CHAPTER- 2

GENDER DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF FEMINISM

REVISITING WOMEN'S SPHERE

'Gender' is one of the busiest, most restless terms in English language. Gender has to do not with how females and males really are, but with the way that a given culture or subculture sees them and therefore the primary issue is to examine how they are 'culturally constructed'. Gender is not a natural process that emanates from the body; it is a socially structuring activity. Social division is based on gender. Gender refers to the cultural categories of femininity/masculinity based upon the biological division. We can also identify a person's gender identity and gender role. Gender identity refers to a person's self-concept: that is, one's own sense of whether one is female or male. By contrast, gender-role refers to a role that society expects according to one's gender; it thus involves the acceptance that particular kinds of behaviour (feminine versus masculine) are appropriate for each gender.

Sex is about anatomical difference but when it becomes culturally intelligible, it becomes gender. Gender is also an inscription of the past. 'Many people regard this opposition as 'natural', a word which can be used to mean 'biological', or 'God given', or 'morally correct', or all three. Yet the research published in sociology, social
anthropology, literature and psychology suggests that most of the things we associate with being male or female are cultural: that is, they are socially determined, and highly changeable throughout history and across the world.\textsuperscript{1}

The gender discourse starts at the time of birth and a complex process of labelling begins. The first process is naming a child. The names given to children tell us quite a lot about them, including fixing them into a context by region, religion and ethnic group. Then children's dressing (tracksuit for boys and frilly frocks for girl), the colour of their dress (pink for girls and blue for boys), manners (boys aggressive while girls fragile) and many more traits are attributed to the children. The woman's speech is hesitant and less definite than man's.

The social construction of gender takes place through the working of ideology. According to Althusser, ideology is that system of beliefs and assumptions - unconscious, unexamined, invisible - which represents: "the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence."\textsuperscript{2} But it is also a system of practices that reflects different aspects of our daily routine, like the way we talk, the words we use, the clothes we wear, the machines we use, the pictures we paint etc. The social position and rights of the various sections of society are determined by various ideas, beliefs, norms, values, attitudes and customs of people living in that society. Several anthropological, psychological sociological, historical and literary factors are involved in determining the place of woman and man in society. By constant internalization of performance assigned by the culture we become gendered bodies.

All women are made to participate in a male-centric universe irrespective of historical, cultural, class or racial differences. Inequalities result from tradition, custom
and prejudice. Prejudice results from the traditional and stereotyped attitude towards women which is both held by men and women, often unconsciously. Thus inequalities against men and women are the products of cumulative acts of discrimination. This discrimination against women generates resentment, and the corollary of this resentment is the outcome of feminist movement.

Feminism has focused right from the beginning on gender because a thorough revision of gender roles seems the most effective way of changing the power relations between men and women. Feminism has politicized gender by showing its constructed nature. After its initial focus on the gendered representation of women and men, it has very effectively widened the issue and shown how often seemingly neutral references, descriptions and definitions are in fact gendered.

Feminism is a global and revolutionary ideology. This ideology is political because it is concerned with the issues related to power and its operations in all spheres of human engagement including family. In the words of Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn: "Feminist scholarship undertakes a dual task of deconstructing predominantly male-cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized us." Feminism as a concept has originated in the West; its universal significance and relevance remains intact nonetheless. The vast scope of feminism has provided women writers across the world with the vocabulary and framework to articulate their experiences of female oppression and female longings.

Feminism is relatively a recent word first coined in France in the 1880s as **feminisme**. It spread through European countries in the 1890s and to North and South
America by 1910s. The term combines the French word for woman, *femme*, and *-isme*, which refers to a social movement or political ideology. Estelle B. Freedman defines feminism as a belief that: “women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies.”

She further clarifies:

> Each of the four components of this working definition—equal worth, male privilege, social movements, and intersecting hierarchies—require some clarification. I use “equal worth” rather than *equality* because the latter term often assumes that men’s historical experience—whether economic, political and sexual— is the standards to which women should aspire. The concept of equal worth values traditional female tasks, such as child-bearing and child-care, as highly as other kinds of work historically performed by men. The term privilege can refer to formal political rights such as suffrage or the right to hold office, but privilege can also include more personal entitlements, such as the greater social value placed on the male children. While women may participate in variety of social movements—civil rights, ecology, socialism, even fundamentalism—those movements cannot be feminist unless they explicitly address justice for women as a primary concern. Thus human rights or nationalist movements that insist on women’s
human rights and women’s full citizenship may be feminist, while those that overlook or affirm patriarchal authority cannot.5

Sexuality is an important area of preoccupation among modern feminists. According to Jeffery Weeks, “‘sexuality’ is an historical construction which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires and fantasies which need not be linked together.”6

Liberal humanists accept subjection of women as biologically determined. According to Gerda Lerner, “traditionalists, whether working within a religious or a ‘scientific’ framework have regarded women’s subordination as universal, God given, or natural, hence, immutable...what has survived, survived because it was best; it follows that it should stay that way.”7 She summarizes that all known societies subscribe to such a “division of labour” which has been based on primary biological difference between the sexes: because their biological functions are distinct, they must “naturally” have different social roles and tasks. And because these differences are natural, no one can be blamed for sexual inequality or male dominance. In view of the fact that women produce children, their chief goal in life is to become mothers, and their chief task, child-bearing and child-rearing.

Aristotle considered males active and females passive. For him female was “mutilated male” someone who does not have a soul. He said, “the courage of man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.”8 French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book Emile (1762) states that: “[w]omen’s place was to oblige us, to do us service,
to gain our love and esteem, these are the duties of the sex at all times, and what they ought to learn from their infancy. Woman is framed particularly for the delight and pleasure of man."9

Modern psychology has also perpetuated similar views. It claims that women's biology determines their psychology and therefore, their abilities and roles. Feminists define 'biological determinism' as a theory which claims that physical and physiological characteristics and roles can be explained in terms of biological factors, and more specifically in terms of the reproductive differences between males and females.

Women's subjugation is located in power relations. According to Foucault, "the term power designates relationships between partners."10 To him: "[p]ower is mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts on their actions."11 Foucault does not deny the existence of negative or repressive relations of power, but he de-emphasizes them, saying that our obsession with power negatively conceals the real working of power. In its negative form, power is understood as that which limits, controls, forbids, masks, withdraws, punishes, excludes and subjugates. He maintains that power is primarily positive rather than negative, productive rather than repressive, exercised rather than possessed, omnipresent rather than localized. According to him, power relation is a matter of degree rather than a zero point. No one has absolute autonomy in a power relation, nor is one completely determined by it.

