Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Feminist movements attained a tremendous momentum in the latter half of the twentieth century and women all over the world have intensified their efforts to deconstruct the social creations of gender in all areas of life. Women are deeply aware of their own rights and claims and they feel that there is no excuse for keeping women down anymore, anywhere. They reject the male construct of sexual difference as political difference and man’s freedom and women’s subjection as natural phenomena. Fed up with their ‘object’ roles, they try to lift themselves to the role and status of ‘subjects’. They discard male defined femininity and demand greater autonomy in their lives.

As a result of these feminist movements, there have been drastic changes to accommodate women in all areas of life including politics, commerce, science, administration etc. and it is quite natural that the resonance of this universal phenomenon of feminism becomes audible in all branches of literature. Many women writers have come forward to project the real portraits of womanhood and some of them like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Kate Millet try to theorise female experiences.

Formerly the realm of literature had been monopolised by male writers. Very few women writers had the courage and calibre to use their pen for creative writing even under pseudonyms. The pseudo-moral system of
male dominated society considered women’s urge to create literature unnatural and unfeminine. In a world of male supremacy, reproduction was considered the most important and the greatest productive activity of women. Since women had to overcome numerous impediments to prove their potential and creativity, most of them reluctantly accepted their exclusion from the literary canon due to their nonproductive status in the world of writing.

As long as there exist the division and discrepancy between the male world and the female world in a powerful way, understanding of reality becomes impossible. Owing to lack of direct contact and accessibility to genuine female experiences unexpressed earlier in literature, exaggerated portraits of women and unreal presentations of their experiences by men flourished in traditional literature. Some of these representations of women are not only anti-feminist but also anti-female as they are based on deceptive appearances and superficial realities. K.K. Ruthven observes that the mythical representation of women is the root cause of all evils:

In the Pagan tradition it was Pandora who opened the box from which all the world’s evil emerged, and in the Christian tradition Paradise was lost because Adam was tempted by Eve, that Eva whose very name is an anagram of vae (woe), and is the source of a disparaging etymology preserved in the seventeenth century spelling of ‘woman’ as ‘woeman’. What is implicitly misogynistic in the Old Testament account of the fall of man
becomes explicitly so in the New Testament, where St. Paul makes it clear that women are inferior creatures which fallen man is obliged to put up with for procreative purposes but whose influence on him should be negligible. (83)

According to Nietzsche, “woman is the diversion of the hero” (Beauvoir 244). Shakespeare describes woman in *Hamlet* in the words: “Frailty, thy name is woman!” (I.ii.146). D.H Lawrence has an entirely different view. To him she is neither a diversion nor a prey; “She is not an object confronting a subject, but a pole necessary for the existence of the pole of the opposite sign” (Beauvoir 245). Simone de Beauvoir, who analyses the feminine myth represented in the writings of five well-known male writers – Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal - finds that they have different versions of womanhood, but “for each of them, the ideal of woman will be she who incarnates most exactly the other capable of revealing him to himself” (281).

One of the traditional presentations of womanhood which reflects a misogynist attitude is pornographic literature or obscene writings. It openly and boldly displays sexual politics and objectifies women. Pornographic literature represents:

...the inevitable consequences of the sado-masochistic construction of woman as victim. It construes male-female as master-slave relationship, and presents us with a heroine who is
fucked, sucked, raped, whipped, humiliated and tortured on a regular basis until she eventually kills herself, having been compelled to realise that the ‘O’ of each of her bodily orifices is a zero which symbolizes her nothingness in a man’s world. (Ruthven 87)

All pornographic literature illustrates the validity of Simone de Beauvoir’s observation of woman’s position in a phallo-centric society: “And she is simply what man decrees, thus 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” (16).

Even though a lot of literature had been generated on women’s lives by both men and women, these conventional presentations of womanhood were distorted or exaggerated and to a great extent biased. The few women writers who wrote about women’s lives were not brave enough to project the genuine realities of womanhood as they had been caught in an image of ‘the true and ideal’ womanhood projected and propagated by patriarchy and perpetuated through centuries. But women’s writings and literature underwent great changes by the end of the nineteenth century and the number of women writers increased due to an awakening of the feminist consciousness. By the second half of the twentieth century feminism became such an important social movement that its impact was very visible in the realm of literature. Consequently, for the first time woman’s true feelings, real responses and
deeper experiences became the subject matter of different literary genres. In woman’s writing, the writer simultaneously takes the role of ‘self’ and ‘other’ or in other words the writer herself is the subject and the object. But it should be remembered that all the writings of women are not ‘feminist writing’ because “Feminism is an ‘alignment of political interest’ which is adopted by some women writers and rejected by others” (Barret 57).

