. Through the marriage of Janaki, the writer shows how the existing social system is blind to a girl's wishes while making a significant decision in her life. The writer expresses that nobody, including her parents, seeks a girl's opinion about her preferences in a marriage relationship.

The troubles Janaki faces in her husband's household are inexplicable. The writer hints at what a woman expects from marriage through the life of Janaki. Her husband is a person who escapes from all the responsibilities of a husband and father. Even the birth of a child with special needs does not move him. Her old lover's support as a reliable partner is an absolute comfort for her. Nobody can blame her for choosing to spend the rest of her life with him. The writer also presents a contrast between the perspectives of the old-generation and new-generation women regarding marriage, widowhood, and divorce. Janaki's mother and her grandmother belong to the old traditional type of women characters. The reaction of her grandmother and

mother when she discloses her decision to get a divorce from her husband shows the difference. Both her mother and grandmother believe that by the death of their husbands, their happiness and life had ended. By depicting Janaki's ill-treatment in her husband's house, the writer points out the injustices a woman suffers when she has an identity to establish and is rebellious to the injustices she faces.

The plight of women in *Afterwards* is the same as Janaki. Maya, too, is caught up in an unhappy married life. She somehow wants to escape from that terrible life. Her situation becomes more pathetic as her parents are not ready to accept the real problems she faces. Like every other person, they believe that she lives a happy life with all the luxuries. All the luxuries she has seem meaningless when handling her suspicious husband. There are some misconceptions in society that a luxurious house, a wealthy family, and a well-settled husband are the only things that a woman requires in her life to be happy. Maya says nobody believes that she has sorrows and leads a miserable life. Everybody wants to see the colourful side of her life, and her parents, too, are unmindful of the real problems.

When nobody was there to comfort Maya, she sought the help of a foreigner named Rahul Tiwari, who came to live in her neighbourhood. When she realised that Rahul was attracted to her, she saw it as an opportunity to escape her married life. She creates situations to get closer to him and shares her real problems with him. When her husband discovers her relationship, she runs off with Rahul. After her escape, she suffered harsh treatment from her family. They perform her death rites because she spoiled the name of an age-old traditional family by eloping with a stranger. Nobody enquires why she choose such a way of life. If her parents had supported her, she would have never taken such a rebellious step. She prefers to be free from a suspicious man to have a comfortable life. Her choice may not be agreeable to a

society that prescribes specific behavioural patterns to women. She dares to break the conventions that threaten her dignity and happiness as a free individual.

Afterwards, presents a different type of male characterisation through Rahul Tiwari. He is represented with sensibilities more akin to a female. His sense of sympathy and benevolence towards Maya, his supporting attitude, and kindness towards Anjali Maya's daughter remind him of a woman. Through the character Rahul, Jaishree Misra pictures how a father ought to be. Even though he is not the biological father of Anjali, he displays much care and deep-rooted affection towards her more than her biological father, Govind. After Maya's death, the social service department suggested he must return her to Govind, and he was shattered. The way he took the whole responsibilities of Anjali after Maya's death is remarkable. When Anjali left for Kerala, he even thought of committing suicide. Without Maya and Anjali, he felt deserted and insignificant in living. When he meets Maya's mother to perform her death rites, she assures him that he will not lose the love of Anjali, which provides him hope to live further.

Through the characters Arjun and Rahul, the writer underlines a change in male sensibility. A different type of menfolk, who are more domesticated, had a better perception of women, who partakes in equal responsibilities in domestic tasks, who support women for their self-development and provide space for it is focussed. Afterwards, the writer vehemently attacks arranged marriages. Maya says that she agrees with her parent's decision to get married because she has no reason to disagree with them. After her marriage, she lost all her freedom; her studies were dropped, and she was compelled to remain at home. Through all these years, she suffered under a dominating and doubtful husband. She often wants to run away from there with her daughter. She employed every method to get attached to Rahul. Maya is half-

successful in rewriting her destiny, but fate plays cruelly with her life. Her desire to get rid of marriage and start a satisfying way of life develops into the driving force toward her liberation. As Rahul was a better parent and acceptable to Anjali, her escape became easy. Her life may be miserable if Rahul cannot adjust to her daughter. The writer scrutinises the necessity of father figures who are equally significant as mothers for the overall development of a child.