But Feminists argue that women as a social group are dominated by men as a social group and this domination of women by men occurs within a set of institutionalized relationships called patriarchy. Kate Millet defines patriarchy as a society in which power resides in male hands. She talks about 'internal colonization' and
argues that domination takes place not only in the public world but also internally, in people's minds. She says that the sexual domination 'as a fundamental concept of power' gives new meaning to terms like 'power' and 'politics'. According to her: "[t]he term 'politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." She further states that sexual domination is: "the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concepts of power".

Gender is constructed in patriarchy. Patriarchy - institutionalized male supremacy - probably arose in Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium BC and gradually spread all over the world. Two influential theories of the emergence of the patriarchy help explain this process. It appeared in an 1884 essay, *On the Origin of the Family and Private Property and the State*, by Friedrich Engels. Engels argued that the subjugation of women began only when economic surpluses accumulated; thus private property, which leads to class hierarchy and the formation of the states, is the source of women's oppression. When individual families replaced larger clan and communal living groups, women lost their reciprocal roles. In short, Engels argues that private property was the source of "the world historical defeat of the female sex."

In a recent work entitled *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) Gerda Lerner says that women were first slaves, and all other forms of enslavement were built upon female reproductive slavery. She argues that: "[e]conomic oppression and exploitation are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women's labour power and her reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition
of resources and persons.” Patriarchy, an elaborate system of male-domination which pervades all aspects of culture and social life, is seen as trans-historical. The power relations existing between the two partners in a marriage determine the supremacy of one partner over another. Although the book *Elementary Structure of Kinship* (1969), a monumental work by Claude Levi-Strauss is not a critique of the sex-gender system, feminists are interested in his analysis of the dichotomy between nature and culture. In his analysis of kinship, Levi-Strauss proposes that social order is always based on kinship system. Marriage is to create social link between two groups which gives rise to social organization. Women are the gifts which men exchange with each other. Women are gifts not givers; they have no significant power over the system, which is controlled by men and works to their benefit.

In words of Gayle Rubin, a sociologist, “kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage, names and ancestors, rights and people, men, women, and children- in concrete system of social relationships.” Kate Millet emphasizes the importance of the family as the cornerstone of patriarchy. She argues:

[p]atriarchy’s chief institution is family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole. Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effect control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient. As the fundamental instrument and the foundation unit of patriarchal society the family and its roles are prototypical. Serving as an agent of the larger
society, the family not only encourages its members to adjust and conform, but acts as a unit in the government of the patriarchal state which rules its citizens through its family heads. Even in patriarchal societies where they are granted legal citizenship, women tend to be ruled through the family alone and have little and no formal relation to the state.17

In fact, the word family itself comes from the original Latin ‘Famulus’ which means household slave, and ‘familia’ the totality of slaves belonging to one man. The family system is the fundamental institution of class society that determines and maintains the specific character of subjugation of the female sex. The family is the only place most people can turn to satisfy some basic human needs such as love and companionship. Providing affection and companionship is not the only function of family, it is an economic and social institution whose responsibility is to maintain the social hierarchy. It moulds the behaviour and character structure of children from infancy through adolescence. It trains, disciplines and polices them teaching submission to the established authority. It curbs rebellious and non-conformist impulses.

Capitalism intensified the growth of markets, the specialization of labour and the belief in separate male and female spheres. It encouraged a new economic division between men and women by separating wage labour from the household. Early capitalism narrows women’s opportunities for work outside the home. By the 1500s, only one professional role remained for women, that of midwife. As wage labour spread, the
value of women's traditional work at home diminished. Confined to domestic sphere, women had less access to wages and thus became more dependent on men in the family.

During the 1800s, the ideology of separate sexual spheres intensified. “Man for the field and woman for hearth....Man to command and woman to obey; all else confusion,” thus, Alfred Lord Tennyson defines the place of woman in his poem in 1849.

In the nineteenth century new scientific theory was formulated by Charles Darwin in support of women's dependence on men. According to his evolutionary theory of sexual selection, reproductive strategies produced different male and female natures, his much stronger than hers. He wrote, “Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius.” Man thus attained “a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up than woman can attain.”

Herbert Spencer in England and G. Stanley Hall in the United States warned that using their brains made women unfit for motherhood because it would “enfeeble their bodies.”

Feminists question the traditional separation of the society into the ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres with its relegation of the women to the family, to a domestic realm which is conceived as a refuge from the world of work and competition of men in market-place and empire. Feminists demonstrate that the ‘private’ and ‘public’ are interdependent – that the ‘personal is political’. Another influential theory of sex-gender system builds on an opposition between nature and culture. Sherry. B. Ortner propounds, “The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact.” She states that women are seen as being closer to nature for three reasons. First, woman’s body space and life cycle are more taken up with the natural processes of
reproduction than is man’s body, which leaves him freer to hunt and make war. Second, her social role as bearer and especially the nurturer of infants who are ‘barely human and unsocialized’, and her close association to the domestic unit. Ortner holds that women tend to experience things, feelings and people as concrete rather than abstract, subjectively and interpersonally rather than objectively. She further says that a woman holds intermediate position. Her mothering role aligns her closely to nature but it also ambiguously places her closer to culture by converting children into civilized human beings.

Social scientists and women activists both accept the main postulate that woman is not biologically inferior and her lower social status to that of man is man-made. However, their approach to the cause of women’s liberation differs. These approaches have resulted in the formulation of different theories to explain how woman’s position was relegated to a lower status in the course of the development of civilization. Broadly speaking there are three theories: (1) Liberal Feminism or Moderate or Women’s Rights Feminism (2) Socialist and Marxist Feminism (3) Radical Feminism.

LIBERAL FEMINISM

The Liberal feminists launched movement for equal legal and political rights for women. They burst on to the political stage with demands for education, property rights and suffrage. By 1670s, European women had begun to demand access to formal
education. Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, a seventeenth century Mexican nun, presented one of the first defenses of women’s education based on the equality of women’s souls. She wrote in 1691: “[h]ave they (women) not a rational soul as men do? Well then, why cannot a woman profit by the privilege of enlightenment if they do?”