With a clear sense of direction, the feminist writers are engaged in a process of creating and seeing mental pictures of an ideal world for both men and women. They are recreating and remoulding the traditional concept of true femininity and strikingly representing their new image of womanhood in their writings. Also they remind the women readers to realise fully the evil consequences of gender discrimination and urge them to work for an androgynous society. The verbal pictures of the egalitarian man-woman relationship and the implied suggestions made by these feminist writers are not easily acceptable to the people as these ideas are alien to their traditionally trained minds. Both men and women who are not sensitive to gender discrimination have a tendency to dispel the notion of equality projected by feminist writers and thinkers as something unnecessary and insignificant. But there is a positive sign that the combined and continuous efforts of numerous women writers have been powerfully influencing a large number of people and making remarkable attitudinal changes in them. All the feminist writers expect and anticipate a time when women’s dreams and feminist vision become a
reality. They visualise a world where women are not burdened by the past, not afraid of the present and not threatened by the future.

All feminist writers are deeply committed to convey the female experiences authentically and powerfully through various literary genres including autobiographies. The experiences and perceptions communicated by these women writers have been unheard, unimaginable and hence unacceptable in a world of androcentricity. Even in a Third world country like India, many writers like Kamala Das, and Amrita Pritam showed the courage to reveal gender politics even in their intimate relationship with men and how they were victimised and humiliated on such occasions. One such occasion is touchingly described by Kamala Das in her autobiography My Story:

At this time my husband turned to his old friend for comfort. They behaved like lovers in my presence. To celebrate my birthday, they shoved me out of the bedroom and locked themselves in. I stood for a while, wondering what two men could possibly do together to get some physical rapture, but after some time, my pride made me move away. I went to my son and lay near him. I felt then a revulsion for my womanliness. The weight of my breasts seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound. The soul’s wound showing through… (104)

By making such shocking revelations regarding the ‘personal’, feminist writers demystified the dominant image of a happy house-wife and
projected the problems and struggles of female human beings who are entrapped into an inescapable situation which even denies them freedom of rational thinking.

(In their writings, feminist writers enthusiastically and earnestly attempted to present "What is to be female"). They explored women's position in all areas of social and political life and represented it honestly and openly in their works. As writers, they make a paradigm shift and observe the realities of life from a different vantage point. They question the relation between sexes and the political significance of sexual difference. They criticise the phallocentric-social set up where manhood is respected and accepted while womanhood is treated as something inferior and undesirable. They have been compelling the attention of the world to the miserable plight of women all over the world. In most cases, women are denied their fair share of leisure for self fulfilling endeavours. They are crushed to the core in their traditionally assigned roles and activities and they are craving for a positive change. In fact, in their lives, there is no thrill, no joy, no adventure, no achievement, no challenge, no pride and no self-respect.

Feminist writers observe how these harsh realities and painful experiences of life create undesirable attitudes among women such as withdrawal and repugnance. All these disorganise the personalities of women and they experience uncertainty, hesitation, frustration, anger, loss of self-confidence and self-respect. In a social context where women are ill-treated,
insulted and ignored, naturally women’s literature becomes a literature of anger
and protest and a means to challenge the unjust patriarchal system.

Many women writers find fiction as an effective tool for communicating female experiences and feminist ideologies. Their writings have the solid foundation of their own real life situations. Since they sincerely share their participatory information and lived experiences, their writings on women’s oppression and gender discriminations have become more convincing and complete than those of male writers. Unlike traditional writers who presented women as sex-objects, children-producers, sweet, soft, fragile, innocent, emotional, brainless creatures, these women novelists have depicted intelligent, responsible, respectable and realistic female characters in their fictional world. As Simone de Beauvoir says, “the writer of originality, unless dead, is always shocking, scandalous; novelty disturbs and repels” (717). When the feminist writers openly and boldly treated all the issues of gender and power in their works, the patriarchal world which only viewed women either as virgins or as whores received a terrible cultural shock at the revealing pictures of womanhood.

Jen Ang speaks of ‘feminist desire’ in her article “Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure” and this is the desire to transform ‘ordinary women’ into feminists (Shiach 361). Feminist writers and thinkers have a desire to enhance the self esteem of ordinary women and enable them to lead a life of dignity, respectability and self fulfilment. It is an undeniable truth that women are still
forced to play a secondary role even when they have proved their competence, courage and commitment in various fields of activity. They have to deal with numerous difficulties, demands, discouraging words and dead-lines every day and everywhere. Emancipation and enhancement of women can become a reality only if they all get enlightened about their rights and unused powers along with their present degraded and dehumanised conditions.