In *Secrets and Lies*, the writer investigates the lives of four women who are friends from their school days. The writer details a change in a woman's life; a woman's friendship is generally considered to last till her marriage. After marriage, there is less chance to continue their relationships because women get typically less opportunity to maintain their friendship. The social condition has changed a lot; these four women are fortunate enough to continue their relationship in their thirties. The novel is about four women, Anita, Bubbles, Samira, and Zeba, lucky to share their friendships as grown-ups. Anita, Bubbles, and Samira live in London, and they are firmly connected, while Zeba, a celebrity film star, stays in India. The life of Bubbles and Samira illustrates the trouble of jobless wives who have no voice in their families. Bubbles is the wife of a millionaire businessman, and Samira is the wife of a corporate lawyer.

On the other hand, Anita, a single woman, constantly searches for an ideal partner after a relationship break. For Bubbles and Samira, the meeting of friends became a means to unburden their miseries and uncertainties in family life. They honestly admit that the happiest part of their life is the moments they spend with their friends. Bubbles is disturbed about her limited hold and involvement in her husband's business and personal life. She does not know his likes or dislikes and his issues in business. Whenever she asked him something, he used to say many complicated

things which she could not understand. Later she realised that he did this knowingly and was not interested in sharing his problems with her. She consoles herself that she enjoys a luxurious life and has whatever is demanded; raising her voice shows ingratitude towards her husband and family. She remained a dutiful mother, wife, and daughter-in-law. She displayed slight rebelliousness by doing tasks that her husband had forbidden her from doing. She envied women with careers moving busily through the streets and independent women. She considered Anita luckier than her because she had complete control over her life. Those who view it from the outside feel that Bubbles enjoys a luxurious life and make fun of her if she reveals that she has sorrows. Her plan to start a business firm is unacceptable, and she considered herself good for nothing except being a homemaker.

Considering herself as an appendage to Binkie's mother, who holds complete control of her life more than her husband, Bubbles feels miserable. Her early marriage and less education made her less confident in life and in her abilities. When her children had grown up enough to look after themselves, she felt empty and dull in life. Later, Bubbles get interested in her physical trainer Giovanni. When the four friends met in India, Zeba Khan suggested her plan to start a charity organisation for street children and abused kids. She wants Bubbles and Samira to take control of her organisation. This opens a new belief that she got the opportunity to express her personality and skills. When she returned to London as a different woman with self-respect, she discovered her husband's homosexual relationship with his friend John. She realised why he was not interested in her. She is not shocked but feels dejected that it is late for her to know the thing that other members of the family already know. She returned from India with some plans in her mind. She neither prefers to be a shadow anymore and without any confusion, she can decide on her relationship with

Gio. As the novel ends, there is a redeemed woman in Bubbles when she becomes capable of standing on her feet. She is neither meek nor an obedient daughter-in-law. This indicates that economic independence can be a way to women's emancipation.

Samira's situation is not different from Bubbles. She is desperate about her husband's loss of interest in her after becoming a mother. After being a mother, the physical changes that she had undergone made him distant from her. When her husband made fun of her appearance, she took it lightly and did not pay attention. When he gave her an exercise kit for her birthday, she was humiliated and realised that his jokes were not for fun. For these years, she lived according to his wish. She belongs to the traditional mode of wife, who is like a shadow of her husband. For her, everything is surrounded by her husband's wish. She blindly follows his prejudiced view and does not have an opinion of herself. He never considers her an equal partner and provides less space for her thoughts, desires and aspirations.

Akbar's aloofness is the fundamental cause of Samira's disinterest in life. She gradually realised that she has become a person who had the least importance in her husband's life. When she disclosed her plan to visit India, he suddenly opened up his plan for a tour with his colleagues, and he preferred their daughter must accompany him. She was shocked by his words, and this incident was an awakening to realise her value and role in the life of her husband and family. At the meeting of four friends in India, she disclosed her fears about ending her marriage. She cannot live without a job or support and is forced to cling to her married life. When Zeba Khan suggests that Samira and Bubbles must be in charge of her charity group, she gets the courage to question her husband for the injustice that she is suffering.

