CHAPTER I
Introduction

"God inhabits where women get respect."

This line of Manusmriti was referred in Vedic civilization between 1500 B.C. to 800 B.C. At that time the women had respectable or honourable place in Vedic society and family. She cooperated her husband in all religious performances.

There was no purdah system. Women could take part in meeting or assembly and had right to study Ved. Some intelligent women like Ghosha, Vijaya and Upala Nivavary composed Mantra.

Women had right to choose their life-partners. Generally men were wedded once. This period was said to be one of the best periods of Indian History when the women were permitted to discuss the highest spiritual truths of life.

Manu said, centuries back while laying down the social codes:

"Pita Rakshati Kaumare

Bharta Rakshati Yauvane

Rakshati Sthavire Putra

Na Stree Svatantra Marhati."

During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth, upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons; if she has no sons, upon the near kinsman of her husband..... a woman must never govern herself as she likes. ¹
In those days women used to enjoy their due respect. Although they were under male-domination, this domination hadn't got monstrous proportions. At that time women were in high spirits and got revere.

In the beginning, the condition of women was quite subtle. They had their social, political and economic rights which they could enjoy in reality. They were equivalent to men. They used to take part in everything and had power to participate in religious performances and social activities. They had their own status in society in which they could take their decisions and in any way they were not less than men. “Economics Of Kautilya” tells that in Maurya period (345 B.C.) the women had right on their husband’s property. They could get divorce from their husbands.

In Rajput period also, women were honoured as mothers and sisters. Indralekha, Avanti, Subhadra, Padamshri, Madalsa etc. were some brilliant women of this era. But as the outside powers and kings assaulted on India, Indian culture was destroyed. Now the women were considered to be feeble and were oppressed. After this, the condition of women became worse and worse. The woman was captured in Purdah system and was denied to participate in court. She became only a source of satisfaction of man’s desires. The women were losing their identity- their status. Everything the men were gaining, were gaining against women. On the other hand, the men became more compelling and the women declined and declined continuously.

The women were being aware of the lack of abstract rights and economic independence. The women of declining-stage were the product of false
emancipation. They had only an empty liberty in that they were liberated but
liberated for nothing. And then came the “Mughal” age. It was the worst period
for women in Indian history. The plight of women was really pathetic at that
time. They were the victims of many wrong systems of society like child-
marrige, polygamy, Purdah system, Sati system, Jauhar system etc. The women
of only royal families had right and arrangement to get education. The women
were kept as slaves even in the royal or noble families.

Women had to bear a lot of pain both physically and mentally and hadn’t
any economic, social or political rights. They were facing the tyranny of male
authority and craving even for civil rights. The women were enclosed with thick
layers of prejudice and conventional ignorance. They had no autonomous
existence and were not only denied the equal freedom of self-expression but also
tortured physically and mentally to be quite or mute.

During this period, the society became totally patriarchal in which women
were only split subjects who used to watch themselves being watched by men.
The women were oppressed and discriminated beings who didn’t play any
important role in society now. Their role was limited in house-keeping and
producing heirs. She was a mother, a wife, a sister or a daughter and beyond this
she had no distinction to be called an individual.

The day of ninth November 1236 was good for women when the daughter
of Iltutmis “Razia” became the ruler in Delhi. Though she was a great, candid
and erudite ruler, the male- dominated society could not endure it and her regime
was ended soon.
In “Mughal” age many wrong systems, as I have mentioned above, had been in existence. Because of them, the lives of women had become a hell. Childhood, married- life, widowhood- each and every stage was a curse for them. They were not only tyrannized mentally but their physical plight was also miserable. They were not safe and sound even in their own houses. Freedom had become a hallucination for them and now they had even lost their will to be free or sovereign.

After this, the British period came but the condition of women got no modification. There was the system of child-marriage in which the girls got married in early age of ten to twelve years. Because of illiteracy they became mothers in younger ages. They had many children and finally they were limited in their families only.

On one hand, when Indian society was perplexed to dig up freedom and independence from British rule, on the other, Indian women were suffering from double slavery- one of British and other of their own families. In most of Indian families, women got the second or inferior place to men. Women had to oppress their desires reluctantly and the right of taking decisions was not theirs. Only the men took decisions not only of their lives but also of women’s lives. Women were the victims of domestic violence also.

The relationship between husband and wife was just like the relationship between master and slave. The society was male-subjugated and the men dominated women. In other words, we can articulate that the women were subordinate to men and were defined with reference to men but men were never
defined with reference to women. The woman was inessential and she was only an object. On the other hand, man was the subject. He was absolute and the woman was other.

The condition of women before independence or in British period was truly pathetic. The woman was never appreciated for anything. She was scorned and humiliated and could not even think to get a hold on her owing respect or any kind of rights. It was believed that men were the heads of household for they were the bread-winners and they should have been active in day- today and social activities. Opposite to it, the women were expected to bear and raise children. They were kept busy in household affairs and looking after the family. They didn’t need to think more than their household and families, and this is why the society was perfectly unfamiliar to them.

There was nonentity to think about the subordinate position of women in society. Why should the men think when they are in profit? They were enjoying their superiority in family and society. But why did the women not think about them? They were entirely limited to their own affairs and were too much oppressed under mate-domination that their thinking had been defunct. Now they had not valour to think more than their household, their children and their family. Not only in one family but the situation of women in most of the families was very similar. So the women had forgotten that they were misbehaved and had started to think this position to be their fate.
The main problem or the motivation for this situation was the illiteracy of women. The women were unqualified due to illiteracy and so they couldn’t think about their betterment. They had in fact become consistent with this position.

