Chapter One

Introduction: Indian Woman Finding A Voice

Several pundits and scholars have recognized for long, India's historic achievements in the spheres of art, religion, literature, basic sciences and philosophy. Taking into view, the profound humanity that informs the vision prevalent in Indian writings, some western minds consider that the Indian experience can even provide an effective antidote to the evil that plagues the materialistic civilizations of the West. For instance, India could elicit a glowing eulogy such as the following one from no less a thinker than Max Muller:

If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow — in some parts, a very paradise on earth — I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions .... — I should point to India. And If I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in
Europe, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life — again I should point to India. (qtd. in Belliappa 346)

In recent decades, especially after Independence, Indian literature has acquired a fresh impetus and a spirit that is imbued with a singular faith in India's own unique myth and traditions handed down from time immemorial. Indian works of art are not mere supine imitations of the West, but often, turn out to be highly original and peculiarly Indian in their preoccupations and vision, often contributing to what can only be called as the Indian consciousness. Amongst the different preoccupations of Indian literature in recent years, those written by women who have chosen to launch a crusade against their suffering and suppression at the hands of the patriarchal guardians of tradition constitute uniquely a vibrant strand.

In the opinion of these modern women writers, liberation of women does not mean mere liberation from men but liberation from women's own psychological fears and spirit of enslavement. The noted Tamil poet
Bharathidasan is deeply concerned with the issue of patriarchal dominance:

To the vast universe
I declare:

Since creation’s dawn
woman was grossly misgoverned
Hence her shrunken
bud of intellect
has not yet fully blossomed.
(qtd. in Mithra 42)

According to Macneil and Rubin: "Women’s liberation refers to the liberation from the traditional female role, which effectively serves to limit the things women can do and the ways she can behave" (qtd. in Shubha Tiwari 16).

Bharati, the predecessor and mentor of Bharatidhasan affirms:

So long as woman stays
thirsting for water
of liberty
there can be no vital life
on earth! (qtd. in Mithra 41)

As Elizabeth Munich puts it:
What we feminists are doing, is comparable to Copernicus shattering our geo-centricity. Darwin shattering our species-centricity. We are shattering andro-centricity and the change is fundamental. (DFT 12)

The feminist movement which started in the West in the 1960s went a long way in arresting the injustice meted out to women. There has been such an abundance of feminist writings which both preceded and followed this movement interrogating the age-old misconceptions and consequent acts of injustice meted out to women.

The term 'feminism' was first used by Alexander Dumas to refer to women's political rights. Later the movement spread across the world making repeated attempts to secure greater and still greater political, social, economic and educational rights for women. After several decades of struggle, this movement has resulted in creating an awareness of the inequities meted out to women at the global level. In the mid-nineteenth century Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher shattered the myth of feminity through her historic work, entitled The Second Sex in which she discusses issues like education of girls, domestic chores and subjects which had remained hitherto taboo like sexual initiation and sexual pleasure.
Even before Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) how ironically women were incarcerated and incapacitated by a patriarchal culture:

Exalted by their inferiority (This sounds like a contradiction), they constantly demand homage as women, though experience should teach them that the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex, with most scrupulous exactness, are most inclined to tyrannize over, despise the very weakness they cherish. (58)

One hundred and sixty years later, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953) would declare that women must assert their independence from the state of 'otherness' and must function as autonomous and independent beings capable of making their own decisions:

She is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less ... she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He
is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the other. (16)

According to Betty Friedan, the core problem for women is not sex but identity. In her view:

Women's sexual problems are in this sense, by products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfil her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfilment ignores. (282).

But Friedan does not oppose the institution of marriage as the radical feminists later would do.

Kate Millet, another well known feminist thinker calls for an egalitarian code of moral behaviour for men and women. Millet envisions a stage when monogamous families will cease to exist and raising of children will be left to trained practitioners of both sexes, instead of parents. In short, Millet wants women to be freed from their, "immemorial subordination" (363).

In her book, The Female Eunuch (1970) Germaine Greer suggests, "Women ought not to enter into socially sanctioned relationship, like marriage" (18). She separates earlier reformers from the latter or the grounds of their socio-political goals: "genteel-middle
class ladies clamoured for reform, now ungenteel middle class women are calling for revolution" (11).

The ultimate aim of the different groups of feminists is the same, namely, to liberate women from oppressive andro-centric, patriarchal mechanism and to promote the rights of women. The radicals in particular suggest that woman must not continue to remain a mere slave to her biological functions. According to them, child bearing must be voluntary and she should have the right to abort on demand and abortion deserves the treatment of a state-sponsored medical phenomenon. Social feminists hold that women's inferior status is based on private property and class-divided society.

Two decades after The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan in The Second Stage argues that women must make compromises for the survival of humanity. She stresses that women must give up their rage and anti-male, anti-family attitudes and go back to the family which is the real source of woman's power. On the other hand, Marilyn French is of the view that only feminism with its vision of a new morality can restore harmony and lasting peace in life.