In order to survive as dignified human beings and liberated women, women have to fight against many powerful agencies of patriarchy such as religion, educational system, media, economical system, culture and customs, traditional value system and dominant ideologies all of which have been supporting and demanding female subjugation. Therefore feminist writers consider it their main duty and responsibility to provide women readers with ideological weapons to fight against all these sexist forces and enable them to lead a life of dignity and equality. Indeed, the feminist desire pervades all forms of feminist literature and it is very evident in the novels of some of the modern women writers. Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande are two such eminent novelists who are acutely conscious of and sensitive to the sorrows and sufferings of their fellow female human beings. They raise their voice against female oppression and spell out the problems of women with such clear conviction through their characters that the reader should pause and ponder over it.
An attempt has been made here to identify and compare the major feminist thoughts and ideologies embedded in the selected novels of the Afro-American novelist Paule Marshall and the Indian novelist Shashi Deshpande in spite of their entirely different socio-cultural background.

The present investigation includes an in-depth study of the portrait of womanhood in the major novels of these eminent feminist writers-Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande. They are compared and contrasted at every stage identifying their similarities and dissimilarities in respect of theme, characterization and social philosophy. Both writers maintain similar ideological position regardless of their class, country and culture while trying to understand and expose the system which keeps women dominated and subordinate.

Before starting the study of the feminist issues and ideologies discussed in the novels of Paule Marshal and Shashi Deshpande, one should be aware of the precise meaning of the term ideology itself. In a general sense “ideology means beliefs concepts, ways of thinking, ideas and values that shape our thoughts and which we use to explain and understand the world” (Peck 146). In other words, it is a set of beliefs or ideas generated by a political or economic system which forms the basis of the system. A human being understands and assimilates everything on the basis of acquired ideologies. All the social institutions such as state, educational system, religion, family and law contribute to the ideological formation of an individual:
Ideology is that never fully articulated system of assumptions by which a society operates, and which permeates everything it produces, including of course what is deemed to be literature...

Ideology is manifest in the ways we represent ourselves (and are represented) to one another. ‘Sexual ideology’ determines, for example, what is deemed to be socially acceptable behaviour for men and women. The function of ideology is to justify the status-quo and to persuade the powerless that their powerlessness is inevitable. (Ruthven 31)

According to French Marxist Philosopher Louis Althusser, “ideology is not just a set of ideas that shape our thinking, but the common sense we learn when we learn a language, so that it makes us the subjects we are .... We are never in a position to choose ideology: in a sense it chooses us” (Peck 14).

In fact, ideologies often support and serve the needs of the dominant group. In a male-centred and male-dominated society, patriarchal or sexist ideologies were dominant. But later when feminism emerged as a well organised, wide-spread social movement with tremendous potential for changing society, it has put forward its own ideologies. Of course, these ideologies aim at creating an environment favourable for women to develop their mental and intellectual capabilities like that of men.
Patriarchy is another term which is often used in feminist discourses and hence it needs explanation. It is a term used and popularised by American radical feminists of Nineteen-sixties. The literal meaning of the word patriarchy is the rule of the father or the patriarch and it was used in the past to denote male dominated family system which included women, young men, children and servants under the control and rule of a dominant and senior male. Now-a-days, this term patriarchy is used as a very powerful analytical concept to refer to male domination and the system of hierarchical power relations by which male domination and female subordination are established. It encompasses all kinds of male domination and female subjugation, according to Sylvia Walby’s definition: “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Bhasin 5). Adrienne Rich gives a detailed description of patriarchy as follows:

The power of the fathers, a financial, social, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (Roy 23)

According to Juliet Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, patriarchy is responsible for the “inferiorised” psychology of women. Many ideologies are linked to the system of patriarchy – such as men are the masters of women, women are inferior to men, women are a part of the possessions and properties
of men, women should be controlled by men etc. The nature of patriarchy varies from place to place and it is different in different classes, societies, religions and different periods of history. The degree and details of oppression may vary, but the truth remains that everywhere women are oppressed and exploited. Patriarchal society considers equality of sexes, which is the demand of feminists, as a Utopian idea.

The traditionalist view of patriarchy is that men are born to dominate and women have only a subordinate role and that this division is biologically determined. The system holds the view that this hierarchy is necessary and it has always existed and it will continue. In religious terms also, women are subordinate to men because they were created in such a way and consequently were assigned different roles and tasks. Since women have the biological function of reproduction, their main goal and duty in life is child-bearing and child-rearing. On the contrary, it is the duty of men, who have more physical strength, to protect women and children and provide them food. The traditionalists say that this division of labour is natural, and that paved the way for sexual inequality and male supremacy for which no one can be blamed. Modern psychology also holds the opinion that women’s biology determines their psychology and hence their abilities and roles. It is Sigmund Freud who said that for women, “anatomy is destiny”. According to him the entire psychological structure of women is centred around a ceaseless struggle to compensate for the lack of a penis. Gerda Learner observes, “traditionalists, whether working within a religious or a ‘scientific’ frame work, have regarded
women’s subordination as universal. God-given, or natural, hence immutable ... what has survived, survived because it was best; it follows that it should stay that way” (Bhasin 16).