The women had been incarcerated and were wholly refused to look out of the casement. They could only remain in the house and wait for something satisfactory to happen. And what is this something? Even they weren’t acquainted with this. They were completely unidentified with the economic and social structure of the nation for they were not permitted to go out and strive to understand anything. Their only task was to watch over the family. The men had achieved domination of the world and subjugation of women. Polygamy had been in practice that man could have as many wives as he pleased and unfortunately not a soul cared about the feelings and emotions of a woman. A woman was thought to be a slave of her master husband, a possession or a property. If Polygamy was limited, it was only by economic consideration.

In past (before independence) the woman owned nothing so she didn’t enjoy the dignity or honour of being a person. In fact the woman was herself a kind of property, firstly of her father, then of her husband and at last of her son. The life of every woman was chained because of the deficiency in economic independence and rights.

The women had set up a belief that they should subordinate their existence to that of the men. The essential characteristic of the feminine woman was her passivity that had developed in her since earlier years. She belonged to her own world that was limited, enclosed and dominated by the male-universe.
Indian culture had been praising the women since beginning but the women were discriminated beings in practical life. Unfortunately even the educated people oppressed them. The women were not being afflicted only by outsiders or British rule, but they were being tormented by their own families—sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.

The women lacked the capacity to be self-sufficient and this incapability gave a kind of timidity to them. It is totally factual as this timidity could be seen all through their lives—in their deeds and in their opinions also. Yes, it is true that they had started thinking that success was reserved only for the male part of our society. This is why they were too afraid to aim high or think to achieve anything high.

The place and position of Indian women were completely unsafe and insecure. In olden times, Indian women were inactive and self-sacrificing who didn’t think about individual exhilaration but sacrificed their individual pleasure, anticipation and aspiration for the betterment of the families. The main concern was about the collective good of the family.

The decadence in the position of women was actually continuing till now. Nobody wanted a female child and a son was being preferred to a daughter and if we say frankly, this thinking is found even today in some illiterate families. The birth of a daughter had become a cause of great grief for the families, and sometimes it was seen that after the birth of female child, her mother was tortured psychologically and sometimes physically also as if it was only her fault to bear a female child while she was not at all responsible for that anyway.
Although the women were called a part of the society, to say frankly they didn’t know the true meaning of society. They were unknown to what society was. Whatever they thought about society, they considered it as a group of males who subordinated females. For them their houses were the whole world in which they were always busy in doing the household works, looking after their children and taking care of all the members of their families. They were totally unknown to the real outer world. They used to comprehend that the world outside their houses was reserved only for men and they dare not go there. It was the result of that for a long time they had been denied to look outside their houses which was the world limited for the women.

In Indian tradition, the concept of women as subordinate to men was functioning. Woman was being misapprehended as paraya dhan or other’s property. Until she got married, her custodians were her parents and in her matrimony, she was handed over to her new owner, her male-partner. In all the respects, her condition was miserable and there was nobody to be bothered or think about them. Uma Parameswaran comments:

The word purdah has two related but distinct meanings. One is physical, in the sense of women wearing a veil or burqa to cover their faces from public view; the other is more complex and attitudinal, in the sense of a social norm whereby women live in seclusion, both from man and from the sphere of civic and public action.²

The Purdah system came into practice in Mughal period. In Indian society, it was actually introduced to protect women from the invader’s glance,
but gradually it became only a means of showing prestige, honour and status of the family. The ill effect of this veil system was that the male part of the society became more and more powerful. The women were reduced to invisibility and silence. The women thought that it was their duty to maintain the family-honour by keeping them under veil or purdah.

The tyranny of the past could be glimpsed in the silhouettes of different customs and traditions. These customs and traditions imposed the subjugation of women in India who had become the worst fatalities of this age-old belief of subservience to traditions. Indian traditions and customs had always tried to keep the women subservient or subordinate to men. In other words it can be said that the male part of our Indian society has been using our traditions and customs for a long time in order to make the women subordinate to men. These traditions had entrapped the women that they played a significant role in big and high-standard families but their real existence was captivated in their very houses. They understood that our culture did not allow them to go out or try to be independent.

Something that is worse than the tyranny of male or subordination of women to men is that women victimize themselves and impose this attitude on other women. It is authentic that the role of women themselves in women’s authoritarianism in Indian society cannot be passed over. *Woman is the biggest enemy of other woman* is said, and sometimes it seems to be factual when a woman is seen entrapping other woman in traditions or customs. The women were vulnerable passive victims who were entrapped physically and psychologically by male supreme.
It seems that in the past everything was made to keep the women subordinate to men. All the traditions and customs were made against the women. They were blamed for the things for which they were never responsible. They had been suffering so many corporals and cerebral affliction for a long time and had lost the manipulation even on their own lives.

At that time there were many situations of women-lives for which they had to suffer a lot but for which they were not responsible at all. We can take widowhood as first of them. The woman who became a widow became depressed and hopeless already but sometimes she was blamed of her husband's death. The widowhood was a curse for women as it gave them complete isolation. The death of a man might be natural or due to some different reason but unfortunately the society cursed his wife's fortune and she had to undergo mental or psychological torture.

While discussing such kind of situations, we can't leave the condition of barrenness. Though the condition of barrenness is natural, the barren women had to face the questioning eyes of the society and sometimes they had to answer the absurd questions of the people. The main tragedy that came before them was that they had to see and tolerate the remarriage of their husbands. Nobody asked her anything and she became a puppet who could do nothing besides looking at the disaster of her small world.