Like Bubbles, Samira, too, has some plans in her mind as they return from Delhi. Samira has transformed into a different person who dares to question her husband. She is no longer afraid of his shouts and is bold enough to face what comes after this. She is even ready to end her marriage and has a clear picture of what to do when she gets out of her family life. Both Bubbles and Samira make themselves liberated as the novel ends. Anita, who is searching for a perfect man, accomplishes her mission. She establishes a relationship with Hugh, her colleague. Anita, bored of her single life, found Hugh as understandable and with whom she could share everything. On the other hand, Zeba is a woman who uses her beauty and charm for her accomplishments. She seduces famous directors and becomes the queen of Bollywood. She leads a lonely life because her orthodox parents left her when they heard gossip about her. To make her life more meaningful, she decided to start a charity organisation for the welfare of street kids and abused kids. Through these activities, she tries to create some meaning in her life.

The women characters of Jaishree Misra display an extraordinary sense of liberating themselves from the chains that bind them from attaining freedom of self. Their inner self is in a constant struggle toward emancipation. They assert their individuality firmly even though they are caught up in adverse circumstances. They are true representatives of the modern new woman of Indian middle-class society. They are educated and progressive individuals and possess a sharp vision regarding their existence and destiny. They are skilled enough to rewrite their lives as they desire by giving prime importance to their dreams and successfully achieving them. Even though they had to sacrifice many things, these sacrifices ultimately enabled them to accomplish a life that pleases them by being true to their selves.

A close review of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe'* shows that it is a cross-section of Indian society. The novel presents a space where women can share their anxieties, sorrows, and happiness without the prejudices of patriarchy. Ladies' coupe is a compartment exclusively for females and the women characters feel free to express themselves without any inhibitions that women face outside. Though the women characters are from different classes, they all share some common problems, precisely their struggle for identity, subjugation in a male-dominated society, society's double standard, and discrimination according to gender. *Ladies Coupe'* is simply a journey of Akhila towards self-discovery.

Meanwhile, the writer travels through the lives of other female characters that share the same coupe. Akhila is constantly confused while thinking of her future. She is tense that there is nobody to take care of her. She aspires to get a peaceful life herself. She constantly struggles to detach herself from the bondage with her sister, Padma. She needs to answer the question that troubles her mind "Can a woman live by herself?" and "Does she need a man to complete her life?". To her, the journey is to find an answer to these questions. The other five women in the coupe are Janaki, Prabha Devi, Sheela, Margaret Shanti, and Marikolanthu. Each of these women shares their life story so that Akhila may get an answer to her questions.

In Janaki's story, there are glimpses of a powerless woman who always occupies a subordinate place to her husband. She is the eldest woman in the coupe and an over-pampered wife and mother. She openly admits that she has internalised from childhood that a girl's destination is marriage and home is her kingdom. She is under the care of her father and brothers; after marriage, her husband takes the role, and after the death of her husband, her son is there. She states that she does not get the opportunity to be strong and ends up as a fragile woman. Hence, she looks down upon

strong and independent women who manage themselves. At a certain point in her life, she becomes tired of getting too much dependent on her husband and son. The thought of depending on her son after the death of her husband disturbs her very much. She dreams of having her own life with her own rules and wants to avoid being submissive.

Prabha Devi's life is similar to Janaki's, and she is brought up blindly accepting the traditional roles that a woman should participate in society. She is groomed perfectly to become an ideal wife and mother by making her skilled in sewing, cleaning, pickling, and cooking. Even her education is a means to obtain a suitable alliance with a wealthy family. She has been given a convent education because that prepares her to be fashionable and speak English. Her father considers her a burden at her birth, even though they have four sons. This shows popular belief among rich and poor in Indian society that a girl child is a liability. After her marriage, her life changed totally. She gets an opportunity to visit New York with her husband. When they returned, she became a transformed individual. She became more fashionable and modern with her changed outlook. Later, she is mistaken for her liberal behaviour, which shocks her. Later she remained content in accepting her traditional role of a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law.