Gradually arguments and claims supporting patriarchal system are being challenged by women who firmly believe that patriarchy is not natural, it is a man-made system and hence it can be changed and it should be changed. Many women writers and thinkers came forward with their explanations for the origin and existence of patriarchy. Some of them found literature as an effective medium to question and criticise the system which assigns fixed roles for women in the family as caretakers of men and children and as domestic workers. They challenged the patriarchal system which always ensured men higher status, more power and privileges than women and which always restricted women. Women’s discontent and distress due to their degraded position in society and their fervent desire for a positive change paved the way for the universal political movement of feminism.

Feminism is much more than the mere statements of women’s rights and their claims for equality and justice. The contemporary American poet, Adrienne Rich defines feminism as “the place where in the most natural, organic way subjectivity and politics have to come together” (Guerin 196). It is not a set of principles, but a way of life for modern women. The seventies and eighties of the twentieth century have shown that feminism is not a monolith. It embraces numerous ideas, issues and ideologies regarding the life
and social position of women. To put it in a nutshell, feminism encompasses women’s awareness of the subtle operations and micro-aggressions of patriarchy in all areas of women’s lives and their conscious efforts to face it and resist it to attain autonomy. Since the first expression of feminism in the eighteenth century, it has been the most significant and conscious movement of women for equality and justice. It is remarkable that this political movement of women was triggered mainly by women writers and not by women leaders. These feminist writers supplied the intellectual stimulus for the movement and they tried to state clearly the ideologies of feminism. Eminent writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, Germaine Greer and Kate Millet have made significant contributions to feminist ideology.

The need for a new critical approach to literature was strongly felt after the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s. Literature, as Marxist critics often point out, is not innocent of ideologies. In fact, literature is based on ideologies and it perpetuates ideologies in an interesting and aesthetic manner and hence it is more effective than other ideological agencies. Feminist writers also identified the deep rooted ideological structure beneath literature. They also realise that the effective use of women’s writings can articulate and propagate feminist ideologies. The sudden growth of feminist criticism reflects the growth of feminist movement itself. Feminist criticism and feminist movements are inseparable because women become feminists by becoming aware of the power symbols and the ideology of culture and by
criticising and questioning them. Feminist criticism became a theoretical issue after the publication of *Sexual Politics* in 1969.

Indeed, feminism and feminist literary criticism are often defined as a matter of what is absent rather than what is present. Unlike other approaches, feminist literary criticism is often a political attack upon other modes of criticism and theory, and its social orientation moves beyond traditional literary criticism… Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts. (Guerin 196)

Hence it has become the Herculean task of feminist critics to throw light on how the marginalisation of women in a world of androcentric ideologies is overtly or covertly represented in literature. Since feminist criticism expresses a powerful political orientation, it is often said that for feminists, criticism is 'an empowering practice of reading'. Richard Allen expresses the same opinion when he says, "Gender-based criticism is nothing if it does not empower the reader to reread texts and bring out new meanings, enabling the silenced to speak and making silences disruptive" (128). Elizabeth Abel argues that gender determines everything, including language. According to her, "sexuality and textuality both depend on differences" (Guerin 200). A feminist critic has to enlighten women readers to recognize the sex-related strategies represented in literary texts because, as Kate Millet
observes, literature is "a record of the collective consciousness of patriarchy" (Guerin 199). Feminist criticism always centralises women, challenges androcentric assumptions and invariably projects feminist ideologies.

According to Elaine Showalter, there are two distinctive trends in feminist criticism — 'Feminist Critique' and 'Gynocriticism'. In her essay *Towards Feminist Poetics*, she explains the distinction between the two. "The first type is concerned with women as reader, with women as consumer of male produced literature" (Shiach 293). It analyses the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in literature and criticism etc. The second type of feminist criticism projects women as writer and producer of literature and textual meaning. In other words, "a feminist critique of language aims at revealing androcentric bias in linguistic practices, gynocritical enquiries focus on the specificity of 'women's language'" (Ruthven 95). The excellent example for gynocriticism is *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) — a work in collaboration by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. To sum up, it is the task of feminist critics to re-read and discover patriarchal ideologies and sexist assumptions in male-authored texts and to highlight 'female reality' and feminist ideologies in female-authored texts.