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the world witnessed two major revolutions - the American Revolution against British colonial rule in 1776 and the French Revolution against aristocratic rule in 1789. With the advent of these revolutions, the common order collapsed and common people, both male and female, insisted on their rights to political representation. Shelly asked, “Can man be free, if woman be a slave?”

The call for liberty, equality and fraternity echoed throughout Europe. In 1791 the French playwright Olympe de Gouges issued *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* in which she called on women to ‘discover their rights’. But their goal would not be achieved until 1944.

In England, Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill laid the groundwork not only for education but also for property rights and voting rights for women. In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft said, “I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves.” She stresses that women should learn skills rather than rely on beauty or emotional influence to survive. Harriet Taylor published the essay “Enfranchisement of Women” in 1851. She compared women to slaves and called for their emancipation through education and legal reforms.

John Stuart Mill is the celebrated author of *Subjection of Women* (1861). Mill believed that “Enlightenment of Womanhood” was badly needed. He believed that men
and women have their peculiar abilities. These abilities are not superior or inferior but they are “reciprocal”. In 1832 he wrote to Harriet, his wife, that: “the great occupation of woman should be to beautify life: to cultivate, for her own sake and that of those who surround her, all her faculties of mind, soul and body; all her powers of enjoyment; to diffuse beauty, elegance, grace everywhere.” Like other liberals, he believed that equality between the two sexes could be brought about by moral reforms, education and legal measures.

Moderate feminists believed that sex discrimination kept half the population unproductive. Males were not benefited by this measure. Therefore, women should be brought out from the four walls of the house. In The Feminine Mystique (1963), Betty Friedman analyzed the cost of maintaining the traditional male-female division of labour. She argued that women spent most of their time in unproductive housework and did not face challenges of life and they had been taught that true self-fulfilment lies in being wife and mother. She opined that as long as women are relegated to being mothers and mothers only: “motherhood is a bane and a curse.” By the 1880s British women were given ownership rights over their property through the Married Women’s Property Act (1870) and gained access to university education laying the groundwork for the militant suffrage movement of the early twentieth century.

MARXISM AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Marxist feminism provided an adequate explanation for the subordination and exploitation of women in capitalist societies. Marxist feminists questioned as to why
women were excluded from the public sphere and were reduced to the level of unpaid workers within the domestic sphere. They said that women did not become subordinated under capitalism but were already subordinated and that the overthrow of the capitalist mode would not result in the emancipation of women. Saint Simonians stated that, "with the emancipation of the woman will come the emancipation of the worker." 27

Marxism failed to resolve the dilemma of women's dual labours. The views of Marx appeared to be neutral, but they were in fact sex-blind; he failed to recognize that women were subject to special form of oppression within capitalist societies and did not analyze gender differences and gender ideologies. Although he used the term 'labour power' he assumed male labour force. He also adopted the naturalistic approach to the family maintaining that home was the best place for women. The paid labour of women and children was seen by Marx as a threat to male workers. Their labour was responsible to produce only cheap products. He did not challenge the practice of paying women less than men.

Nonetheless, Marxist philosophy inspired feminist movement throughout the world. Across the globe women started foregrounding issues both in terms of class and gender. Throughout twentieth century, the socialist critique inspired women novelists, theorists and scholars. Writers with socialist background reignited women's question after 1940s. Simone de Beauvoir in France, Doris Lessing in England and liberal feminist Betty Friedan all had strong roots in Communist or leftist movements. Beauvoir explained in her work *The Second Sex* (1949): "We must fight for an improvement in woman's actual situation before achieving the socialism we hope for." 28
Radical feminism places its main emphasis upon the power relationships by which men dominate women institutionalized within patriarchy. According to radical feminists, patriarchy preceded private property. They believe that the original and basic contradiction is between the sexes and not between economic classes. Unlike the traditionalists or liberal feminists they do not believe that patriarchy is natural. According to their analysis gender difference can be explained in terms of the biological or psychological differences between men and women.

Shulamith Firestone, one of the precursors of radical feminism, says women are oppressed because of their reproductive capabilities. In her book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1974), she argues that the division between men and women had a biological base. She believes that the basis of women’s oppression does lie in women’s reproductive capacity as this has been controlled by men.

Some radical feminists state that there are two systems of social classes: “(1) the economic class system which is based on relations of production and (2) the sex class system which is based on relations of reproduction.”²⁹ It is the second system that is responsible for the subordination of women. But the feminists also say that ‘it is not women’s biology itself, but the value men place on it and the power they derive from their control over it that are ‘oppressive’.

French radical feminists reject the biological explanation for the subjection of women. Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig argue that to give birth is not a biological
process, a natural given, but a social/historical construction of 'forced production'. They argue that it is birth that is planned and women are socially programmed to give birth. Women are forced to behave in ways that are seen as natural, and this has resulted in the creation of two discrete biological sexes. Biological theories of sex differences are social constructs, which serve the interests of socially dominant group. They argue that male power is exercised and reinforced in all spheres of life, including 'personal' relationships such as child-rearing, housework, and marriage and in all kinds of sexual practices including rape, prostitution and sexual harassment.

They have also been concerned to uncover ‘herstory’, to recover for women their history and their cultural heritage and to reveal the ways in which women’s knowledge has been devalued historically. They ask questions about the quality of their daily lives, their role in the family, their class and relations to other women, their perceptions of their place in the world and their relation to wars and revolutions. Women present a special case to historians: neither class nor caste, they are more closely allied to the men in their lives than they are to women of other classes or castes. Kelly states, “although women exist within social classes, they do not themselves constitute a class.”

Feminism emerged as an important force in the Western world in the 1960s. Charlotte Brunch (1981) has pointed out that feminism is not about adding in women’s rights but about transforming society, so that feminism may be called “transformational politics”. Because everything affects women, every issue is women’s issue, and there is a feminist perspective on every subject.
FEMINISM AND LITERATURE

Historically speaking, literature being an extension of socio-cultural milieu has mediated vital issues related to gender, surreptitiously strengthening as well as perpetuating myths surrounding the patriarchal ideology without being overtly vocal. Literature does more than transmit ideology: it actually creates it - it is “a mediating, moulding force in society”. It is through fiction that the individual perceptions of the real world be they literary, psychological, anthropological, social, biological, political or familial start to merge.