When Prabha Devi realised that her way of life has turned dull and monotonous, she transformed herself into the Prabha Devi, who was full of spirit and passion for life some years back. She began her metamorphosis by learning to swim within eight days. She is the kind of woman who could free and liberate herself whenever she wished. She is less anxious about others and firmly believes in the hidden power of her self. She understands her inner strength and tries to assert her individuality. She states that she will not raise her daughter as her mother raised her.

She has a different view in contrast to her mother on woman's individuality and life. Her life is an inspiration to all women who assume that their lives are over when they age.

Margaret Shanti is an exceptional character among the co-passengers. She is a chemistry teacher and has a remarkable capacity to apprehend and classify people according to chemicals. She could be considered the real powerful new woman. She regards herself to be like water, the universal solvent. As water is everywhere, everybody thinks it has no value. It is powerful enough to dissolve anything. Her husband Ebenezer Paulraj is a tyrant, self-absorbed and egoist man. He is selfish and takes great pride in his physical appearance. He is the principal of the school she works. He rules the school like a dictator and has less concern for others' feelings, including students. When she was pregnant, he forced her for an abortion. Later she realised that he wanted her to remain beautiful and disliked her being a mother. This selfish act drained her real happiness and love, and is vindictive toward him.

Margaret matches her husband to the oil of Vitriol, Sulphuric acid king of chemicals. It is the most vigorous and can burn anything. She says if water is added to it, it begins to splutter first. When the process is continued, it will lose all its properties, that is, the power of water. Likewise, she slowly takes revenge upon him by shattering his self-pride about physical fitness and beauty. She makes him obese by giving him too much food and making him suitable for nothing. Later she becomes a mother and leads a happy life. Margaret Shanti has the skill and courage to recapture her lost happiness and life. She devised her plans and rules to deal with her problems and find the most desirable solution by making her life more comfortable. She becomes a symbol of a liberated and self-fulfilled woman. She showed profound faith in herself to retain her life as pleasing to her.

The next noteworthy character is Marikolanthu, who belongs to the working class. She is a rape victim but does not appear in a deplorable state. Even though she is from the working class, she shows better practicability in life than other women passengers. In her words, the other women are only weeping over silly things compared to the hardships she faced. She is a genuine motivation to other women to think about how trivial are their problems. Since her childhood, she has been an ambitious individual. She became the right hand of Sujata Akka of the Chettiar Family and was sent to Vellore as a domestic maid to foreign lady doctors, Missy K and Missy V. She enjoyed her life there and disliked her life in the village. There she witnessed the homosexual relationship of the two foreign women. She does not feel contempt toward them. When she was raped, she considered it something that could be washed out when she bathes. When she got pregnant, things got worsened. She rejected the idea of getting married to the man who raped her. She takes a strong stand that she cannot accept a man who spoiled her life. She preferred to remain single. To her, marriage is not an essential thing in a woman's life. She is rebellious towards marriage because of its male dominance and less concern for females as an individual.

Without any guilt, Marikolanthu decides to abort the child and is unsuccessful. She regards that child as a curse upon her life. She did not give much care to the baby. She left the baby with her mother and only provided financial assistance to him. Her homosexual relationship with Sujata Akka and incestuous relationship with Sujata Akka's husband shows her complex mindset. She indulges in relation with Sujata Akka's husband because Sujata Akka is tired of her relationship with her husband. She wants to detain him from not going to other women. She misunderstands everything that she does for the sake of Sujata Akka, and she becomes desolate. She was not ready to surrender to fate. She reaches the textile mill with her son Muthu,

pawns him there, and goes to Vellore after getting a job, she takes back her son. In her life, she is the master; she knows how to make her life fruitful. She can be considered a perfect liberated woman with a strong will to seize her life.

Karpagam is another significant character and is Akhila's childhood friend. She is a widow and hates the appearance that society prefers for a woman who lost her husband. She does what is suitable for her to lead a comfortable life. She does not care about others' opinions and words regarding how she must live. She prefers her happiness and sets her own rules. She becomes the guiding force for Akhila to have a life of her own. The whole story revolves around Akhila's quest for self. She is regarded as the central character of the novel. At the age of nineteen, she shouldered the responsibility of the family. When her siblings were grown up and could stand at their own feet, she felt complete relief from the duties. When her brother comes up with plans for his marriage, she expects someone, including her mother insists on her marriage. Everybody is blind to her desires; she has turned into a person with no cravings, dreams, or aspirations in their mind. She was humiliated by this, that not even her mother understood her needs. Even after the marriage of her younger sister, nobody thought of life for Akhila. She repressed her emotions and desires. She always yearns for a happy life on her own.