Feminist literary scholarship and criticism is a flexible system which has been constantly changing and developing because feminist critics use various critical theories and practices for the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of literary texts. This branch of literary criticism has benefited from
the reader-response theory which says that meaning is not ingrained or inherent in a text, but it is to be invented by the readers in the process of reading. In other words, the meaning of a text is not absolute but it is something which is to be derived by the reader. Feminist criticism is subjective and it upholds the idea of plurality of meanings. Feminist critics and readers adopt a heuristic approach that they are engaged in an attempt to discover meanings in literary texts by re-reading and re-constructing the texts. Simone de Beauvoir, Winifred Holtby, Olive Schreiner, Kate Millet, Adrienne Rich, Virginia Woolf, Rebeca West, Mary Wollstonecraft and George Sand are some of the women who wrote significant literary criticism. Similarly there are numerous anthologies of feminist criticism. Elizabeth Abel, Mary Eagleton, Mari Evans, Mary Jacobus, Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter are some of the well-known editors of various collections of feminist literary criticism.

Feminist writers present their 'semantic universe' (Fokkems 9) from the point of view of women. It is quite natural that in feminist literature there is a shift of emphasis and a deviation from the trodden path.

In order to identify and understand a 'woman's perspective in feminist fiction one should have some acquaintance with the prominent theories and ideologies of feminism. Hence the following few paragraphs give a brief survey of the major theories and ideological stances of feminism which is essential as a backdrop for the study of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande, who are real feminists to the core.
The underlying strands of thought that combine all forms of feminist theory are three: firstly that women as women are oppressed and subordinated by men, secondly that 'the personal is political', that is to say, that every individual case of woman's subordination is nothing but the manifestation of a universal power display, thirdly that consciousness-raising is the most important first step for women to deal with this problem. Despite these shared convictions, when feminists started analysing and explaining the history and nature of the subjugation of women and prescribing solutions for this, many different perspectives arose leading to what are known as different feminist theories. Since there is the widespread misunderstanding that feminism is a single, uniform and unalterable position, and since in India particularly this misunderstanding is strong, it is necessary to give a brief account of each of the theoretical positions within the broad-based term feminism. The different species that come under the genres of feminism are Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psychoanalytical, Socialist and Existentialist. Each of these feminist perspectives brings its own answer to the 'woman question'. The answers brought by each seem to be partial and provisional and it is a fact that no absolutely satisfactory theory has yet been evolved for female subjugation. But from an understanding of the methodological strengths and weaknesses of these theories, women can move toward greater grasp of the facts of their oppression and suppression and evolve ways in which women can take charge of their own destinies and live happily as women.
Liberal feminism deserves to be considered first, because it has been the traditional form of feminism and other forms of feminism arose as a reaction against these. Liberal feminist ideology was formulated by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and by John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women*. It is an ideology that influences many feminists even today. The main argument of liberal feminists is that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that prevent women from entering the public sphere. In other words, traditional beliefs about the physical and intellectual weakness of women when compared to men, have kept women out of the academy, the world of business and of public administration. Because of this policy of exclusion, women have not been able to realize their full potential. If men and women are given the same educational opportunities and the same rights in the society, then women can achieve success and distinction in all those fields where men have achieved eminence. Therefore liberal feminists demand of society gender justice and the abolition of all gender discrimination. Betty Friedan’s highly influential book *The Feminine Mystique* embodies the position of liberal feminism.

Marxist feminists point out that the liberal feminist dream of winning for women equal opportunity in society is an impossible dream. In a class society, Marxists point out, it is impossible for anyone, especially women to obtain genuine equality. They adhere to the theory of Friedrich Engels that women’s oppression originated in the introduction of private property. Private ownership of the means of production led to capitalism under which men are
privileged over women. If women are to be liberated, Marxist feminists argue, the capitalist system must be replaced by a socialist system where the means of production belongs to one and all. In a classless society women and men will be equal.

Radical feminists do not agree with their liberal or Marxists sisters. According to them patriarchal system is responsible for women’s oppressions, for patriarchy is built on power and dominance. Kate Millett’s sensational book *Sexual Politics* brilliantly upholds this position. In fact the term “patriarchy” used in the present sense comes from her use of it. The book’s title “Sexual Politics” indicates that patriarchy is built on a power-structure. It is a system that sees man and woman in a hierarchical relationship, woman being always held inferior. Radical feminists believe that it is not enough to overturn patriarchy’s legal and political structures, but that its social and cultural institutions like the family, the church, the academy should also be abolished. Some radical feminists declare female biology to be a factor that dooms women to inferior position. Some also argue that heterosexual relationship is exploitative and therefore advocate lesbianism.

Psychoanalytic feminists trace the root of woman’s oppression in the psyche. Following Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex they point out that a girl child’s integration into culture is not as complete as that of a boy, and that woman therefore exists at the periphery or margin of culture. Some psychoanalytical feminists insist that patriarchy is an invention of male
imagination, a psychological trap from which every one, especially women must escape. The privileging of the male in society has caused women to accept their inferior status and to interiorize society's devaluation of the female gender.