In Indian social life woman's individual identity was entirely forgotten. They were being figured out only a means of sexual pleasure. The woman was not comprehended or accepted as a full human being who could think about their
desires and feelings when their condition was being overlooked. The woman was leading dreary life full of pains and suffering.

During that period, the wife in Indian family trailed behind the husband, she never dare walk alongside him. Those painstaking women were entirely devoted to their husbands. In other words, they can be put side by side to Sita or Shakuntala. Those were the days of subservience and passivity in the lives of Indian women.

The society was typically patriarchal and the women were shoved to occupy a secondary place in the social order. Although women constituted numerically at least half of the population, their position could be weighed against with the position of minorities. There was sexual politics- man was considered to be superior while female was thought to be passive and subordinate to man.

Patriarchy had constituted the man as subject and woman as object. The man was absolute while the woman was other in the comparison. Women held a secondary position in the society. The institution of marriage favoured man much more than it favoured woman. Submission or Passivity was thought to be the compulsory virtue in women.

During that era, as the females were not allowed to do anything positive or creative, they had lost their identity. There is no doubt that therefore, they could not get the recognition as only a complete human being. The main tragedy of their pathetic lives was that their actions, decisions and the real meaning of their lives were not in their hands. They were nothing but parasites in other’s
houses—firstly in their fathers’ houses, secondly in their husbands’ houses and in the end in their sons’ houses.

Although the woman was the key person of the family, she was living the life of slavery, suffering, subjugation and suppression. Women were suffering in calm as if lingering patiently for the day when they would be treated with tenderness and esteem. Most of the women were living as parasites or at the mercy of men and their whole existence depended on men. They could not take the decisions even on their behalf. It is weird and wonderful that man determined woman’s fate and elected what is decent and what is awful for her.

This was the situation of all the women of all the religions. On one hand, where the Hindu women were entrapped by the traditions and customs which seemed to be made only for the captivation of women, at the same time the Muslim women were suffering in their veils or burqas and were taciturn in all the conditions.

As I have previously mentioned that the social set up was patriarchal and an essential part of this kind of society was submissive, domesticated and self-sacrificing women. The society was male-dominated and seeking to make the plight of women worse and worst. Well-defined orbit of the women was that: they used to make themselves desirable objects of the subjects (men). They were not released or permitted to think more than this. Their task was only to maintain domestic arrangement, look after the family and keep their husbands in high spirits. If a woman was not up the snuff in these areas, she had to face rejection. For the Indian women, barrenness was regarded the biggest curse. The barrenness
or infertility was thought inauspicious. Women of such conditions were kept away from the auspicious functions in the society at large.

In this way, we can understand the bona fide situation of the female world in Indian society. In exact sense, they were unaided, and it gave the impression that they were waiting for a celebrity to come to lend a hand them. A number of ladies tried to get freedom occasionally but their voice was suppressed and they were chastised for their rebel for equality and liberty. There was requisition of rebel in concert. Many women were unknown to their power so the rebel for freedom together seemed to be impossible.

Fortunately, the Second World War broke out. Indian people were forced to participate in the Second World War by British Government. If they wanted freedom from British Rule, they had to do it. This was a condition or bet, and Indian leaders accepted it. Indian citizens had been suffering from the slavery of British rule for about two hundred years. They were enthusiastic to get independence or freedom. This was the rationale why Indian people accepted the bet of British Government.

Now there was another quandary. So many men were killed in the First World War and therefore, there was lack of males to wage the Second World War. The only way out of this problem was that the women were sent to battlefield to take part in the war. Although it was outlandish at that time because the job of women was limited in the house before independence and the period of Second World War was from 1939 to 1945, women had to go to participate in the war. The condition of women was certainly deteriorated at that time and their role
in society was negligible. But this World War was later proved to be a good prospect for the betterment of women.

Many countries were taking part in Second World War. Mainly Britain, France, Soviet Union, Germany, Italy and Japan were involved anyway in this war. The Indian women, who took part in the war, got in touch with the people of other territories. On the other hand, having participated in the World War, they came to know about their potential power. Till now Indian male-dominated society had made them realize that they were frail and submissive. But now their involvement in that World War made them some confident and they were now adept to think about their own potential power.

As I have mentioned before that Indian women came in contact with the women of other countries- especially with the women of European countries. Now Indian women were not in their houses concealing their faces under the veils but now they obtained a very propitious chance to know about the women of other countries, their condition outside India. They came to know the existent structure of the society not only in India but also in other countries. Now they were conscious of their powers. When they came to know that the condition of women was the worst in India and in other countries the plight of women was being improved, they decided that they would not endure anything wrong now. They also hankered after freedom and equality with men. Not only one woman but also a great part of Indian women wanted liberty and equality. They were together but now the question was that “What to do now?” The women, who have participated in that war, were now aware of their plight and wanted to change the
wrong social system but even at that time, many other women were unaware of
the same thing. They were unknown with what was persisting. If women desired
to challenge the society, they had to do it collectively, and this was the problem.

Feminism has already taken place in America. First of all, feminism was
introduced in New York (U.S.A) in 1848. The condition of women in all over the
world was almost same before some time. But one by one Feminism took place
and their condition began to be improved. Now it was the turn of Indian women
to welcome Feminism in India and get their condition improved. In 1945, the
Second World War ended and Indian people were going to get freedom from
British rule. At the same time, Indian women had become aware of their rights
and their freedom and now they wanted the introduction of Feminism in India.