In feminist literature, the central concern is woman's experience. Virginia Woolf finds a marked
difference between male and female preoccupations in literature "... essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself" (26). Elaine Showalter feels that women writers should develop a distinct vocabulary of their own, a "vocabulary for the body" (qtd. in Arora 32) in order to describe in graphic terms the female sexual behaviour.

Feminist Literary Criticism also has been evolved to study literature in the light of the new ideology. Its objectives are social and cultural and it primarily resists patriarchy and sexism. Feminist critics are highly critical of stereotyped images of women such as the "temptress and what is called linguistic misogyny" (Gilbert and Gubar 231) which paints woman as a stupid, babbling creature whose words are incoherent, nonsensical and destructive.

Helen Cixous deconstructs the fairy tale of the 'sleeping beauty' to show how men desire/encourage passivity in women. They want them to be beautiful dancing dolls and not independent thinking individuals:

However, she is breathing. Just enough life — and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only
him; him in place of everything, all him ... She is lying down, he stands up. She arises — end of the dream — what follows is socio-cultural: he makes her lots of babies, she spends her youth in labour; from bed to bed, until the age at which the thing isn't 'woman' for him anymore. (qtd. in Arora 34)

Thus, feminist criticism as a major revolutionary, has provided new insights into problems of women inspiring the new women writers to depict their own emotions and experiences boldly and uninhibitedly.

The impact of feminism on the Indian literary scene has resulted in certain peculiar features. Ancient Hindu socio-religious edicts like the Manu Smriti laid down separate codes of behaviour for man and woman, thereby rendering woman a permanent dependent and slave to father, husband and son. However, in the Vedic period which preceded the age of Manu, there was no recorded difference between male and female codes of conduct. This can be realized from its echo in the iconography of the Siva Sakthi concept in the Hindu pantheon where the Almighty Divine is perceived as an inseparable combination of the male and female principles. It was only in the course of the centuries that followed that the Hindu ideal of woman became the
'life' of the epic Ramayana. This stage, in fact, marked an attempt at the subordination of woman and the inequality of the genders, according to the Indian feminists:

Thus in spite of professing equality ... it is paradoxical that the archetype of the Hindu ideal woman is Sita of the epic Ramayana ... an ideal which implied to the majority of Indian feminists, the subordination of the woman and acknowledged the inequalities of sexes. (Taiwar 5)

In recent times, social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotibha Phooly succeeded in eradicating several of the social evils like the tonsuring of widows, child marriage and 'sati', and great thinkers like Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi encouraged women to participate in the national freedom struggle. This period is popularly known as the Indian Renaissance. However, both Tagore and Gandhi believed also in the polarization of the social roles of men and women seeing them merely as, "supplementing and complementing each other's labours" (Gandhi 21).

Swami Vivekananda, in particular, was radical in his views on women. He wondered why there was
distinction between the genders, because the Vedanta itself declared that "one and the same conscious self is present in all beings" (qtd. in Vivekananda 445). Vivekananda did not see women as "mere manufacturing machines" (443). In fact, he upbraids the irresponsible and indifferent Indian men who had contributed little towards the upliftment of women but sought to subject them under more and more stringent rules. He wondered whether the absence of brilliant women like Maitreyi and Gargi and, philosophers like Saraswani of ancient India in the present is due to the lack of opportunity for education, as regards the women of India. The Indian Women's Movement was male directed and patriotic though it was founded with a view to establishing a 'women-centred', 'women-supportive' society.

In South India, especially in Tamil Nadu, thinkers like E.V.R.Periyar, Bharathidasan and Bharathi contributed a great deal towards liberation of women from the harsh clutches of an age-old tradition. Poet Bharathi through the mouth of a character in one of his stories says, "To the whole world, I declare. The injustice meted out to woman by man defies all words. None inscribed it in books; and none espoused its cause in public" (qtd. in Kuzhandaisami 36).
He goes on to assert further in his essay "The Awakening of Tamil Nadu":

It is totally wrong that not only in Tamil Nadu but the entire globe, there is a convention in vogue under which man is treated as superior and woman, inferior. It is the basis of all sufferings; fortress of all injustice; and the very origin of the age of the Apocalypse. (qtd. in Kuzhandaisami 40)

Bharathidasan, who traced the footsteps of Bharathi writes in his "Woman's World", "Denied right to learn, and right to power / Women stand blinking finding no way for survival / And you think your wives are but grass" (qtd. in Mithra 43).