A very important contribution to feminist theory has come from Simone de Beauvoir whose book *The Second Sex* has come to be regarded as the key theoretical text of twentieth-century feminism. A student and associate of Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir offers an existentialist explanation of the subjugation of women. According to her, woman is perceived by man as 'the other' and this 'otherness' makes her a victim of oppression. Woman is denied the opportunity and the freedom to transcend the constraints and limitations that define her existence. Therefore woman must take control of her own life and become whatever she wants to be.

Socialist feminists, as distinct from Marxist, take an eclectic attitude, selecting strands from all the above theories. Juliet Mitchell who is the best exponent of Socialist feminism argues that women's oppression is caused by the present structures of capitalism, by control of women's sexuality and reproduction, by the socialization of children and gender discrimination within the family. If the liberation of women is to be achieved, all these must give way.

It is important to notice that subsequent to the formulation of the above theories, differences still persist in the feminist ranks. A major criticism
of these theories has come from the Black writer who argues that none of the above theories takes into account the reality of black women’s experience. The oppression of black people, especially black women in the United States has very deep and complex roots. The devaluation of the black race, the denial of their culture, memories of the slave trade and years of brutal treatment at the hands of slave owners and centuries of discrimination lie buried under the oppression of black women. Black women share the oppression meted out to the blacks in general. In addition to this they suffer because of their gender. Colour and gender form a powerful double-instrument of torture for the Black American woman. In a culture where white is valorized as the colour of beauty and goodness, being a black woman is an awfully traumatic experience. Even black men regard their colour as an intolerable burden. As psychologists and social analysts like Franz Fanon have shown, the black man tries to hide his black skin under a white mask. If the black man despises himself for his colour, he despises the black woman even more, for her colour. Thus the black woman is made to carry a sense of inferiority that is almost unbearable. Yet she is the object of sexual assault by white men and black men. Stereotypical assumptions about the sexuality of black women make them the victims of male aggression, often white male aggression. Above all, the Black American woman becomes the beast of burden, carrying on her shoulders the entire family responsibility, since black men are often shiftless and improvident and tend to neglect their families. Many black women like Audre Lorde (black feminist poet who is openly lesbian) have argued that none of the above peculiar and tormenting experiential realities of black women have been taken
into account by feminist theories formed by white women. They even argue that white women of America have been able to theorize about women’s subordination because they have the black women to work for them, clean their houses and cook for them, giving them leisure to theorize. A knowledge of the double burden of the Black American woman is important for our understanding of the fiction of Paule Marshall and so it is treated at some length in the next chapter.

It is enough to state here that it is in such a context of tension that black women writers started writing. Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Maya Angelou are some of the black women writers who made remarkable contributions to black feminism. All of them felt that they have to rely upon their experiences, in shaping black feminist ideologies by their powerful writing. So they borrowed the ideas and insights of the other feminists, but frankly and fearlessly projected their own experiences. The black women writers are creating new self-images and forming a force to change the present condition of Black womanhood. They presented black women who are evolving from their socially assigned roles to roles of their own choice. The Black woman was changing her roles from victim to victor, by bravely placing herself outside the cocoon of other’s constructions of her and, as Alice Walker’s character Celie says in *The Color Purple*, entering into the ‘the creation’ (Shiach 293). Many Black women writers used the theme of Black women’s quest for identity and her need for self-fulfilment frequently in
their works. Precisely speaking, the main concerns of black feminism are economic survival, ethnic and racial discrimination and sexism.

In the context of Black Feminism, Paule Marshall, one of America’s remarkable contemporary black writers, leaves lasting impressions in the minds of her readers mostly as a feminist. She treats openly and boldly the issues of gender and power in her works. She has four novels and a number of short stories and articles to her credit. Feminism permeates all her novels and women characters play an active and predominant role in them. Paule Marshall is deeply concerned with the issues affecting women, the lives of women, their experiences. She creates constructive, positive and encouraging images of women. They engage us emotionally and intellectually. There are relatively few male characters in her novels. Before the active and resourceful women characters, they occupy only a secondary position. In short, Marshall envisages “a new world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body” (Rich 285).

Black women’s literature thematizes the twin concerns relating to racial and gender discriminations. As Barbara Smith pointed out “the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are cruelly interlocking factors in Black women’s literature” (Mary Eagleton 78). Paule Marshall is making a lively portrayal of the doubly oppressed, unfortunate black women who are victims of political, sociological, psychological, economical, religious and literary oppressions and exploitations with blunt originality. Just like many
other. Black feminist writers, Paule Marshall in her novels deals seriously with the black women's quest for identity in an oppressive social order.