The incident on the bus revealed her inner desire for the touch of a man. She secretly enjoyed the act even though the man was misbehaving with her. She prefers to travel by bus because the touch gives her some pleasure, which is very comfortable. She continued it for nearly two weeks until she was conscious that somebody was watching her. Her relationship with Hari, a man much younger than her, is unsuccessful. She quit that relationship because she felt that they were not a match together and the thought of age difference constantly haunted her. More than that, she

is embarrassed by other people's questioning glances when they are together. She leads a lonely life after the death of her mother. Her meeting with Karpagam is a turning point in her life. Karpagam gave her the courage to start a new life by detaching herself from her sister, Padma. She makes her brave and bold enough to discard others' words concerning her life. The journey is the consequence of her fierce determination to value her happiness and rules in life. The trip is to restore her lost vigour and spirit in life. The changed physical appearance shows her attitude. She ceased wearing a dull, coloured sari; instead, she chose to wear a colourful one. Her preference to travel alone for long distances is a revolutionary act that her sister and brothers disliked. From the life stories of other women passengers, she deduces answers to the questions that haunt her constantly.

At Kanyakumari, she becomes redeemed and self-fulfilled. She gains fresh perspectives regarding how her future life must be. At Kanyakumari, a transformed woman is seen who lets loose her desires and passions. She experimented with her life and is full of spirit and ecstasy. She seduces a man younger than her; when she returns, she tries to phone Hari, and the novel ends as Hari calls back. She has become a woman who has complete control over her life. She finds out that only she can make her self-fulfilled, and a man is not essential for it. She is entirely responsible for shaping her life, and her choices in her life must be pleasing to her self as a human being.

In the novel *Mistress*, there is a different picture of the female character. The protagonist, Radha, is a married woman who remains in an unhappy marriage because she has no choice. She is full of contempt towards her husband Shyam and regards him with low ideals compared to her. She never misses an opportunity to disdain him with her harsh comments. She believes him as a person who values money and looks

at everything with a business mind. They both have different opinions and attitudes concerning everything. She openly displays her disagreement with whatever he does. They are like two parallel lines that never met at any point. As Shyam is her cousin, she doubts that her marriage to him is a business deal with her father. She suspects that her father had offered him a considerable dowry for marrying her, as he knows her past. For Shyam, Radha is a long-cherished dream, and her father has taken advantage of it, which became a significant compatibility issue between them.

When a foreigner named Christopher arrives there to have an interview with Koman, her uncle and a Kathakali artist, Radha is drawn to him. To Radha, their sensibilities are similar and easily transferable. They have similar views regarding various subjects, and she develops a deep relationship with him. To her, indulging in a relationship with a stranger becomes a rebellious move to Shyam's over-possessing and dominating attitude. She and Christopher share similar anguishes and anxieties regarding their parentage in childhood. This similarity strengthens their relationship, and later, Christopher reveals himself as the son of Koman. Meanwhile, Radha becomes pregnant and grieves, indulging in an incestuous relationship with her cousin. When Radha discloses her pregnancy, she realises from Shyam that he is sterile. At that, she feels sorry for her actions and for betraying him. As the novel ends, she chooses to live a single life separated from Shyam as a penalty for her deeds. She prefers to be a single mother, and neither deserves Shyam anymore.

Another notable individual is Saadiya, a Muslim girl in Arabipattinam. She is a person with a strong urge toward freedom. She is always curious to know what lies beyond the walls. She lives in a community where women are denied freedom and dominated by moral, religious, and social codes. She drives herself free beyond the borders by developing an affair with Sethu and elopes with him. She disobeys her

father, one of their community's religious leaders. Her life with Sethu becomes troubled by the birth of their son. She wants her son to be a true Muslim, which Sethu opposes. To her, this is a severe blow to her selfhood and beliefs. Later she commits suicide because Sethu challenged herself that she could leave him without her son. Her self is entrenched in her religion, and she sacrifices her life to uphold her selfhood.