In the words of E.V.R.Periyar, the social reformer:

It is but a treacherous gesture that men make, whenever they parade themselves as champions of the women's cause, simply with a view to cheating women. Can a liberation of mice be feasible, through the efforts of cats, anywhere? Can liberty be attained for sheep and chick through the ventures of a bunch of foxes? Can equality be ever realized by non-
brahmins, through the struggles of brahmins? You will grasp this truth, if only you think. (qtd. in Solomon 72)

To cite Showalter again, "Feminism spoke to our lived and our literary experience with the fierce urgency of a revelation or a Great Awakening" (1985, 5). Obviously, the history of feminism is inevitably linked with the history of woman's emancipation. Though feminism is likely to be mistaken as a movement opposed to man, denying men entry into it, in reality, it is simply concerned with issues of injustice; it wants to eliminate and is not blindly hostile towards men. In the words of Eisenstein:

In my understanding of the term 'feminist', I see an element of visionary, futurist thought. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that, as part of the eventual liberation of women, will change all human relationships for the better. (qtd. in Sushila Singh 47)

Simone de Beauvoir also sees woman's emancipation only in terms of improved heterosexual relationships, that would ensure woman's autonomy and honour, "To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the
relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her" (740).

Feminism has already begun to re-examine and re-write our own political and cultural history in India. And, it is primarily through the novel, the identity and role of women in our culture have been most elaborately and insightfully analysed. Showalter divides the growth of women’s consciousness into three phases "the feminine, the feminist and female" (1977, 13); the first phase is marked by ‘imitation’, the second by ‘protest’ and the third phase by ‘a search of identity’ (qtd. in Talwar 12). The ‘female’ stage offers the highest psychological interest because in this stage, the novelist intrudes between the reader and the story and passes comments on the inner feelings of the characters, in a typical post-modern fashion.

It is in the genre of fiction, that the female voice of protest is heard loudest by the largest audience. Signs of woman’s emancipation are most conspicuous in the fictional works by women published in the recent decades. In the seventies, Canada saw the emergence of a vast array of women writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Drabble, Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro. These women writers, "tend to write more as women than as social critics or crusaders
of social culture" (K.S. Ramamurthy 182). They focus mainly on the inner world of feeling and sensibility as women, as their general tendency is to turn inward, towards the body, the emotions and ultimately to the innermost niches of their psyche.

Margaret Atwood's concept of feminism as depicted in her novels is incisive as well as comprehensive. It is primarily concerned with the modes of victimisation of women all over the world and the need for their liberation from forces of subtle but age-old, well-entrenched structures of oppression and bondage. Most of her short stories from Blue Bird's Egg to other stories (1983) can be read as both feminist and post-modernist texts.

Margaret Laurence, another Canadian novelist is the author of four Manawaka novels The Stone Angel (1964), A Jest of God (1966), The Fire Dwellers (1969) and The Diviners (1964). Each of her female protagonists in the great Manawaka novels and other works struggles from her own complex cultural and religious heritage, in her quest for self-definition and individuation. Laurence has always proved to be a prodigious trend-setter in her chosen genre. In the words of Sandre Djwa, "Laurence's Canadianism, her sense of place and her honesty in describing the situation of
women helped to shape a whole generation of writers" (72).

Gender and nationality exercise their own peculiar impact on creative writing in the short stories of Mavis Gallant too. Alice Munro's women emerge as vibrant, autonomous intellectuals fully equipped to probe feminity from a most uninhibited perspective and ready to take charge of their situations in life. *Dance of the Happy Shades, Lives of Girls and Women, Who do You Think You Are?* are some of their stories which analyse the condition of contemporary women.

In Margaret Drabble's fictional art, one can find a mosaic of womanhood and the multifarious roles women have to perform in life. However Drabble's chief preoccupation seems to concern the individual, the affirmation of life and submission to the bonds of life. *The Summer Bird Cage, The Garrick Year* and *The Realms of Gold* are some of her most popular works.

Perhaps Doris Lessing is the most important feminist novelist of our times. Her *Golden Note Book* has been hailed as the forerunner of the second-wave feminism. Though Lessing has always been a champion of women's freedom, she too does not advocate complete sexual freedom for women. On the other hand Sylvia Plath
can be seen espousing the feminist cause with single acuteness in her poems. Her poems *The Applicant* and *Bee Poems* are cases in point. Plath's novel *Bell Jar* depicts the transformation of the young innocent and oppressed protagonist Esther into a devastatingly vengeful Diana, embodying a force to reckon with.

The concept of women in twentieth century India has undergone several changes. In particular, a new set of writers deeply concerned with the social and psychological problems of middle-class Indian women have come up. In the past, women in Indian fiction remained always in the periphery, even as their works glorified in unison the stereotypical virtues like endurance, devotion, self-sacrifice and total submission. However, in recent decades, novel writing in India has entered a refreshingly new phase, and the 'New Woman' increasingly aspires to realize her proper place under the sun, be it in her own family or the society at large.

Especially women novelists of the post-independent India, have been instrumental in bringing about the development of a radical kind of woman-centred fictional tradition. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande have all contributed a major share towards the emergence of this new tradition.
In Kamala Markandaya's novels, both the poor and rich women are victims of patriarchal domination and social oppression. It is true Nectar in a Sieve projects Rukmani's strength, only through her capacity for compromise, acceptance, sacrifice and optimism. However, Markandaya's independent and assertive characters like Mohini of The Golden Honeycomb represent the emerging new Indian woman. When King Bawajiraj makes a proposal of marriage to Mohini, his own concubine at present, she replies, "I don't want to be your queen, I want to be free" (32).