Therefore, it could be said that literature as a medium of imagination has the power to shift the boundaries. This implies nothing less than the possibility that the creation of fictional reality could have a high impact on reader’s perception of his or her own life-world. Seen from this perspective, the act of inventing and creating spaces for women’s social and political boundaries by fashioning new and re-evaluated spaces has become the work of feminists. As Gayle Greene and Koppelia Kahn put it:

Feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. This enquiry holds two related premises about gender. One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construct, therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline.
The second is that a male perspective, assumed to be 'universal' has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods. Feminist scholarship then, has two concerns: it revises concepts previously thought universal but now as originating in particular cultures and serving particular purposes; and it restores a female perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and contributions to culture.  

A feminist interpretation of literature involves decoding many of the systems of signification with which social scientists are concerned. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn argue that: “Feminist literary critics attend to the collusion between literature and ideology, focusing on the ways ideology is inscribed within literary forms, styles, conventions, genres, and the institutions of literary production.”

Feminist literary criticism has manifested itself in two distinct schools of thought: the Anglo-American and the French.

The Anglo-American feminist literary critic Kate Millet's book *Sexual Politics* (1969) is the precursor of all later works of feminist criticism in the Anglo-American tradition and feminists of the 1970s and 1980s acknowledged its debt. In this book, Millet discusses the power relationships between the sexes. Then she deals with the fate of feminist struggle and its opponents in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Finally she shows how the sexual power-politics is enacted in the works of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet.
Mary Ellman’s *Thinking About Women* (1968) deals with the political and historical aspects of patriarchy independently of literary analysis. She states that Western culture employs ridiculous sexual mode of thought and classifies almost all experience by means of sexual analogy. This affects our perception of the world. She exposes the ludicrous and illogical nature of this sexual thought. She uses irony in understanding this kind of reading.

These books of Millet and Ellman constitute the basic source of inspiration for the criticism of ‘Images of Women’, the search for female stereotypes in the works of male-writers. The first phase of feminist writing focuses attention on women as readers. Writers, male or female, create ‘unreal’ female characters. Feminist readings have no pretensions of being value-free, dispassionate and universal. But there is a conviction that they are necessary and important as one way of reading a text, which is also fully conscious of its leanings and limitations. This phase is marked by a preoccupation with exposing the stereotyped images of women in literary works and the dichotomous presentation of female character in literature. They are either presented as virgins or as whores. The connections between the social and literary mistreatment of women are drawn and the exclusion of women from the literary history and criticism is challenged.

The other branch of feminist literary criticism deals with the writings of women. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter sets out to: “describe the female literary tradition in the English novel from the generation of the Brontes to the present day, and to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture.” She calls women’s writing a subculture. She traces three major stages of historical development claimed to be common to all literary subcultures: First,
there is a phase of imitation of the dominant tradition, and internalization of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, Feminine, Feminist and Female.

In her article *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (1979), Showalter distinguishes between two forms of feminist criticism. The first type is concerned with woman as reader, which she labels ‘feminist critique’. The second type deals with woman as writer, and she calls this ‘gynocritics’. ‘Feminist critique’ deals with works by male authors and she says that this form of criticism is a “historically grounded enquiry, which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomenon.” Among the primary concerns of ‘gynocritics’ we find the “history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women” as well as “the psychodynamics of female creativity” and “studies of particular writers and works”

Critics like Gilbert, Gubar, Cheri Register are also of the view that since woman’s consciousness and world-view are different from that of man’s, their expression ought to be studied not in comparison with that of the man but by its own standards.

The most famous name in French feminist theorist is Simone de Beauvoir. Her book *The Second Sex* (1949) is a landmark in the history of feminism. This book is based on Jean Paul Sartre’s existentialist philosophy. In this epochal work she states that throughout history women have been reduced to objects for men; woman has been constructed, as man’s other, denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions. She shows how these fundamental assumptions dominate all aspects
of social, political and cultural life, and more importantly, how women themselves internalize this objectified vision. To quote her famous statement: "[o]ne is not born but rather becomes a woman....it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature."\(^{37}\)

Helene Cixous, one of the most prolific writers involved in French thinking about the feminine, maps out the binary oppositions that structure the phallocentric system as follows: Cixous begins with a question: "Where is She?" and lists up binary oppositions: Activity/Passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/Emotions, Intelligible/Sensitive, Logos/Pathos and so on. In the end ‘active’ wins precipitating death for the ‘passive’. Cixous’ concept of Ecriture Feminine, or female writing is crucially related to Derrida’s analysis of writing as difference. For her, feminine texts are texts that ‘work on the difference’. She states:

> In spite of vicissitudes that the concept undergoes in her texts, writing for her is always in some sense a libidinal object or act. By enabling feminist criticism to escape from a disabling author-centred empiricism, this linking of sexuality and textuality opens up a whole new field of feminist investigation of the articulations of desire in language, not only in texts written by women, but also in texts by men.\(^{38}\)

Julia Kristeva is primarily not a feminist and her approach is also not consistently political. Her work has been marked by psychoanalytic probe: which focuses on the problems of sexuality, femininity and love. She questions motherhood. In La Revolution
du Langage Poetique, she argues that woman is not repressed in patriarchal society, but motherhood. The problem is not women’s jouissance alone, as Lacan has it in Encore, but the necessary relationship between reproduction and jouissance.

All psychoanalytic criticism starts with Freud’s theories. Psychoanalysis purports to tell us what gender means - that is, how persons become psychologically ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. Freud’s three interrelated categories are crucial: the unconscious; the sexual origin of human motivation in repressed infantile incestuous desires; and the symbolic manifestation of the unconscious wishes in dreams, jokes, errors and art. Feminist psychoanalytic critics usually accept Freud’s morphology of mental functioning. They solve feminist literary problems like roles of gendered body play in texts, readers’ responses and the latent structure of the literary text, with the help of Freud’s concepts of unconscious, sexuality and fantasies. Feminist critics analyse how psychoanalysis explains themes and portrayal of characters in an author’s work with reference to his biography. They question structure, language, character and plot in a literary work.

There are other feminist critics like Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig. They have also contributed greatly to French criticism. French feminists employ Derrida’s method of deconstruction and Lacan’s theory of psychoanalysis to add a new dimension to feminism. They primarily attack language and allege that the very structure of language is phallocentric.