By analysing the female characters of Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair, it can be estimated that they belong to the new generation of females. They possess modern values and perspectives regarding a woman's life in general and about women's self in relation to society and family. The writers prioritise the choices that a woman makes in life and attacks distorted views of society regarding their choices. Their characters are unique in the suffering and conflict they endure while proclaiming their individuality and becoming emancipated and empowered individuals. Even though they seem powerless and submissive, they ultimately emerge as successful individuals after the trials in their lives. It delineates a prominent trait among Postfeminist writers focusing on successful female characters. Even though they appear pathetic, all-female characters eventually gain power over their lives. This makes the writings of Postfeminist writers stand apart. The protagonists never rely on their horrible fate but try to rework it to make them desirable. Female characters confirm to Rosalind Gill's notion as central to postfeminist discourse as "being oneself and pleasing oneself"(155). With their innate abilities, they design their life as pleasing to themselves by strictly conforming to their identity and feminine self.

The authors appear not to picture their female characters as victims of tradition, patriarchy, and other adverse circumstances. On the other hand, they render them survivors who redefine and restore their lost lives and affirm their identity with

their brave and bold individualities. Women caught in discontent marriages, women prone to rape and other problems are not displayed in a desolate colour yet treated as situations with better solutions when women face them boldly and fearlessly. Through the denial of marrying a man who raped Marikolanthu, the writer tries to change the attitude of society, which considers marriage as a means of retribution. The writer also tries to change the widespread belief that a raped girl's life is doomed and that she cannot expect any better days in her life. Victimisation is avoided in the majority of works produced by female writers. More prominence is given to women's attempts to overcome the limits and impediments they face in their journey to affirm their individuality.

Another noteworthy aspect is the evolution of the different types of male personalities in Indian English Fiction, especially in Women's Writing. Men who are highly acceptable and share the same sense of responsibility towards family were seen. Janaki's husband, Suresh, Maya's husband, Govind, Binkie, Akbar, Shyam, Sethu, Ebenezer Paulraj, Janaki's husband, Prabha Devi's husband, and Akhila's brothers belong to conventional patriarchal male chauvinists. Meanwhile, Arjun, Rahul, Hugh, and Christopher belong to male individuals who have broader perspectives on life. They are not self-centred as others and share responsibilities in parenting and building up a healthy family. They provide space for the self-development of the female characters and value their perspectives, desires, and emotions. They are more flexible in the modern world and guarantee more freedom for women.

The writers celebrate female sexuality and present their heroines as embodying elegance and feminine virtues. They are charming, educated, and have modern perspectives concerning their life and choices. Their choices in life are a

means to their affirmation of individualism and emancipation. Such women dare to rework their life if the choices seem inappropriate or create obstacles on their path towards autonomy. The writers focus on the notion that their characters are individuals who think and act like human beings and who have equal rights and space as human beings. There is a shift toward stressing the condition of a woman as a human being who experiences the same world as men. The writers attempt to wipe out the gendered behavioural patterns in society that demands complete adherence on the part of both men and women. Writers open up the double standard of society in dealing with men and women through their characters. The concern of writers moved from women in general to individual woman, their struggles, anguishes, anxieties, and dilemmas in a postmodern world.

Postfeminism is generally viewed in connection with popular culture. According to Ann Brooks, "there is a conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on difference. It is fundamentally about not a depoliticisation of feminism but a political shift in feminism's conceptual and theoretical agenda. Post Feminism is about a critical engagement with earlier feminism political and theoretical concepts and struggles due to its engagement with other social movements for change" (). Post Feminism represents a change in feminism, both chronological and theoretical. It marks a movement away from second wave equality discourses and recognises the impact of those discourses in the current world. The concept broadens feminist theory in connection with young women's engagement with feminism and popular culture. Devaluing feminism becomes a common theme while discussing postfeminism Angela McRobbie's notion 'death of feminism' asserts that postfeminism deconstructs ideals of previous feminist movements. In a neoliberal society sticking to strict rules is no longer relevant. This

causes a rethinking of some concepts of the second and third waves. Feminist researcher Anita Harris echoes the words of Ann Brooks's view that "new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women". Postfeminism is a concept that enables an understanding of how feminist discourse influences contemporary society. It does not imply that feminism is dead or suspended. It encompasses feminism's intersection with theoretical approaches like Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, and Postcolonialism and challenges some ideas and assumptions of the second wave.