Anita Desai's novels present solitary individuals isolated and insecure, buffeted by circumstances. Desai's women are sensitive, introverted and tender, inhabiting a brave new world, at times teetering on the edge of neurosis, and even psychosis. Desai's Maya, Monisha, Sita, Raka and Aunt Mira belong to this category. Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Bye-Bye Black Bird, In Custody, A Journey to Ithaca and Fasting, Feasting are some of Desai's well-known novels, which map with skill and sensitivity, the inner worlds of women.

Nayantara Sahgal, always a champion of the women's cause, herself modestly wishes to be labelled as a 'feminist'. Most of her women from Maya to Smriti meet
with disillusionment in marriage. Often as they break themselves free of stifling relationships, these women tend to yield unconditionally only to other men. This seems to be the paradigm from Sahgal's maiden novel *A Time to be Happy* to her fourth entitled *The Day in Shadow*. However, Sonali Ranade figuring in her novel *Rich Like Us* marks the emergence of a truly emancipated woman.

Whether the Indian novelists write for the Western audience or not, Indian sensibility always tends to subscribe to certain well-entrenched concepts of wifely fidelity and the glory of motherhood. Neenakshi Mukherjee is of the opinion that the Sita image is pervasive in the consciousness of the Indian race and it overshadows the Draupadi image in the Mahabharata: "The Mahabharata uninhibitedly presents a spirited woman like Draupadi, it is the Sita image as wife which is pervasive in the consciousness of the race" (Talwar 10). Hence there is a recurrence of the 'Pativrata' (a chaste wife) image in Indo-Anglian literature. It is only in the post-independent era that women novelists have started subverting ideals and patterns.

Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Shoba De and Namita Gokhale frequently take the readers right into the bedrooms of their women protagonists in order to
highlight their amoral behaviour patterns. For the New Woman, her main concern in life increasingly seems to be a quest for identity. There is in recent fiction also a deliberate subversion of the norms of chastity for woman and promiscuity for man. Women too have started reiterating their right to respond to the instinctual calls of the body and sublime demands of the soul. Hence, in these works, often an extra-marital affair is regarded with greater understanding and flexibility.

The so called 'De phenomenon' of subverting norms and establishing one's identity by indulging in liberal sex has almost become the established norm. Shashi Deshpande presents in her fictional works, confident, ambitious and individualistic new Indian women who insist upon equality, autonomy and attention on par with men, in marriage. Men will no longer dare playing wolves when women are resolved not to play the roles of lambs.

Deshpande is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English novelist with four volumes of short stories, four children's books and nine novels to her credit. She was born in Dharward, Karnataka. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada playwright and Sanskrit Scholar Sriranga, frequently referred to as the 'Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre'. After she graduated in Economics from the Elphinstone College, Bombay, she took her degree in
law from the Government college, Bangalore. Years later, she did her postgraduate degree too. Meanwhile she married Dr. Deshpande, a neuropathologist in 1962. She started writing quite late in life owing to the obligations she had in her family.

Deshpande took to writing fiction quite casually. When she wrote her experiences of her stay in England with her husband, it was accepted for publication. She continued writing her short stories and novels and soon blossomed into a full-fledged writer of fiction. The Moving On is her most recent novel. Deshpande in her "Of Concerns, Of Anxieties" cites three factors that shaped her writings, "That my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female" (29).

A close study of Deshpande's novels reveals an intelligent and articulate writer. She makes bold attempts to voice the frustrations and disappointments of women, though she denies to herself the label of a feminist.

Her first collection of short stories The Legacy was published in 1972. Three other collections came later, namely It was Dark, The Miracle, It was the Nightingale. She has published nine novels so far.
Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) talks of a girl child neglected at home, who sublimates all her anger and frustration through her studies and becomes a medical doctor. Revengeful at heart, she marries Manu, a college lecturer, much against her mother’s wishes. But her marriage also crumbles down because of her personal success and prosperity as a doctor. The novel explores her existential dilemma in analytical terms.

Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* (1983) which won Deshpande the prize for the best Indian novel during 1982-1983, explores the inner tensions of Indu, the protagonist who questions the concepts of love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality as a woman. Her attempt to assert her individuality brings her into conflict with the family and society.

Her *Come Up and be Dead* (1983) deals with a series of murders that take place in a reputed Girl’s High School. Despite the thematic format of crime, the work turns out to be a fine study of feministic sensibilities. In her novel entitled *If I Die Today* (1982) Guru, the central character gets murdered, causing panic and suspicion in a medical college campus. Besides being a thriller, the work also studies the conflicts in the lives of some married couples.
In *That Long Silence* (1988) Jaya, the journalist wife of Mohan, frustrated in her marriage and profession finds stability through her extra-marital affair with the middle-aged man, Kamat. In *The Binding Vine* (1993) Urmila, the protagonist who has lost her child Anu, keeps brooding over her entire past right from the times of her grandparents, finding at last the meaning of existence only in altruistic endeavours.