Feminist literary critics deconstruct the existing paradigms of patriarchal ideology manifest in language and literature and help to reconstitute a canon of works by women which were until recently neglected by mainstream literature. Women have the right to assert their own values, to explore their own consciousness, and to develop new forms of
expression corresponding to their values and consciousness. There are various strands in feminist criticism. In the words of Abrams: "since 1969, there has been an explosion of feminist writings without close parallel in the history of previous critical innovations." 39

**FEMINISM IN INDIA: STATUS OF WOMEN IN VEDIC PERIOD**

In view of the fact that Anand, Narayan and Rao belonged to India and also wrote about Indian scenes and sensibilities, it is necessary that the study of the position of women in the Indian context be undertaken. It also becomes imperative to assess the dimensions of the socio-cultural milieu their female characters spring from.

The status of women in India has varied in different historical periods and has also been subject to differentiations according to caste, religion and ethnicity. The general situation however, was one of suppression and domination within the bounds of a patriarchal system. Whether the woman in question belonged to a peasant family working in the field or belonged to upper caste family living a life of leisure, she was a victim of a set of values that demanded implicit obedience to male domination, and of many other social practices that circumscribed her life.

However, in ancient India women enjoyed considerable freedom and privileges in the spheres of family, religion and public life. The position of women was fairly satisfactory in the Vedic age. Vedic age was the golden period of Indian womanhood. “During the early Vedic period women in India enjoyed almost an equal status with men
in different spheres of life." In the pre-Aryan society according to D.D. Kosambi, agriculture was the monopoly of women. Woman was the first potter and weaver.

Girls were no doubt less welcome than boys but they were treated compassionately and they had their shares in the family and public life. Girls were educated like boys and they had to pass through a period of ‘Brahmacharya’. Radha Kumud Mookerjee opines that: “[t]he Rigveda shows abundant evidence pointing to the fact that women were fully the equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge, even the knowledge of the absolute Brahma.” Women philosophers were called Brahmavadini (i.e. learned women). Gargi, Vachaknavi and Maitreyi were well known philosophers of the Vedic period.

Marriage used to take place at an advanced age of sixteen or seventeen. They were educated and therefore, they had naturally an effective voice in the selection of their partners in life. There were love marriages, which were later blessed by parents. Marriage was a compulsory act for both the sexes and the position of a wife was an honoured one in the family and she was the joint-owner of the household with her husband. Polygamy was common in the ruling elite, but monogamy was the rule. The ‘sati’ custom was nowhere. If the wife had the misfortune to be widowed, she could, if she liked, marry again.

There were no social restrictions on their movement. In social and religious gatherings they occupied a prominent position. They were equal in religious matters; they could perform sacrifices independently and were not regarded impediments in religious pursuits.
During the period of Brahmans and Upanishads a perceptible change in the condition of women occurred. There was gradual decline in the female education as the period advanced. Their movement was curbed and tendency to curtail women’s religious rights arose. Still, in Panini’s grammar (500 B.C) several passages show that women had other careers open to them apart from a mere literary one.\textsuperscript{44} It is found from Patanjali’s \textit{Mahabhashya} (150 B.C.) and Kautilya’s \textit{Arthashastra} (about 300 B.C.) that females were also soldiers armed with bows and arrows.\textsuperscript{45}

However, in the age of Epics and the early Smritis the condition of women started deteriorating drastically. By that time Aryans firmed their feet in India and started marrying non-Aryan princesses. This alliance was the key to the general deterioration of the women. The non-Aryan wife, with her ignorance of Sanskrit language and Hindu religion could not enjoy the same religious privileges as the Aryan consort. The well-known dictum of Manu reveals that a woman should be kept under control. “In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord (her husband) is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent.”\textsuperscript{46}

Society had begun to discourage widow remarriage; specifically childless widow. It began to be argued that world was a mirage, and its pleasures were mere snares. Vedas declared that a son was necessary for securing heaven. Since childless widow had no issue she was expected to aim at higher ideal of salvation by leading a pure and chaste life.

Evidence of the beginning of dowry system is found after 200 A.D. “The \textit{Brahmapurana} therefore mentions how Sursena presented his daughter with cows, gold,
clothes, horses and ornaments at the time of her marriage; also when Samba was married to the daughter of king Duryodhana, she was given much wealth." ⁴⁷

In the age of later Smritis, woman continued to lose all along the line. Woman was regarded as of the same status as the 'sudra'. The age of marriage got reduced to eight years and no education worth the name was possible before the age of ten. Woman was, thus, automatically denied of education. She also, naturally, had no voice in the settlement of her marriage; she also failed to become a proper companion to her husband owing to her immense intellectual inferiority.

A greater calamity that took place in this period was the revival of sati tradition, though it was restricted only to the warrior class. Women preferred sati to the tiresome life of the widow and voluntarily ascended their husbands' pyre. Some were forced to do so because relatives feared that they would bring disgrace to the family. Earlier it was restricted to warrior class only but later so much honour had been associated with it that the Brahman women also started this custom in order to compete with the warrior class women. *Brahma Purana* recommends that it was the highest duty of a woman "to immolate herself after her husband"⁴⁸

The position of the women worsened further during the medieval period. With the advent of the foreigners, veil system came into existence. Emphasis on chastity increased and it was expected that they should remain chaste not only in her conduct but also in her thoughts.

Widow re-marriage was completely prohibited. "By medieval times the restriction on widow remarriage was so strictly observed in the upper classes that it included even girls widowed in childhood, whose marriages had not been consummated."⁴⁹ Widows
were considered inauspicious to every one. "Always watched by the parents and relatives of her lord, least she broke her vows and imperiled the dead man's spiritual welfare, shunned as unlucky even by the servants, her life must often had been miserable in the extreme." Mental atrocities on widows were so much that they preferred to die with her husband on the very funeral pyre. As for property, says Nivedita Menon:

women not only did not own property, they were considered to be property, the bride, for example, being gifted to the groom along with the other goods. Women were excluded from participating in a variety of material transactions, from giving and receiving Dakhshinas on ritual occasions, to giving and receiving tribute taxes. Women had a certain limited recognition only as wives and mothers in a patriarchal kinship structure. Further in the words of Bhattacharji:

Women has been a chattel in India ever since the later Vedic times when she was included in the list of 'dakhshina' along with items like cattle, horses, chariots, etc. Such gifts were given to priests. Evidently they were enjoyed and sold as slaves and prostitutes...Heroes are said to be rewarded with hosts of beautiful women in heaven; undoubtedly this is a reflection of earthly prizes given to heroes and eminent men.
Hence, the emergence of 'devdasi' and 'prostitute' took place. Women had very little initiative or choice about their destiny. They were pawned, lost or gained in battles, given as gifts, were relegated to the position of slaves and chattels.