After the slavery of two hundred years, India got freedom from British
government on 15th August 1947. But the slavery of Indian women under the men
was older to it and now when they had become aware of their rights, they were
not ready to compromise at any cost. The struggle of women was not going to be
ended in one day. It had to take a very long time because the male-dominated
Indian society could not easily grant liberty and equality to women.

The participation of Indian women in the Second World War proved to be
a fortunate thing in their plight. Now when they became aware of their potential
power and rights, they couldn’t endure more suffering and torture. On the other
hand, the male dominated society could not easily leave their superiority or
supremacy. A more struggling life was going to start for the women. In this way,
Feminism entered into India. It was the time when India got independence or freedom from British rule.

Now the first question arises “what is feminism?” Is Feminism a state of mind that wants to declare, “I also matter.” Is it only a theory? Is Feminism a movement for the freedom and rights of women? Is Feminism an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment with women? Is Feminism only a point of view that denotes the equality of man and woman? Is Feminism a movement by women that takes different forms in different contexts? In other words, is Feminism a movement from the point of view of, by and for women? Is Feminism a mode of existence in which woman is free? Is it an aggressive way of living?

Does it mean only female-ism or female-ness- the characteristic or qualities of the women? Does it mean the adage that advocates for women’s complete equality with men in all spheres of life- social, political, economic, legal etc.?

Does Feminism mean a sense of personal courage to get equality with men? Is Feminism a philosophy of life that tries to discover and finish the causes of women’s oppression? Is Feminism only an ideology of women’s liberation? Is Feminism a belief that women should have the same rights, powers or opportunities like men? Is it a search for identity and a quest for the meaning of the self?

Oxford English Dictionary tells that the Feminism was first used in the latter part of nineteenth century and it meant, “having the qualities of females.”
Actually as the time changed, the meaning of this term gradually changed. Different writers gave the different definitions of the term *Feminism*.

The term *Feminism* was first used by the French dramatist “Alexander Dumas”, the younger in 1872 in a pamphlet “L’Hommefemme” to designate the then emerging movement for women’s rights.³

Jyoti Nandan says, “Feminism is a process of subverting representations of gender and creating new representations.”⁴

Linda Gordon (a noted historian) gives the definition of *Feminism* in this way: “Feminism is an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to analyze it. The feminist literary tradition is grown out of the anxieties of women’s life.”⁵

According to Sushila Singh, “Feminism is an impossible undertaking. *Feminism* is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men.”⁶

According to K. Madhavi Menon, “Feminism, as a concept, has vastly different meanings in the West and in the East. In the West, *Feminism* is a movement in itself, extending to the idea of women’s sufferage and liberation of the notion of what are women’s areas of sovereignty and of seclusion. In the East, however *Feminism* is only in the germ.”⁷

According to Alice Jardin, “Feminism is generally understood as a movement from the point of view of, by and for women.”⁸

In the words of Toril Moi, “The two words ‘feminist’ and ‘femininity’ are political labels supporting the aims of women’s movements of the 1960s.”⁹
Present day feminist theorists believe that strictly speaking, *Feminism* is an impossible position. The agonistic definition of *Feminism* sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal power.

According to K. Meera Bai, "The refusal to be crushed, the attempt to fight and voice protest is the core of *Feminism*." 10

*Feminism* emerged as an important force in the Western world in the 1960s. The feminists, who were the earliest, were women who were actually the members of Civil Rights Movement and had protested against the Vietnam War and struggled for the abolition of slavery. The sexist attitude of their male colleagues who swore about equality brought them closer to form all women-groups. They grasped that the tactics used to oppress the blacks were same to those used to keep women subservient. There was an urgent need to acknowledge the necessity of viewing women as a separate group. To fight racism, capitalism and patriarchal society, a political necessity was this revolutionary *Feminism*.

*Feminism* entered in India also. But like in other eastern countries it is in the germ. It is not a battle or a complete movement but only a developing awareness. The women writers give literature related to *Feminism* and this literature shows that the educated Indian women have become aware of the degrading status of women in India. These women writers want to make all the women aware of their rights, liberty and equality with men.

I have mentioned above the first use of the term "Feminism" but after some time *Feminism* became a cultural movement which aimed to secure liberty
and equality of women with men so that they could also enjoy their social, political, educational, economic and religious rights. When this movement was spreading world-wide, how could India be left behind?

India also welcomed Feminism so when the new Indian constitution was being adopted, all women were given rights to vote or participate in that. The constitution was adopted and it gave women all social, political and economic rights as men had. The constitutional provisions were not only theory but they were translated into reality. We can believe this by thinking about Mrs. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, Jai Lalita as Chief Minister, Madhuri Shah as Chairman of U.G.C. etc. With the adoption of our new constitution, women were ready to fight or struggle with male society. Yes, Feminism has come.

As we have found out that many writers have defined Feminism in their own ways. Their points of view regarding Feminism are sometimes similar and sometimes different. A writer thinks Feminism to be a concept of liberty and equality of women with men and the other considers it as a movement for the rights of women.

Consistent with me none of these writers is wrong. It looks that they have described the same thing in assorted protocols. Actually in the past when Feminism came into existence, it was only a concept, a philosophy of the liberty of women and their equality with men. But progressively this concept of equality began to be adopted by almost all the countries, this became a movement- a cultural and then political movement that calls for equal social, economic and religious rights of women as the men enjoy in this male-dominated society.
Whatever the *Feminism* is, but as a philosophy or as a movement, its aim is “freedom of women from this chronic slavery of men and all kinds of rights for women equal to men’s.”