*A Matter of Time* (1996) shows how Sumitha, the mother of three grown-up daughters, suddenly abandoned by her husband Gopal for no solid reason, in the midstream of life, overcomes all her odds in a very admirable way though she dies in an accident at the end. *Small Remedies* (2000) presents a marital discord in Madhu’s life. Separated from her husband, Madhu attempts to write the biography of Savitri Bai, a talented musician who was also a rebel, in choosing to live with her tabla master after separation from her husband.

In Deshpande’s *Moving On* (2004) Jiji deserts her parental home to marry Shyam, her lover. However, her husband’s disloyalty results in a bitter marital discord and eventually in his death. The novel goes on to record the success of Jiji, the widow who strikes an
interesting compromise with life through a fulfilling love affair.

Though Tamil can boast of having perhaps the world's oldest written document dating back to 3rd century B.C. and also the oldest literature in the world, the genre of novel itself, is relatively quite new in Tamil Literature, having only a recorded history of two centuries. It is also true that thousands of novels have enriched Tamil Literature. Gynocentric novels began to flood Tamil Literature from the nineteen fifties onwards, focussing their attention on familial relationships and social issues like inter-caste marriage, dowry system, widow remarriage, divorce and incompatible marriage. These novels present a shifting social attitude to woman presenting her both as a boon and a bane, a sacred deity and a profane personification of lust. Often it tends to glorify motherhood and chastity but deliberately keeps the woman subservient, applying hypocritical double standards.

Indumathi, a social realist and a feminist at heart, is an accomplished novelist in the art of story telling, delineation of characters, handling of issues and manipulation of the language. She has striven hard for the emancipation of women along with a number of Tamil women writers of the post-Independence era like
Rajam Krishnan, Anuradha Ramanan, Siva Sankari, Vasanthi and Ramanichandran. These writers plead for a drastic change in the attitude of society towards all women victims.

Women novelists in Tamil of the post-independent era focus their attention on social evils like caste and dowry system, exploitation of the poor and the oppressed which includes women who are bound by the hard and fast rules and customs of a conservative society held up in familial and social relationships. Both the sociological and the psychological problems of the women are brought to light in these novels.

Rajam Krishnan's novels present enlightened women who correct others through their enormous capacity for love. They speak up for an integrated family structure in society, primarily governed by the principle of love and affection in the family, while being sensitive to issues of awareness of women's rights and emancipation. Her Kuttuk Kuncu (The Caged Chick) deals with child labour and women's liberation. Putiya Cirakukal (New Wings) (1983) discusses the liberation of women from her in-laws. Her Thottakkari (Woman Gardener) shows how it is love alone that promotes family unity and tyranny can bring about only division and confusion.
Anuradha Ramanan’s *Kuttup Pulukkal* (The Larvae) extols the largeness of the soul of Manga, a prostitute who elevates the man Surya personally and professionally. Themes discussed in her fictional works include family relationships, ill-treatment meted out to widows, the plight of career women and prostitutes. As for the experiences conveyed through her fiction she has gone on record, "In most cases, I will be present in some character or other in my fictional works. It is sheer experience of life that shapes a creative writer" (qtd. in Ponnusamy 50).

Sivasankari’s fictional works register the writer’s impatient protest against ignorance, illiteracy and superstition that govern the lives of most women, and plead the cause of resistance against all patriarchal structures. Her *Kinarrut Tavalaikal* (Frogs of the Well) graphically highlights the fact that women continue to remain victims on account of their own ignorance.

Sivasankari’s *47 Natkal* (47 days) depicts Kumar a cheat who marries two women, one, the rich doctor Lucia, a widow in America and the poor Visali, an innocent uneducated girl from the Indian rural side. He takes Visali to America only for service to him and his first wife Lucia. He also exploits her sexually. When Visali
becomes aware of her situation she cries out in despair that he has cheated her. He only replies, "She (Lucia) is my wife only. Whenever I want you, I'll also come to you. Be obedient" (47 Natkal 163). At last Visali’s brother rescues her and Kumar is arrested with Lucia’s help.

Similarly Sivasankari’s Tiri Canku Corkkam (Unstable Heaven) is about Kamali, the married working woman, whose infatuation for the handsome man Manohar ends up in losing both her husband and her paramour. Sivasankari’s Mella Mella (Slowly, Slowly) and Natiyin Vekattottu (With the Speed of the River) reveal the male chauvinism of their egotist men.

Vasanthi’s fiction voices forth the disappointments, struggles and irritations of women. Her Tirakkata Jannalkal (The Unopened Windows) shows how a tradition-bound woman and a New Woman liberate themselves from the clutches of a heartless society.