Marriage, in this age, was regarded as a religious bond, normally indissoluble in this life. It aimed to ensure the full growth and development of husband and to preserve family and society by the procreation of children and their proper upbringing. Family was patriarchal and the husband attained greater power by marrying. Sons were indispensable as they alone could offer monthly oblutions to ancestors residing in heaven. Motherhood, therefore, represented the cherished goal of a Hindu woman. The birth of a son heightened her status in family and society.

Scriptures for marital duties had no ambiguity for women. Women had to perform conjugal duties with devotion. The 'Dharamshashtras' as well as 'epics' laid down 'pativratam' as a supreme duty of married woman. They had to perceive everything in this world in the eyes of their male-counterpart and define their self in their relationships with their fathers, husbands and sons. They were supposed to close their eyes and numb their minds in spite of the awareness of all that was happening around them. As pointed out by Sudhir Kakar: “[i]n addition to the ‘virtues’ of self-effacement and self-sacrifice, the feminine role in India also crystallizes a women’s connection to others, her embeddedness in a multitude of familial relationships.”53 As a custodian of Indian culture, woman is supposed to be an embodiment of the qualities of endurance and adjustment and is extolled for her stoic suffering and forbearance. Woman is deified in the Vedas as being 'shakti', the centrifugal source of energy for the creation of the world. The literary
traditions become a determining factor for moulding her rights and duties. In one of the epics, the Ramayana, the character of Sita is depicted who is the quintessence of wifely devotion and the epitome of womanhood.

The other figure is Savithri, who is the ideal of chaste and virtual wifely devotion who saves her husband from the mouth of death by the sheer tenacity and dutifulness. Subbama says, “our culture is bound hand and foot by our literary tradition which makes our scriptures the determining factors for moulding a woman’s life.” Indian texts essentialized women as devoted and self-sacrificing, yet occasionally rebellious and dangerous. Different texts carried different pronouncements for men. In contrast, women’s differences were overshadowed by their biological characteristics and the subordinate, supportive roles they were destined to play.

FEMINISM IN COLONIAL INDIA

Feminism started during colonial period by male reformers in nineteenth-century India. Patriarchal system in India was so firmly rooted that it was only men who could decide that it was time for change. The British were responsible in sparking this change. Indian traditions were dismissed contemptuously as ‘effeminate’ by the British. For reformers, change was essential but not through reliance on Western guidance. They believed in a glorious pre-colonial, pre-Muslim past where women were worshipped. The
reformist movements were intended to cleanse Hinduism of certain corrupt and decadent practices and to counteract the missionary propaganda by presenting the Hindu religion as one that was compatible with progress and change.

According to Nivedita Menon, “There was no uniform movement for social reform, but different campaigns on locally specific issues which were taken up at different times. By and large, these movements as well as the resistance to such reform were decisively shaped by the colonial encounter. Prominent section of the bourgeoisie were intent on reforming what colonial discourse presented as primitive and barbaric aspects of Hindu society, while resistance came from revivalist nationalists who challenged the colonial interventions into ‘Indian tradition’.”

On the other hand Geraldine Forbes, an eminent sociologist, states that: “[r]eform, actually a return to the past according to most social reformers, was in harmony with both natural law and the dictates of reason. ‘Evil’ customs, such as child marriage, and polygamy, were not in harmony with nature.....According to reformers these customs were perverted, twisted, distorted practices born of ignorance and fear and followed without recourse to common sense. The first generation of Western-educated young men had evoked reason as the touchstone for both ideas and action. These later advocates of social reform combined rationalism with their appeal to revive the golden age.”

Indian social reformers were anxious to redeem the reputation of their society. As far as the position of woman was concerned, the sanction for change was sought and obtained from ancient India. Thus Ranade states that, “the nineteenth century reform movement was in the great Hindu tradition of reform- reform which always sought out the ancient principles in order to restate them.” The presumption was that the basic
structures of society, e.g., family, caste system, etc. were not to be challenged as they were functioning properly in ancient times and that the present degeneration was due to some later developments.\(^{58}\)

The ideology that emerged to redefine gender relations was an amalgamation of new foreign ideas, indigenous concepts and the response of Indian men and women to the foreign presence in their midst. Social reformers rediscovered the past and engaged in new intellectual activity. Concerning this Rajat. K. Ray argues that: “[t]hey digested and borrowed and inherited elements in such a way that the new culture could not be said to be a pale imitation but was a genuinely indigenous product.”\(^{59}\)

**SOCIAL REFORMERS IN INDIA**

Across India, there is a long list of reformers who undertook major efforts on woman’s behalf. The pioneer in the agitation for women’s rights in India was Raja Rammohan Roy, a Bengali Brahmin. He reshaped the foreign ideas that came to him through his association with Mary Wollstonecraft and James Mill, and institutions to fit the social and cultural milieu.

In 1828, Roy and other enlightened Bengalis formed Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmos challenged all forms of obscurantism, as well as female oppression. He championed women’s rights on four issues: sati, polygamy, women’s education and
women's property rights. He argued forcefully that Hindu scriptures did not prescribe sati and consequently in 1829 William Bentinck abolished sati and declared it as a crime.  

Roy also advocated the right to property for the women as it had been stated in the rules of Dayabhanga. In his pamphlet *Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Female*, he pleaded for a change in Hindu law of inheritance so as to improve the status of the Hindu widows. He advocated property rights only for widows because it was according to the rules of Shashtras and, denial of property rights to women was justified as: “the principle is to keep the mother function free of all anxieties and pecuniary cares.”

However, this approach meant that the basic patriarchal structure needed to be protected. In 1894, the Right to Property Act gave a widow a life interest in her husband’s share of property and a share equal to that of a son. However the act did not give her the right to own or dispose of property and the daughters continue to be excluded from the property.

Ishwarchand Vidyasagar championed female education and led the campaign to legalize widow remarriage. Despite his efforts, widow remarriage never received the approval of society, polygamy was not abolished, and the battle for female education had only begun. “Widow celibacy was lauded by the elite as a hallmark of respectability.”