*Feminism* doesn’t mean the behavior of women like that of men. It means economic independence of women. Actually *Feminism* is the state of mind that makes the women realize that they are also relevant. It can be considered as a movement all over the world that wants to make the women think that they are not only objects of desire or property of society. This movement always wants to make the women aware of their freedom, their rights—social, political, religious and economic and their equality with men.

In this way, *Feminism* as a concept and as a movement pervaded all over the world. Somewhere it was adopted early and somewhere later. *Feminism* was also adopted by the Indian women at the same time when Second World War ended, India got freedom from British rule and new Indian constitution was adopted. This movement has not come to an end yet. In point of fact, it is going on even now. It has been a long time since we adopted *Feminism* in our country. Has the condition of women been changed during this time? Is there any change in the plight of women before independence and post-independence?

Not only women writers but also some male writers began to write on *Feminism*. To speak ideally, the literature of both man and woman writers should be studied in the same way. But in reality it is not so. As we have not reached at the point where feminist criticism becomes necessary and when we reach there, there will be no need to pay attention to the sex of the writer.
The real condition of women before independence has been discussed by now. Now we need discussion on the condition of women at present. In spite of Feminism, the condition of Indian women has not been changed from tip to toe. But the improvement in their plight cannot be disregarded. Feminism has improved their condition in India but even today women have not got complete freedom or equality with men. Even today women have lack of economic, legal, political and social privileges. If we put side by side the condition of women in India with that in other countries—especially in Western countries, we come to know about the backwardness of Indian women. Not only women but also some dedicated reformers tried to improve the deteriorating condition of women in India. Social reformers like Raja Rammohan Rai welcomed education as a weapon to fight against the evils of child-marriage, Sati-system, Caste-system, dowry- system, polygamy and such other evils. Now we need to make an estimate to which limit the plight of Indian women has been improved.

The time has changed, Feminism has pervaded in India. It is proper to say that education has imparted positive thinking and a longing for identity in Indian women. But this feature is not applicable in the cases of all women. Even today there is illiteracy in many regions in India. Because of this lack of education, women have not got the place that they should have.

An unfortunate thing about the men’s attitude towards women is that they outwardly advocate female-education but in reality they don’t accept and assimilate awareness of women. Indian male-dominated society expects the women to be custodians of the Indian traditions and customs. Our society can’t
easily admit the uniformity of women with men. So many men are seen who support the equal rights for women in public but in their houses they deny the enjoyment of these rights for the women of their families. Because of men’s erroneous thinking the women cannot go forward so effortlessly.

Our society is even today a patriarchal society where women are subsidiary to men. In such atmosphere a woman owns nothing. She is herself a property—firstly of her father, then of her husband. Women lack the enjoyment of dignity of being a person. She is a daughter, a sister, a wife or a mother. But who is she? What is her own identity? She doesn’t know and perhaps doesn’t want to know. In the present age some women are educated, want their career and are aware of their identity, rights and independence.

Women’s desires, their dreams, their emotions and their thinking are repressed by the male-dominated society so that they can keep silence. The men want to keep the women silent and busy doing the household works.

Even today woman is regarded as a property. When she is a young girl, her father owns all the power over her and when she gets married, her father transfers this authority to her husband. Fathers and brothers dominate Indian families. Women belong to a small sphere that is limited, closed and dominated by male-universe. The inability to get independence and be self-sufficient makes the women timid and this timidity pervades over their whole lives. It is observed in their behavior and actions. They begin to believe that only men deserve success or accomplishment is reserved for men merely. High goal or aim frightens them and they dare not go forward to achieve them. The male-
dominated society makes the women deem that they should subordinate their existence to that of men. This belief or point of view captivates the women in the houses and their role is limited in the domestic work, looking after the family and bearing the children.

Although the Indian society has accepted the women’s hard work, devotion and sacrifice to an extent, the other side of this fact is that after so many years of independence Indian women seem to be struggling for their freedom. Men have not stopped to oppress them and they are facing the slavery under male-domination.

Indian society neglects the virtues and intellectuality of women. Woman is considered a mean of man’s convenience. In other words, she is only a sex-object. She is nothing without man or her identity depends on her family. All the facts, values and ideals talked by men, are hollow and false. At present women like Naina Sahni, Anju Ilyyasi, Shivani Bhatnagar, Madhumita, Jaisika Lal etc. undergo the insult and punishment that was suffered by Sita, Draupadi, Ahilaya and Ansuiya so many years ago.

Most of the men think that a woman is man’s shadow and if she has some identity, it is only when she is with the man or her family. The women are considered to be neglected and unwanted others. They are not given the love and honour they deserve. Our society has always made the women feel that they are the women and it means that they are subordinate to men or their place is secondary to men not only in family but also in society.
Since childhood, the girls are taught to endure the tyranny of males. They are told that their husbands are like God (Parmeshwer) and it doesn’t mean how they treat their wives. The girls are made comprehend that they need not complain against them. It is considered the duty of a woman to serve and look after her family without any complaint against anyone.

Women play significant role in their families but it is neglected and given no importance. The traditions are used in such a way that they make the women subordinate to men and the very existence of their lives become unknown to everyone. Though a very important and high place has been imparted to women in our Indian culture and civilization, it only sounds good and seeing practically, it doesn’t seem so. The male part of our society doesn’t want to give them their place and pretend to be unknown to Feminism because of their fear of loss of the place as God.