Vasanthi’s Cirakukal (Wings) presents the protagonist Sita’s marriage to Bhaskaran, an affectionate man. He becomes a different man after a few years, drinks and takes to all lousy habits. Sita leaves him only to bring up the children in a better climate and place them in better positions in life. She
achieves her goal only to find her good intentions misunderstood by her own daughter who later realizes her mistake and adores her. Vasanthi's *Nilalkal* (Shadows) reveals Kamala, mother of the protagonist Sudha's attitude to her own husband. She writes a letter to her daughter at last, "He [husband] did not beat me or hit me. But listening to his harsh words, I died several times" (Chap. 21).

Ramanichandran's novels show how suspicion, jealousy and social malpractices like dowry, ruin the life of several women and how most issues can be amicably resolved by the individuals themselves in love and marriage. Her works present the problems arising out of joint families, the plight of career women and chauvinistic attitudes of men. Her novel *Enakkakave Ni* (You are there, Only for Me!) depicts how suspicion can ruin the life of an innocent girl.

Ramanichandran's *Oru Kalyanattin Katai* (The Story of a Marriage) deals with the life of a couple married compulsorily according to their parental wishes, relying upon astrological matching. The aspirations of both the couple being different, they cannot come together and they hurt each other in words and action. Mira's (the wife's) attempt to establish her equality with the man deepens the crisis. Due to the intervention of Mira's
father and other circumstantial assistance, the couple arrive at a compromise. Ramanichandran's *Pal Nilā* (Milky Moon) depicts how women enslave women. In this novel Sivaraman's second wife ill treats her adopted and innocent daughter Mathangini, dupes her and sends her to serve Niranjan (her partner in the crime), who rapes her and humiliates her. Heart broken, and abandoned by her parental home and Niranjan, Mathangini attempts suicide. She is ultimately saved and accepted by Niranjan himself, with a change of heart.

Thus Ramanichandran and her counterparts usually deal with themes of love, marriage, economic disparities and joint family life, women at loggerheads with social norms, rituals and customs, family relationships, complications arising in the life of the working women due to male chauvinism and patriarchal domination, the independent attitudes of educated women characters and rights and emancipation of women which are their favourite subjects.

Indumathi, originally called Saraswathi, began her career as a writer in the 1970s. Born in a Tamil Brahmin family, she has written more than fifty novels and a number of short stories till date, depicting mainly the life of working and non-working women hailing from the middle class and lower middle class milieux. Her
fictional creations were published in several leading Tamil weeklies like Ananda Vikatan, Kunkumam, Kalki and Amuta Surapi. A few of her stories have been turned into films and T.V. serials like Manka, Yamuna, Caravati and Cankamam which brought her wide acclaim as a talented story teller.

Indumathi was introduced to the reading public by Manian, himself a renowned writer and journalist, who was then the chief editor at Ananda Vikatan. Within a period of seven years (from 1970) she could carve out a unique niche for herself with the Tamil reading public.

A keen observer of men and matters, imbued with a humanitarian outlook, Indumathi is profoundly concerned with the condition of women in society. Like Shashi Deshpande, she is in sympathy with the downtrodden, deprived and ignorant women of India, struggling for survival in a patriarchal social order. Like Deshpande, Indumathi highlights their weaknesses which render these women sub-servient in a male-dominated culture. Like Deshpande she too calls for a change through her art, in the basic attitude of the people towards women.

The works of Deshpande and Indumathi vouch for the fact that literature and sociology are vitally interconnected. To quote Harry Levin, "... the relations
between literature and society are reciprocal. Literature is not only the effect of social causes, it is also the cause of social effects" (qtd. in N.Subramanian 148).

A comparative study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Indumathi is undertaken, with a view to attaining greater clarity of the quality of vision of each author's art, in terms of the mutual illuminations provided by the works of both. For long, comparatists have realized the advantage of comparison:

... less as an independent subject, which must at all costs, set up its own inflexible laws, than as a badly needed auxiliary discipline, a link between organically related, but physically separated, areas of human creativeness. (Remak 8)

According to Wayne C.Booth objectivity is "first an attitude of neutrality towards all values, an attempt at disinterested reporting of all things good and evil" (67-68).

An analysis of the novels of these women novelists reveal their immense concern and understanding of their female characters, themselves being fellow women in a common distress. The concealed and suppressed worlds of
the psyche of the Indian women comes to light in the works of both. Above all, contemporary feminine sensibility is brought alive in each of their fictional creations. It may be even asserted that, in a sense, most of their powerful works already constitute an integral part of the women's liberation movement of the present day India. A comparative study of their novels attempt an objective evaluation of the novels concerned.