A key characteristic of Postfeminism is that it aims to make women self-sufficient. As women became economically independent, they do not require to be financially supported by a male partner. This shift in society is a noticed feature compared to the previous generation of women. The increased opportunities for women in the public sphere are still an achievement of the second wave; a postfeminist world offers more choices and varied situations to explore for the young generation of women. Today women enjoy diverse prospects than the previous generation of women. Women can choose any career and access education in their desired fields. This gave women the legacy to be anything they wanted, more independence and more choice than the earlier generation of women.

Increased involvement of women in the public sphere deprived women of enough time of spending with family. The recent trend developed is to delay parenthood. They neither deny motherhood, but more prominence is given to things they want to achieve, like education, career establishment, and financial stability. Women of today do not prefer children at a young age because they value self-development before settling with family life. Women also envisage working by balancing motherhood and other domestic activities. Motherhood is not viewed as a

burden as believed by previous feminists but is perceived as a natural phenomenon in female life which enhances feminine virtues. Postfeminism not only projects a changing world for women but also probes the changing attitude of the menfolk. Changed women and men are given equal importance. As it focuses on femininity and what makes a woman feminine, it cannot be said to be anti-feministic, as some critics point out. They acknowledge the differences women have. Neither do they regard these differences as a means to degrade one gender and upgrade the other?

Postfeminism asserts its influence in popular culture, media, and films; its impact is evident in people's lives in society. It directs to a new world where gender differences are bridged, with more importance on the individual as a human being. The emergence of Chick Literature and discourses that provide prominence to beauty, glamour and fashion are gradually gaining popularity worldwide. In Indian English Literature, too recent writers exhibit this trend. A significant impact of postfeminism can be seen in media and in popular culture, which strongly influences people. Further studies can be carried out in these areas, which will be more enjoyable.

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Recommendations

Postfeminism not only proposes a changing world for women but further delves into the shifting perspective of the menfolk. Transformed women and men are provided equal importance. As its focus is on womanhood and what makes a woman feminine, it cannot be said to be anti-feministic, as some critics point out. They recognize the variations women have. Neither do they look upon these characteristics as a mechanism to degrade one gender and promote the other. A key component of Postfeminism is that it targets to make women self-sufficient. As women developed into economically independent, they appear not required to be financially supported by a male partner. This move in society is a noticed feature compared to the previous generation of women. The enhanced opportunities for women in the public sphere is an achievement granted by the second wave, but a postfeminist world offers more options and diverse situations to explore for young women. Today women enjoy varied prospects than the previous generation of women. Women can choose any career and have access to education in their desired fields. This grant women the legacy to be everything they choose to be, more autonomy and more choice than the earlier generation of women.

As women are highly interested in the public sphere, women do not get sufficient time to devote to family. A new tendency is to delay parenthood. They neither reject parenthood, but more prominence is to things that they need to achieve like education, building a career, and economic stability. Women of today does not prefer children at a young age, because they value self-advancement before being settled with family life. Women delay motherhood until they are settled into a career, becomes a common subject now a days. Women also envisage working by balancing

motherhood and other domestic activities. Motherhood is not perceived as a burden by postfeminists but seen as a natural phenomenon in female life. Postfeminism asserts its influence in popular culture, media, and films; its impact is evident in the lives of people in society. It leads to a new world where gender differences are bridged and more importance is on the individual as a human being. The emergence of Chick Literature and discourses that provide prominence to beauty, glamour and fashion are gradually gaining acceptance all over the world. In Indian English Literature too new writers indicate this trend. A major impact of Postfeminism can be seen in media and in popular culture. The feminist critics explores the concept through media. Individualism, consumerism and domesticity are viewed in a new light which extends further spaces for investigation.