Feminist thoughts for the liberation of women are very relevant in the Indian background because still a large number of Indian women are leading a subhuman life. It is generally believed that an educated Indian woman is socially and economically free. The constitution assures her equal rights with man. But in reality her freedom is curtailed and constricted by written and unwritten rules imposed on her by caste, culture, community, custom, religion and above all gender. Most women when they are young girls, are strictly under the control and guidance of their fathers; when they grow up, marriage overturns their lives and they are expected to lead a life of bonded and unpaid labour under their husbands and finally in their old age, they have to depend on their sons for anything and everything. During these stages, all important decisions are made for women by men themselves. That is why one of the characters of Shashi Deshpande wonders:

A woman's life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, specially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The woman had no choice but to submit to accept. And I had often wondered ... have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life-time of disuse? (Roots and Shadows 6)
When women assert themselves or take decisions for themselves, they are branded as freaks or audacious ones. Like men, women also need social support for their survival. They know that the social bond is invisible but it is very important and powerful. When they move against the accepted norms and traditions, definitely they fail to get the sustaining social support. Customs, social structures, family etc. serve to bind people together, and any change is a challenge to the existing structure. Hence the agent of change becomes unacceptable. In such a situation, ordinary women have no other option than to adapt themselves to the existing system. It is an undeniable truth that the majority of Indian women have no objection to unjust male domination and they always think, speak and act according to patriarchal ideologies of true womanhood. It is a pity that in India many women have been acting as agents and promoters of patriarchy, thereby digging their own graves.

In the present times educated men and women are much exposed to Western culture and values. Feminist theories and ideologies are accessible to Indian women and hence they are getting influenced and inspired by women’s movements for equality, justice and freedom. Empowerment of women has figured consistently at various academic discourses and social gatherings. It is interesting and useful to study the impact of feminist ideas on men and women in a Third world country like India. Cultural contact with Europe, the independence struggle and women’s active participation in it, the growth of democracy, awareness of social, political and economic rights, opportunity for education, the influence of great feminist writers like Virginia Woolf, Simone
de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan are the main factors which contributed to the growth and development of feminism in India. On the surface, the impact of feminism in a country like India may appear slight and insignificant, as it has more opponents than proponents. Many people including some traditionally trained women have a temptation to underestimate the issues and problems of women. But no one can deny that there has been remarkable improvement in the social status of Indian women as they have been strengthened by education and employment. Many Indian women have already proved that the bonds of conditioning can be broken and women also can become autonomous beings.

The influence of feminism is easily visible in Indian Literature. Like Western women writers, many women writers have come forward to give expression to the problems and sufferings of Indian women in their writings. Serious attempts have been made to prove the feelings, thoughts and experiences of women in fiction by writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukerjee, Shobha De and Gita Metha. All of them focus on feminist issues and deliberately try to deconstruct the gender roles of women in their works. They could bring to the notice of the world, the harsh environment and hard realities of life which Indian women of the past centuries were helplessly exposed to. They portrayed women characters who had to suffer the negative consequences of inadequate nutrition, frequent pregnancy and delivery, dowry system, early marriage, unsuitable marriage, illiteracy and unemployment.
These women writers started questioning male supremacy and the social and institutional structures which locate women at a lower position than men in their fiction. Shashi Deshpande is one among the contemporary feminist writers who emphatically declare in their fiction that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The victimisation of women, in the institution of marriage is an important theme in Shashi Deshpande’s fiction. To the basic problems and questions concerning women, some kind of similarity can be seen in the works of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande. Like Marshall, Shashi Deshpande also presents women’s eternal struggle for existence, recognition and success. Both of them make attempts at re-creating and re-constructing positive and powerful images of women. They vigorously criticise and question the injustices done to women within the patriarchal power structure of marriage and family. When Marshall focuses on black women, in white America, Shashi Deshpande projects Hindu women who make open revolt against tradition, customs and male domination. Deshpande’s women blame the duality and dubiousness of the moral standards that prevail in India.

Women’s social fears and fear of failure and victimisation are explored deeply in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. The inner conflict of Indian women who seek freedom and fulfilment outside the frame-work of marriage is well portrayed in her novels. For example in That Long Silence
Jaya wants to bring out her creativity in writing. She is not brave enough to continue her literary pursuit just because she is “scared of failing” (148).