As regards Indumathi's fictional works, her early novels like *Enru Putitaip Pirappom* (When Shall be Born Again?) (1985), *Parappatarku Mun Koṇcam* (Just A While Before Flying) (1986), *Oru Pū Utirum* (A Flower Shall Wither) (1993), *Enrum Pen* (Ever Woman) (1992), *Kakitak Kappal* (Paper Boat) (1997) and *Viralkalai Mīṭṭum Vinai* (Veena that Plays on Fingers) (1984) have all in common the plight of either a child or an adolescent right in the 'centre' of a conflict, where parenting proves to be critical, because of a divorce, separation or death in the family. The adults meet with sudden failure in their relationships, often due to untenable condition imposed by a patriarchal structure. Invariably it is the children who emerge as victims of such pathetic situations, in which their young mothers find themselves powerless against the odds they face in life.
Indumathi’s novels are amoral in the vision they present and abound in instances of divorces, separations and illicit affairs. Often prostitution is embraced as a deliberately chosen way of life by a young mother as a ready solution for the problem of survival, causing violent conflicts in the mother as well as her adolescent child involved. This can be seen in works like _Enrum Pen_ (Ever Woman) and _Kakitak Kappal_ (Paper Boat). Such works depict the conflict between the autonomy sought by desperate young women and the restrictive societal values obtained in the patriarchal system in which they live.

Several causes of failure in heterosexual relationships are studied by Indumathi. In _Kātal Īritam_ (Love Tucked Up in One Spot) (1980), _Kūntuk Kuyil_ (Caged Koel) (1984) and _Malarkalile Aval Mallikai_ (Jasmine Amidst Flower) (1977) suspicion ruins the marital harmony in the lives of two young girls, where men lacking in maturity turn abruptly judgmental against their young spouses.

Perhaps there is nowhere else can an instance of growing autonomy on the part of women be discerned in Indumathi, as in their brave quest for heterosexual love. A young girl is prepared to wait endlessly for the love of a blind youth who is hopelessly in love with
another girl who has duped him in Carayu Kāṭṭirukkīrāl (Sarayu is Waiting) (1985). In Nirāṅkal (Colours) (1984), a girl falls for a man frustrated in love with someone else.

The institution of marriage is inextricably associated with patriarchal values in Indumathi, and hence all the rigidity it signifies, gets subverted in novel after novel Iravu Nēra Pūpālam (Boopalam, The Tune of Night) (1983), Kitamati Ni Enakku (To Me, You are a Melody) (1977), Valaiyum Ner Kotukal (Straight Lines Bending) (1977), Otum Mēkāṅkal (Clouds on the Run) (1992), Mukamillātā Maniṭarkal (Faceless People) (1987), Nirāṅkal (Colours) (1984), Anīṭā (Anitha) (1977), Kalveri Kollutati (I Feel Intoxicated, My Love) (1987) and Oru Kotiyil Iru Malarkal (Two Blossoms on a Single Twig) (1986) all the works can be cited as instances where the novelist exposes the hollowness implicit in the marriage ritual, in the form of hypocrisy of partners themselves, patriarchal domination, denial of the claims of genuine love, mismatching of partners for materialistic gain and denial of autonomy for women. Subversion of marriage alone can be said to constitute a stout central pillar of resistance to patriarchal values in Indumathi’s fictional art.
The conflicts in some of Indumathi’s characters grow so intense that their neurosis ends up ultimately in psychosis. In Iravu Nērā Pūpālam (Bhoopalam, The Tune of Night), Deepa commits suicide when her husband runs in pursuit of his erstwhile paramour. In Anītā (Anitha) (1977), the young protagonist having ruined the marital life of Dr. Manohar also takes her own life out of sheer sense of guilt. In Mān Kutirai (Mud Horse) (1999) the middle-aged Jayanthi, seduced by Kirubakar, her young lover kills herself when she learns that her lover has a simultaneous liaison with her own daughter too. In Mukamillātā Manitarkal (Faceless People), Abiramai turns a murderess when she comes to know how debased her husband and in-law are.

There are no well-defined endings in some of Indumathi’s works, where the narrative closes along existential lines. For instance, young Kanthamani who gets seduced by Dr. Jagatheesh in Kalaiyātā Mayakkāṅkal (Undissolved Illusions) (1983) finds no light at the end of her tunnel, even after Jagatheesh gives her up, allowing other hooligans to take over. In Māyā Mān (Illusive Deer) (1984), Mythreyee becomes the object of lust for men even in her middle-age, as her parents fail to settle her in marriage at the right stage, counting only on her income. Suguna, a working woman in Mālai
Mayakkam (Illusion at Dusk) (1983) too suffers from a similar fate at the hands of her parents. Even her brother-in-law seeks her only to satisfy his lust exploiting her solitude and is not prepared to marry her. Taraiyil Irāṅkum Vimānnkal (Aircrafts Landing on Ground) (1977) depicts the despair of two youths Parasu and Viswam whose materialistic ambitions are thwarted, and no solution seems possible in their situation. In Visam (Poison) (1985) Senthil, an orphan, gives up everything he has for the sake of his uncle and his family who took care of him long ago in his childhood. Yar (Who) (1981) and Nālu Per Nakaram (A City of Four People) (1983) are detective thrillers and Pūmikkut Vanta CuriyANKAL (Suns that Come to Earth) (1992) is an interesting collection of Indumathi’s prose essays presenting her reactions to various social problems of women and her appreciation for the forthcoming and heroic enterprises of women.