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, encouraged female education and protested against marriages between partners of unequal ages, dowry and polygamy. He advocated education for women in order to get participation in religious rituals. He said, “If the master of the house be educated and his wife uneducated or vice-versa, there will everyday be a war between gods and devils in the house.” The main
aim of education was to produce good mothers and wives. He and most of the other reformers believed that man and woman had different roles to play so different types of education should be given to them. Indian reformers thought that the 'dreadful social practices' could be eliminated only by perpetuating education. But, for women, the education was given only to equip them as good wives and good mothers.

Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, a Hindu philosopher, popularized the concept of a 'Supreme Mother' and her worship in the form of Goddess Kali. His renowned disciple Vivekananda, however, a radical on many issues, believed that a woman should not be educated in the modern sciences but should be trained to achieve fulfilment within the family. This ideology had a clear effect of legitimizing sex segregation that characterized family life, limited women’s sphere to home and glorified their role in serving the male population.

In Himani Banerji’s words, “what is of greater importance to us is the fact that there is a general direction through which this educational ideological venture moves. It keeps a balance, and a fine tension between speaking as and for a ‘gendered’ class, as well as women.” 64 She further states:

In this interpellated ideological form neither patriarchy nor gender division of labour is discarded, but is redefined and displaced in such ways as to mediate the emerging new social relations and to form new ideological cluster. Their (women’s) domain, however, is social reproduction rather than social production and they help to crystallize on ideology of ‘home’, womanhood and a type of
motherhood, all of which serve as complex social and emotional signifiers, working with desire and practical needs. It is this cultural symbolic cluster to which even to this day and especially now, domestic capital and consumer advertising cater to in a promise to make a dream come true.  

By the end of the nineteenth century women social reformers also came to the fore-front. Although they had to face huge resistance from the society, they continued to work for the emancipation of Indian women. Pandita Ramabai and Ramabai Ranade were most prominent social reformers of the day. Pandita Ramabai, a Sanskrit scholar, campaigned for women’s education and medical training for women and attacked the traditional practices in the light of Hindu scriptures.

Ramabai Ranade was active in social work. She held free classes for women in sewing and first aid, visited hospitals and prisons and distributed food during famine.

The social reform movement was started basically by men from urban areas, most of whom had benefited from the British education system and were influenced by Western liberal ideas. This male leadership of the movement affected the way women’s issues were taken up. “What issues should be taken up, how they should be taken up, to what extent any reform was to go, what were to be the purposes of educating women, what should be the women’s role in public life, etc., were questions which were decided by this leadership with its own limited understanding of women’s problems.”
GANDHI'S VIEWS ON WOMEN

Gandhi believed in 'Sarvodaya', welfare for all. Gandhi was opposed to gender discrimination. He was the first to raise the issue of personal dignity of women. He described discrimination against women as an anachronism. He once stated, "to call women the weaker sex is libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength then indeed woman is less brute than man. If by strength meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not great intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not great power of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man couldn't be. If non-violence is law of our being, the future is with woman." 67

He further states: "I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going." 68

Gandhi also spoke against the double standards of men and women. He was also against purdah system but emphasized on chastity. He believed that the real strength of woman was her chastity. He said: "[c]hastity is not a hothouse growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's." 69 About the education of women Gandhi stated:
In framing any scheme of women’s education this cardinal truth must be kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married couple, and therefore it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely sphere of women, and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and the education of the children, women ought to have more knowledge.\(^70\)

Gandhi profoundly said:

woman is the incarnation of ahimsa: Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?.....And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to trade the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for the nectar. She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.\(^71\)

Gandhi’s utilization of religious symbols though enabled women to participate in public life, also strengthened the religious values which became hurdle in women’s progress.
However, despite his liberal intentions Gandhi’s view of women’s equality could be located within the patriarchal system. Sadhna Arya argues that: “While he advocated a new role for women which was radically different from her traditional roles, this new role was not a departure from the ideology of division of labour between sexes which has been historically an important tool for the oppression and exploitation of women.”

In the similar vein, Gandhi saw an important role for women not in political decision-making but in those parts of movement, which addressed themselves to the task of transforming people’s ideas and lives; for instance, participants in demonstrations, Satyagrahis, boycott organizers and picketers. This was in tune with Gandhi’s idealizing the image of women as the embodiment of sacrifice and extolling the strength that come from suffering which helps to strengthen the prevailing oppressive stereotype of women as selfless companions and contributors to a social cause defined by men.

Gandhi never encouraged women to organize themselves as a political force in their own right around their own issues. They were to seek their liberation by serving the national cause, in the tradition of selfless social workers. For his ideology he was criticized by several feminists. Ketu Katrak argues: “Like other Indian social reformers, Gandhi reinforced British liberal and imperial policies since he didn’t challenge women’s subordinate position in patriarchal family structure.”

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN

The issue of women’s emancipation in India under British colonial rule was closely linked with two important movements: one, a political movement of challenge
and resistance to imperialism, and the other, a social movement to reform traditional structures. The inclusion of women in the national freedom was actually a resistance of the colonialists to the imperialist rather than an issue related to woman’s status. The reformers intended to prove that they were different from the imperialist or as civilized as them. Partha Chatterji states:

‘Women’s Question’ was the central issue in the debates over social reform in nineteenth century Bengal, the issue disappeared from the agenda of public debate by the end of the century. The reason for this, according to him, is the refusal of nationalism to make the women’s question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. In other words, the bourgeois leadership of the national movement chose to contest imperialist domination by simultaneously defining the public (‘outer’) sphere of the citizen as that where ‘we’ are the same or the equal to the imperialist masters, and the private (‘inner’) domain as that where ‘we’ are different, thus justifying the practice which were discriminatory to women. In his words, ‘Nationalism...located its own subjected its own subjectivity in the spiritual domain of culture, where it considered itself superior to the West and hence undominated and sovereign.’ The nationalist position was based on the premise the reform of the lives of women was an area where the nation was acting on its own, outside the guidance of the colonial state. Thus the ‘new patriarchy’ which the nationalist set up as a hegemonic
construct distinguished itself not only from the West but from the mass of its own people, for its argument about preserving the ‘difference’ in the ‘inner’ realm was relevant only to the sections of the middle classes. For the non-Hindu middle classes and other sections of Indian society which felt excluded from the idea of the nation produced by the nationalist leadership, the ‘resolution’ of the women’s question was necessarily problematic. 76