We encounter some frightening realities when we endeavor to look compactly at lower stratum of society. Even in present age, in the Indian social milieu, in the families of lower stratum women are accustomed to abuses and beatings they receive from their husbands. They earn money with toil that is snatched with manual slogging by their drunkard husbands. In these families woman-beating is very familiar. It appears that they are habitual to this kind of misbehavior of their husbands. They spend the whole day in working and earning money while their idle husbands spend their time lying and wandering here and there. Despite this truth, their husbands thrash the women and snatch their money earned with hard work. This is the exact pathetic picture of the lower stratum of
society. Thus, the rights of women are merely in black and white in constitution and they are not applied rationally in our society.

The condition of women in upper-standard families is better than that in lower class. During present age, the women of upper class family have opportunity of getting education. Because of this education, they become aware of their social, political, economic and religious rights. They come to know that they should have correspondence with men. They elect their career, become self-supporting and thus, prime themselves to struggle and wrangle with males in male-dominated society. This is what we make out in cursory glance on the families of upper standard in Indian society but the fact is that even today woman is considered inferior or lesser than man.

The woman never gets the honour of being a person. Actually her own self or identity is faded or blurred. She remains only a part of patrimony of a man. Even in this twenty-first century polygamy is common to hear all over the country. It is bitter to listen but factual that about ten millions women are enduring the evil of polygamy. In other words, a large number of women are facing problems or difficulties because their husbands have married twice or more times. A man can have as many wives as he likes but a woman or even a widow cannot think of marrying again. Polygamy is limited by economic considerations only and it deteriorates the women’s condition badly. Even today so many women are trapped in such a situation that they cannot even say a single word against their husbands or regarding their remarriage. It is a treacherous evil of society. Although it has become less at present than past, it is in existence even
now. After the movement *Feminism* and development of education, these evils should be aloof from society.

While discussing the evils of society, we cannot disregard child-marriages. The search and study in this region tell that the marriages before legal age generally break up before the mature age. In such matters the woman becomes victim and she is forced either to work in other’s houses or to accept prostitution. If the question is of polygamy, its basic origin is the secondary place of women that is in existence because of illiteracy and poverty. In most of Indian families the unmarried girl is considered as a burden, and if the family members are unable to find a suitable match for her, they find it better to get the girl married with an already married man than to keep her unmarried in their house.

India is a developing country, *Feminism* has already been introduced in it, and education is being provided for most of people and especially for girls but the real plight of women in India is pitiable as described above. We have rules and regulations against all the evils of society but they are only in print in constitution. Is there someone who follows or practices them? Is it not the right of women to get their due respect? They have not even now got equality with men and other economic, social, political and religious rights which they deserve. Although they work whole day assiduously like men and more than men, they don’t get any support or commendation from their families. Their exertion is considered as their duty. The life of a woman is spent in thinking and doing for others without any gratitude of others towards her. This is the form of life of a widespread woman. What if she is suffering from some other crisis or she is
victim of the evils of society like Bigamy, Child-marriage, Dowry- system etc. They are forced to be tranquil and silent all the life although tyranny is introduced in it.

In spite of Feminism and freedom from British rule, women are split subjects and the meaning of their own lives is not in their own hands. It seems that they are not allowed to do anything positive in their lives. They can only watch themselves being tortured and teased by male-dominated society. Women have to transform themselves into objects. In our society man is subject while woman is object. It can be considered easily that men desire to dominate women and unluckily some factors enable them to do so freely. The man considers his spouse a slave, and so the relationship between man and woman converts into a relationship between a master and a slave. The males of the society always make attempt to achieve something and whatever they achieve, it seems, has been achieved against women. The man turns powerful day by day, and with it the woman declines slowly but surely.

Actually the subordination of women is advantageous enough for our society since it is a male-dominated society. Women are kept mute or silent in order to prevent them from complaining or rebelling. We find numerous factors combining against women’s independence and their equality with men. Firstly, women are scrawnier than men in the flesh but this frailty is not countable at present age because women have got several ways to earn money and become independent. Proper education is not made available for all the females for it causes a fear that if all the females are literate and aware of their rights, they can
rebel together. Due to this mentality, a number of girls in India are kept away from suitable education that can make them self-dependent and aware of their rights as human beings.

Indian women are seen chained all around because of lack of economic independence and abstract rights. The women have only depleted liberty and perhaps they have permission for nothing. Even in this period, woman can’t take her decisions related to her own life. She doesn’t know the meaning of her existence and relies on her father, husband or son for everything one to all. Then what is her identity? Nobody knows and nobody cares. The very meaning of her life and existence is in her husband’s control. Firstly, her father takes the decisions pertaining to her life and when the ownership is transferred from her father to her husband, the right of taking decisions about her life goes to her husband. In the last stage of her life, her children- only sons not daughters have this right. At any stage of life woman is not free for anything, she is not free even to take decisions of her own life, not of other’s life.

It can also be felt that the woman makes her choices not according to her real nature but according to her husband’s liking and disliking. She forgets her own existence while serving her husband. But what does the man do in reply? Sometimes he doesn’t even notice his spouse’s sacrifice for him and sometimes he thinks it her duty to be devoted to him. It is not a matter of exchange between husband and wife but it is only a matter of giving and receiving nothing in exchange. Education is attempting to make everyone aware of women’s rights
and independence but the male part of our society doesn’t want to accept it because they are in profit already.