There is also a surprising bunch of works in Indumathi, where women serve as effective agents of refinement in the lives of the men they accidentally come across in life, drawing out the best elements in those men. In Ninaive Illaiyā Nitya? (Can’t You Remember at all, Nithya?) (1981) Dr.Ramkumar falls in love over a period of time with the gentle Nithya, whom he comes across after a plane accident, after all the earlier
torture he subjects her to, out of a sheer sense of mistaken identity, ending up as a transformed soul. In *Tottu Vitum Tūram Tan* (Just the Distance that Could be Reached Across) (1981) Rajaraman a dissolute director of films gets so much influenced by Divya that he falls headlong in love with her. Even when thwarted in love, he turns over a new leaf and decides to settle down in marriage with his cousin. In *Totuvana Manitarkal* (Persons of Horizon) (1989) Karthikeyan takes such a strong fancy for Radhika, his colleague, even after the demise of her lover Ramkumar. In the process, he succeeds in making her so utterly self-reliant. In *Kalveri Kollutati* (I Feel Intoxicated, My Love) (1987) Chandran finds a new life for Nandini, who has been crudely foisted on him in marriage by an ignorant mob, despite the treachery he meets with at the hands of the wealthy and modern Shobana. In *Ivale En Manaivi* (This Alone is My Wife) (1999) Surya the young writer initially cheated by Kavitha, throws himself all out in seeking the rehabilitation of Divya. In *Manal Vitukal* (Houses of Sand) (1995) Kirubakaran falls head over heels for his child’s surrogate mother Sasi, but restrains himself at the end, and decides to stick on with his wife Bhuvana. These works are vital for any consideration of Indumathi’s portrayal of life as they suggest that the writer presents a balanced vision of
humanity and her art is not biased in mere limited considerations of gender. For, in these works Indumathi succeeds to a considerable degree, vindicating the fact that heterosexual relationships can contribute not only to sensually thrilling but spiritually ennobling human experiences as well, and women if required, can function as the most potent agents of transformation in the lives of men.

The opening chapter of this dissertation entitled "Introduction: Indian Woman Finding a Voice" traces the growth of feminism in literature in general and in Indian literature in particular. Contributions of leading thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Elizabeth Munich and others are discussed. Monumental creative works of artists like Sylvia Plath, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence are also discussed to trace the impact of the feministic movement in literature.

As regards the novels of Indian feminists, novelists such as Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande are discussed in some detail. With regard to Tamil Literature, the views of thinkers like Periyar, Bharati, Bharatidhasan are highlighted in order to foreground the 'progressive'
fictional works of Tamil novelists like Anuradha Ramanan, Ramani Chandran, Siva Sankari and Indumathi who constitute the vanguard of Tamil women writers, who dared to fashion characters embodying norms which are highly unconventional and emancipating in the social and familial spheres.

The second chapter, "Marriage or Patriarchal Bondage" addresses the anxieties and conflicts that women encounter in marriage in patriarchal systems. This chapter shows how the women of Deshpande and Indumathi resist or subvert the rigid moral codes of a tradition-bound society, analyse the issues and themes, assert themselves and make intelligent, pragmatic compromises as they face different demands in their personal and professional domains.

The third chapter "Iconoclasm of Idealized Motherhood" analyses how the new woman in both the writers responds to the parental strictures in general and maternal impositions in particular and the subsequent negotiations she makes at different stages of her life in general. The chapter also studies the differences in the modes of treatment of motherhood and mother-children bonds in the authors under investigation, with a view of elucidating their respective world views.
The fourth chapter "Woman at Crossroads: Compliance or Compromise?" focusses on extra-marital relationships in both Deshpande and Indumath in order to assess the quality of their quests in the context of heterosexual relationships. Women in the works of both the authors emerge as highly successful professionals, capable of sexually exploiting men with scant feeling of guilt, with a pronounced penchant for the sensual thrill in the arms of their lovers, while they remain utterly incapable of deriving the instinctual pleasures of motherhood. The amorality that informs the behaviour of several characters in Deshpande and Indumath against the backdrops of their respective social milieu is investigated so as to estimate the quality of love relationships in both of them. Passion in Indumath is another salient area explored in detail in this chapter.

The fifth chapter "Variety in Gynocentric Vision" highlights the fact that most of the woman-centred works of Deshpande and Indumath turn out to be highly analytical explorations of the 'self' on the part of the authors in question. The presence/absence of 'conflict' in both these authors and their respective ideological and metaphysical orientations as revealed through their fictional creations, are taken up for a close scrutiny in this section. The implications of silence with
regard to some of the most memorable characters in Deshpande and female 'bonding' in Indumaththi constitute a vital area of investigation in this chapter.

The sixth chapter "Commentary on Craftsmanship" deals with some aspects of the techniques employed by both the artists like plot, first-person narrative, multiple perspectives, imagery, intertextuality, irony and topoi. The closing chapter, "Summing Up" lists all the major findings of the project.