Shashi Deshpande presents modern Indian women who are victims of the contradictions and clashes between patriarchal ideologies and feminist ideologies. In fact they want to become liberated women. At the same time, they want to please the sexist society. They are admirers of the feminist movement which has the potential to change society and to ameliorate the conditions of women. As they are socially conditioned to be passive and submissive, they have to overcome severe inner struggles to adopt progressive measures advised by feminist movements for the betterment of their lives. This inner conflict of Indian women is well explored in her novels. Shashi Deshpande in her novels has attempted to portray various faces of Indian womanhood and how ordinary Hindu women go through the ordeals of their daily lives. She focuses on how the ‘man made manacles’ make their lives miserable. *Her message is that in order to improve the living conditions of women in India, women themselves should make attempts to stand on their feet by getting educated and employed. By creating intelligent, educated and employed women like Indu, Leela, Saruta, Urmila, Jaya she presents different stages of women’s development and applies the principles of women’s empowerment in fiction.* While examining the psycho-sociological and economical aspects of women’s issues, as it is represented in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Paule Marshall one can say that women’s predicament in India and America is basically alike.
A critical re-reading of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande to explore the feminist ideologies embedded in their works, is an interesting intellectual exercise and an inspiring experience. Both writers make a clear statement of women's position in their respective social contexts using fiction as a medium. As feminism is a global phenomenon, it is informative and beneficial to make a comparative study of the feminist ideologies in the contemporary literature of two distinct cultures with entirely different value systems and separate social contexts. Unlike other approaches feminist literary criticism has serious social commitment and strong social orientation. Hence the methodology adopted in this study is not that of the formalist or aesthetic critic since the central concern is not the artistic or aesthetic achievements of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande. In this comparative study, how these two writers perceived and projected the problems and questions concerning women in their novels and the major issues of sociological significance are analysed in detail.

Women writers are committed to construct a sense of shared experiences with their women readers. Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande have succeeded in inculcating in their women readers a sense of solidarity and a sense of being empowered, which is actually one of the major motifs of feminist writing. Through their fiction and in their fiction they elevated the status of women in society and made them aware of their rights. Both writers seriously treated issues like liberty of women, atrocities committed against
women, discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual harassment, problems of child bearing and rearing etc.

Through their characters they raise lengthy questions regarding the relevance of patriarchal power structure by which women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. Both Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande aim at promoting among their readers a fervent desire for growth and development, a desire for autonomy, openness and optimism. What Pat Crutchfield Exum says generally about the creative force generated by Black women writers is equally true in the case of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande:

This creative force stresses liberation from old stereotypes, self-love, self-determination, self awareness, self reliance and the black women writer has contributed and continues to contribute her time and energy to the task of keeping alive this creativity and the images it gives birth to. (18)

Both Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande are convinced of the fact that the first and the most important step in women’s liberation is conscientisation or awareness raising. They prompt their women readers to make an inward journey to realise the depth of the dehumanizing process which they have been undergoing due to excessive male-demands. They do not leave the readers at this juncture of self pity and frustration but lead them to a regenerative process by providing them ideological weapons and the ideal of self-help.
Their main message is that the women should not wait for external help and support, instead they should find ways of self help. Shashi Deshpande and Paule Marshall remind their readers that they too have limitless energy and potential. In a very realistic way Paule Marshall informs her readers that not only women but black men also have problems of different kind and range along with the common experience of racial discrimination. Similarly Shashi Deshpande traces the root cause of women’s oppression to their lack of exposure to social, economical, political, cultural and other important spheres of activity. But at the same time, she depicts how the very same exposure creates problems for some women who are unfairly treated in the male-centered society. She underlines the universal reality that men enjoy better psychosocial climate than that of women while women experience utter hopelessness within the limited family circle. It is very true in the Indian socio-cultural milieu.

It is remarkable that the feminist point of view of these two writers is not a limited one – it encompasses the welfare of both men and women. At the same time, they attack the patriarchy which is holding on too tightly to one point of view -the welfare of male population.

Their Feminism is not a kind of fault finding or negative approach. On the contrary, it is an affirmation of woman’s strength and an assertion of her self-actualising needs. They gladly accept the positive values, customs and habits of the existing system and strongly resist everything which destroys the
confidence and creativity of women. All women readers are encouraged and motivated to overcome their personal, cultural and social limitations which were imposed on them by their earlier experiences and patriarchal influences.

The present study has been organised in five major chapters; each examining a definite step in the process of identifying the feminist ideologies embedded in the work of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande. For brevity and clarity, three novels of Paule Marshall and six novels of Shashi Deshpande are specially chosen for the proposed study. Chapter One is a descriptive study of the major trends in feminism as we have already seen.

Chapter Two introduces the African American novelist, Paule Marshall, as a fervent feminist writer who makes the invisible black woman visible and respectable in her fiction.

Chapter Three attempts at presenting the Indo-Anglian writer Shashi Deshpande as an admirer and advocate of feminist themes and ideologies as it is reflected in her novels.

Chapter Four is a comparative study of the common feminist themes and ideologies represented in the novels of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande.
Chapter Five projects the prominent female characters created by these novelists. The distinct characteristics of New Women are identified and listed.

Chapter Six summarises all the arguments which substantiate the central thesis that irrespective of socio-cultural differences, the feminist ideologies expressed in the novels of Paule Marshall and Shashi Deshpande have numerous striking parallels.