Women have been leading a life of suffocation and suffering in this male-dominated society for a very long time. Their endurance and extinguishments in their own houses are unspoken. With her family she is not liberated to do anything according to her own will. She feels stifled with her family-members. Her life is not private, it is considered to be the property of family altogether. Everyone has the right to interfere in it and she can’t live according to her own longings. The women are chained in their houses and don’t have license as human beings. It is a violent fact of our Indian society that in marital relationship the husband behaves like a master or lord while his mate is an image of sacrifice and dedication.

Woman has to be dependent on the male who can be her father, husband or son. Although women are considered respectable or honourable in Indian culture, practically their place and position are not completely safe and secure. Their place is always secondary in the society. In Indian tradition, the concept of women as subordinate to men is deep-rooted and it is very tough to change this system outright. Woman has been regarded as Paraya-Dhan. Their custodians are their parents till marriage and after it they are handed over to their right owners. The form of woman that is not determined by biological or psychological facts is determined actually by the whole civilization.

It is factual that woman deserves a place of respect in Indian culture but with it, it is also sure that this doesn’t indicate that Indian woman’s position and
place are safe and secure. Since these things are only seen written in the books that women should be respected or they are the statues of sacrifice and patience but if we look at the real position of women closely, we will come to know that the fact is that nobody cares for their respect and their sacrifice for everyone is never appreciated but ignored always.

Woman of India has never been accepted as complete human being and her individual identity has never been realized in our society open-mindedly. The males are not unknown now to the potential power and other capabilities of the women-world, but they are not ready to admit these things as they have fear of losing their superiority.

Even at present we can observe in some families that in our society that is patriarchal, a female child is brought up by her parents under the strict laws as they want to make her ready for her new owner, her husband. In many families marriage is the destiny of several girls in this advanced or developing country. This plight of women has been such for a long time and unfortunately it has not been improved.

Thus, we can summarize that women's condition is even now in a bad stage. Although several efforts have been made to improve the deteriorating plight of women, they are not thoroughly successful. Even in this twenty-first century, women are subordinate to men. The evil systems of society that are against the welfare of females have not been removed completely. We are aware of the cases of child-marriage and polygamy. The dowry-system and Veil system are in practice even today. The low mentality of our male-dominated society is
found even now. The illiteracy especially in women has been keeping these evils in existence. All the women are not conscious of their social, political and religious rights, economic independence and equality with men. In foreign countries the condition of women is much better than that in India. While woman is an image of sacrifice, the man doesn’t digest her betterment, progress and development.

This is only one aspect of women’s plight or the improvement in their condition. It is altogether truthful that women’s place is secondary even now and they are subordinate to men. But we can’t let slip the effects of Feminism and education. As it has been already discussed above what Feminism is. This movement has been introduced in India during the period of independence (after Second World War) and since then an improvement is being noticed in the plight of women.

Firstly, this movement has made the women aware of their rights, economic independence and equality with males of society. They had always been taught about their duties but now they have become familiar with what their social, economic, religious and political rights are. They have knowledge of what they should have. Woman is now conscious of her equality with man and her rights as human being. They have learnt through Feminism that they should be honoured at least as persons and they should have authority to take decisions regarding their own lives. After this movement or considering the concept of Feminism, women are eager to get economic independence. They come to know that if financially a woman is dependent, she need not bend before the patriarch
of family or before this male-dominated society. So all the women want to be independent, especially economically. To be economic independent, they have to achieve education at different levels, and when they get proper education, their thinking becomes better and high. Now their deteriorating plight begins to be improved and this improvement is the result of education and ultimately of Feminism.

We can notice the improvement in women's condition by comparing the plight of women in present with that in past. Although it can't be concluded that their condition is altogether excellent, the positive change in it cannot be laid aside. It can be explained stepwise. First of all the number of dowry-cases has been reduced. It is the consequence of strict laws against dowry-system. If a woman or her parents report a dowry case, a strict action is taken against her in-laws. And if they are proved to be demanding dowry or torturing the girl, they are imparted hard punishment. The other cause is that the educated women don't bear it if her in-laws tease her for dowry. Now-a-days the incidents of Sati System are almost negligible.

Strict laws and education in women are also restraining polygamy or Bigamy. The evil of child-marriage also seems to be leaving the society. Educated woman is aware of her place in family and her husband's life. She can't put up with the practice of Bigamy of her husband easily and can demand justice from court if she is self-dependent. Now women are familiar with their rights and the way to get them back if they are snatched. This is why women are now achieving freedom from the problem of Bigamy-practice of their husbands.
The changing mentality of women due to education and Feminism can’t be left in the lurch. Recently they are not ready to be others but desire to be one with men. Now they want same opportunity and authority that men have. The sphere to which they belong is opening now. Most of the women don’t wish to live in their fathers’ or husbands’ houses as parasites. They are being granted opportunities and so they are taking their benefits soundly. Although unwillingly, our society is giving freedom to an extent to the women, it is not true for all the women of every class. Women’s opinions have now changed and their destiny is not now only marriage and household works. They have desire to do something useful and positive in their lives and search their own identity.

In educated and advanced families the birth of a female-child is also welcomed now as that of a male-child. A reason for this change in consideration is that now girls also prove them successful in lives and become a reason of honour and pride of their families. Constitution provides provisions to women and these provisions seem to be translated into realities. At present, the educated women who have studied and worked in social and public regions are serving the country on high posts. We can’t overlook the women like Kalpana Chawla, Lata Mangeshkar, P.T. Usha, Anju Boby George, Saniya Mirza, Aishvarya Rai, Kiran Vedi etc. who have guided the way to men also but unfortunately we can’t surmise the actual state of all Indian women only by these successful women.