The beginning of the women’s movement could be found in the formation of the All India Women’s Conference in 1927. Radha Kumar argues that: “Originally, it was set up to discuss the issue of female education, but it soon found this question could not be addressed without looking at other issues such as purdah and child-marriage. From here came the realization that these could not be separated from India’s political subjection. Thus, the AIWC came to a point where it stressed the political goal of national self-government as a means to achieve women’s aspirations.” 77

Sarojini Naidu, a feminist and a true Satyagrahi, was the leader of AIWC, and the first woman president of the Congress. She campaigned for women’s rights (including franchise, education and divorce) but her views were conservative. She had the traditional view of the ideal woman. She laid emphasis on harmony and amicable cooperation between man and woman in the common struggle for freedom. Her campaign against discrimination against women was more preoccupied with the nationalist political struggle, bypassing the issues of women’s subordination within the family and in the
public life. Sarojini Naidu was severely criticized for linking social feminism with nationalism.

Another prominent woman national leader who was a radical feminist was Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. She was the first woman in India to run for the Legislative Council, but was defeated. Many foreign thinkers and activists also participated in the nationalist and women’s movements, the foremost being Annie Besant, feminist and former Fabian socialist who worked zealously for the Indian cause. Margaret Cousins, an Irish feminist also arrived in India and took part in many of the social and political reform movements.

Religion is considered to be an important tool for the subjugation of women. In India the religious plurality hampered the feminist’s way in strengthening the position of women. Many feminist scholars argued that the caste and the religious community are more powerful in women’s lives than gender.

These reformers viewed woman to be an amalgamation of the modern and the traditional at the same time. That implies that women should be educated, should be brought out in society, should know social graces, should involve themselves in national struggle and should be free from dreadful practices like, sati and child marriage. They should not be backward in any sphere: home and public life.

Of the several elements that nationalism adopted from tradition as marks of its native cultural identity, the image of the ‘mother’ was the most powerful one proposed to Indian women. ‘Revival’ of worship of mother goddesses like Kali, Chandi, Durga etc, eulogisation of motherhood in Vedic and Arya Samaj literature, symbolic representation of India as mother as well as mother goddess (as the presiding deity Shakti) - all were in
tune with nationalist glorification of the motherhood, which was seen as the ultimate
destiny of women. 78

The question has been raised by scholars and feminists as to how far women in
the national movement were ‘feminist’ as opposed to being ‘nationalist’. Certainly the
women’s movement did not call itself feminist, because that would imply priority to
women’s liberation, so it stressed rather, the joint struggle for national and gender
equality. At this time it was imperialism rather than family that was focused upon as the
root of inequality, but nevertheless, as is clear for the demand for female suffrage and
guarantees of sexual equality in the constitution, there was a clear feminist agenda as
well. 79

Women’s emancipation was sought without changing the traditional power
hierarchy that prevailed in most families. It failed to touch the problems of masses of
Indian women. The reform only touched the upper and the middle classes of society. It
meant little to women belonging to poor class. The concept of the ‘perfect wife’ was
redefined. “First, there were modifications in the appropriate activities for a female at
different stages of her life. Second, the appropriate arena for female action was expanded.
And third, there was a new and growing approval of individualism.” 80

This reform, in a way, further strengthened the patriarchal hold on women. Uma
Chakravarty has argued that for contemporary women this perception of the past “has led
to a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood has become
both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as a historical truth.” 81
This new patriarchy valorized women’s positions as wives and mothers. It also paved the
way for the ascendency of an urban middle-class prototype of woman. This growing
ideology was interested in the feminine merely as existing in relation to the masculine. The sole purpose was to produce wives and mothers who would be better companions for the young, English-educated men of the rising middle class.

Nevertheless, the efforts taken by the Indian social reformers helped women in improving their status. Their attempts helped Indian women to gain equal rights in the Indian Constitution. The institution of marriage and family still holds supreme in India and woman's primary role as a wife, mother and daughter is reinforced, which makes Indian feminists different from Western feminists. They protest against social injustice and oppression rather than fight for freedom from the institution of marriage and family.

While the basic underlying principles of feminism in the West and the East are to a great extent similar in terms of their objectives and goals the difference in the two historical and social contexts necessitates a socio-cultural specific feminist approach to writings in India.

There is no doubt that literature creates its own reliable reality: it offers the possibility to create and represent an open space of possible life-worlds. Literature thereby points to existing restrictions set by society and offers a different concept of what reality could be. And, though it approaches reality in great detail, fiction always represents a sphere very different, and therefore separate from reality. Fiction has the ability to function on different planes at the same time. It often combines elements of fictional narrative with socio-political motifs as it is in Anand, Narayan and Rao's fiction. Their fiction combines plot-line that addresses gender issues with political messages, creating a fictitious world that challenges the established concepts dividing fact and fiction, authenticity and reality. The tension between traditionally organized gender
perspectives and queer individualization processes is often reflected in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Their fictional world accommodates vicissitudes of problematic range of Indian reality.

Anand, Narayan and Rao initially dealt with the issues and problems of colonial India. With the evolution of India into an increasingly diverse society in the post-colonial era, and the heightened awareness of the need to preserve and promote this mainstream culture, these authors contributed to the cultural mosaic that was closely associated with the multiple Indian identities. Within their ethnic communities, many of the old patterns and rituals that had formerly dominated the lives of women got reinforced in a different way.

By the end of the 60s, however, awareness of the need for the women’s identity had emerged. Anand, Narayan and Rao have also taken tentative steps to change the trends of the time which merits close scrutiny.
Notes


5 ibid., 7.


11 ibid., 220.

13 Ibid., 25.


23 Quoted in Anderson, Joyous Greetings. p. 16.


27 Charles Fourier, quoted in Bell and Offen, *Women, the Family and Freedom*, VOL- 1.


33 Ibid., 5.


36 Ibid., 26.


44 Radha Kumud Mookerji. op.cit.

45 Ibid.


47 Ibid., 93.

48 Ibid., 108.


50 Ibid., 188.


61 Madhu Kishwar, in J.Krishnamurty, op.cit., p.104.

63 Quoted by Madhu Kishwar, *The Arya Samaj and the Women's Reform Movement*.
(mimeographed), 1978.


65 ibid., 60.


68 ibid., 217.


74 Ibid., 50.