The improvement in the plight of women has been noticed but it is to an extent unluckily not complete. Complete change in women’s state is possible in twenty-first century only when women come forward, be guide for them and
others and achieving victory get the equality with males of society. Famous feminist Simone de Beavoir has said that the tyranny on women would be continued until they didn’t take the form of a revolution. Now women don’t approve the image of Sita-Savitri, they love to change. It is constant that if woman becomes power, she really becomes Durga and if women-power is gathered, no other power can defeat it. This has been known forever but to introduce this concept practically in society, awareness, direction, guidance etc. were very essential and our literature provided all these entities for the society. In this long period of Feminism and because of strict provisions in constitution, the evils against women should have been controlled but they are only limited but not disappeared totally. It is nothing but our defeat. Several writers have imparted the contribution in the field of Feminism.

Shashi Deshpande, a famous Indian woman novelist reveals women in her novels facing the problems so frequently, sociologists have discussed. According to her, even women are responsible for their pain and suffering because they also contribute to their own victimization. Women should struggle for their rights but they don’t offer resistance. Shashi Deshpande feels embarrassed when she is called a woman writer. Although she denies the influence of Feminism in her works, the fact is that Feminism is the base of her novels. Her famous novels are The Dark Holds No Terrors, The Legacy, That Long Silence etc.

Bharti Mukherjee, an Indian novelist (settled in America) creates a self-hood drawing sustenance from traditions and tries to take decisions or opt an aspect in the dilemma in family in her novels. She accepts positive attitude in
later novels. She depicts emotional state of mind, longing for the past, pain for
exile and homelessness, unfriendly surroundings and identity crisis of her women
protagonists in a new country. Her famous literature includes The Tiger’s
Daughter And Wife, Jasmine, The Middleman And Other Stories etc.

Kamala Markandaya goes into the factors like racism and probes the
emotional implications. Her novels reveal that she is “feminine” in her
perspective because she gives significant place to women in her novels. Some
circumstances in her novels show her intense awareness of her self-identity as a
woman and her concern for feminine problems. She investigates the factors that
shackle women. She seems to be involved in the relationship of the individual
and society. She emphasizes on the traditional attitude of women in her literature.
Her writings are Nectar In A Sieve, Some Inner Fury, Two Virgins, The Golden
Honeycomb, A Handful Of Rice, A Silence Of Desire etc.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, as a woman novelist was aware of the basic
importance of race-relations in present age. Her feminine approaches are essential
to our understanding of the contemporary state of literature. Jhabvala presents the
social, familial and cultural implications of human characters and situation. The
theme of her novels is social alienation. She depicts the changing position of
women in changing society, problems of women and their reaction to them. The
major theme in her novels is “marital dissonance”. Her famous works are Esmond
In India, To whom She Will, The Nature In Passion, Heat And Dust, An
Experience Of India etc.
Nayantara Sehgal, one of famous Indian woman novelist depicts her women characters with good educational background, fighting in male-dominated society and struggling to come out of their shells. She explores the place of women in Indian society before and after marriage. Sehgal insists that women should throw off conditions of society against her and learn self-confidence. According to Nayantara Sehgal, a girl is always reminded of her femininity and that she is destined for a man but she should be assertive and self-confident. The novels given by her are *A Time To Be Happy, This Time Of Morning, A Storm In Chandigarh, The Day In Shadow, A Situation In New Delhi* etc.

Famous woman novelist Shobha De believes that we have a requirement to conceptualize woman as a composite energy of production, protection and love. Her heroines struggle against oppression and exploitation by patriarchal society but they never get complete liberation. They are always victimized in some way. Shobha De offers no solution to the problems of Indian women. She has given us following famous novels: *Starry Nights, Socialite Evening, Sisters, Strange obsessions, Sultry Days* etc.

Kamala Das was aware of the sexual oppression of the women and revolted against it with a Promethean constancy. She revolts against the masculine part of the civilization and reveals restlessness with women’s passive acceptance of subordination. Quest for identity is an oft-recurring theme in the novels of Kamala Das. She worked excessively on the theme of Sexual Politics. Her nominative creations are *My Story, A Doll For The Child Prostitute, Alphabet Of Lust* etc.
Rama Mehta, a sociologist by profession had researched deeply into the lives of the Western educated women and the Hindu Divorced women. She has written on these themes in her novels. She depicts the life-crisis of her protagonists and then their acceptance of traditional values. Rama Mehta mentions with her pen the psychological conflict of educated women experienced in modern India. The books written by her are *Inside The Haveli, The Western Educated Hindu Woman* etc.

Anita Desai, really a nominative Indian woman novelist whom I have taken for thesis has written specially on feminine world. Her protagonists are mostly women- mostly Indian but sometimes Westerner also. She depicts woman’s state of mind, its traumatic condition, woman’s quest for self, her neurotic anxiety and marital disharmony. She delineates the plight of women in India through her characters. She is a feminist in true sense.

In her earlier novels, her attitude was negative but gradually her outlook changes and in her later novels she appears to be positive in her life. Her women characters are neurotic and her characters of neurotic anxiety are different individually. Most of her characters are not contented and satisfied in their lives but their way to protest is dissimilar. Anita Desai’s own attitude towards life and its problems seems to be changed in later years of her life. Her fiction includes *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye- Bye, Blackbird, Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, Village by the Sea, In Custody, Baumgartner’s Bombay, Journey to Ithaca, Fasting, Feasting* etc. Her contribution in the feminine literature cannot be let slipped.
Notes and References


