Chapter 2

Chapter-2

FEMINISM AND IDENTITY
This chapter is about Feminist movements and the formation of Identity. It deals with the beginning of feminine consciousness and then it discusses the formation of a woman’s identity. The identity theories of Erik H. Erikson, Heinz Lichtenstein and Nancy Chodorow are discussed in the second part of the chapter.

Feminism is a worldwide movement to secure the complete freedom of women in the enjoyment of all human rights – moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic. Originally it is a French word, first used by Alexander Dumas the Younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet, L’Homme-femme, to designate the then emerging movement for women’s rights in the 19th century was referred in the United States as ‘the woman movement’. This was a diverse collection of groups all aimed at advancing and improving the position of women. This is a man’s world, but in a way Feminism has always existed. Whenever women are subordinated, and this is true everywhere, there has always been some sort of resistance and protest. Sometimes it has been collective and conscious, but most of the times it has been single and unconscious, as when women have sought escape from their socially prescribed roles through illness, drugs, and sometimes insanity. Despite this, the recorded history of feminism begins only with the published works of project.
Perhaps with a few exceptions, these first appeared in the 1630's and continued for another 150 years, though not very strong and visible, nevertheless very much present. But in the two centuries from 1780 to the present, feminist writing became a conscious, significant and collective effort, growing not only in number, but also in the scope of its critique.

The high activity recorded in the feminist movement could be seen in 1780's and 1790's and a far more organized effort in the 1850's and the massive mobilization for suffrage in the early 20th century and more recently the modern broad based movement of the latter half of the 20th century. Virtually excluded from religious ritual, she became a negative symbol. Thousands of years have elapsed, yet the position of women has not changed much. Since the social condition of women has its roots in the past, a look at it would help. Current beliefs and behaviour can be unraveled back to Biblical teachings. Male domination and female subordination were not effected in a day. When women's position was at its lowest, there was mild consolation for her in her plight. The moral tradition of her equality, which never quite died out, kept asserting itself in strange ways, for instance, a belief in powerful female deities. The installation of female deities and belief in the female power was in part, an awe, which developed because of the fertility of the woman that was equated with the fertility of the soil. The numerous cults of female
goddesses, no doubt caused woman's social status to rise, and the old moral tradition of woman’s equality must have been revitalized. Organized feminism emerged in a period of economic and political transformation: industrial capitalism was beginning to develop, and Britain, France and the United States were adopting political systems of representative democracy. These economic and political changes drastically altered women’s situation and also the way in which women perceived their situation. Much of this alteration was a result of the transformation in the economic and political significance of the family.

The impact of industrialization, together with the rise of the democratic state, undermined and finally transformed the traditional relationship that had defined pre-industrial society. Among them, it transformed the family and disrupted women’s traditional position. Women of the upper classes lost political power with the decline of aristocratic families and the rise of the democratic state. Similarly women of the lower classes had the basis of their economic power undermined as industrialization removed much of their traditional work out of the home and into the factory. Even though many women were employed in the factories, the industrialization of their traditional work meant that women’s control diminished over such vital industries such as food processing, textile manufacture, and garment manufacture. Women’s
reduced contribution to the household increased their economic dependence on their husbands, and diminished their power. The decline of the economic and political significance of the family, tended to undercut women's economic and political status, but at least it held the promise of a new status for women, one not predicated on their family membership. For instance, the factory system and the opportunity for wage labour opened to women for the first time the prospect of economic independence outside the household and apart from the husbands. Similarly, the new democratic ideals of equality and individual autonomy, provided a basis for challenging traditional assumptions of women's natural subordination to men. The contradictory results of these economic and political developments meant that women's positions in society no longer appeared as a natural necessity.

**Feminism in India:**

The beginnings of feminist activities in India go back a long way. Colonialism also introduced new patriarchal tendencies to go along with that which was already prevalent. In other words, 'tradition' and 'modernity' have been interpreted in particular ways to deepen the oppression of Indian women. These two words are in particular the bane of the Indian woman though there are much more in store. Earlier on,
when the new Indian constitution was adopted on Jan 26, 1950, all Indian women including untouchables were enfranchised. The constitution, in Articles 15 and 16 gave women the same social and economic rights as men, and also the same opportunities for promotion to the highest offices in the land. Perhaps these came quite easily and the Indian woman is not denied much opportunities. Today, the problem in India is still the age old one. The movement has to deal with the medieval forms of oppression such as murders of women for dowry, or widow immolation, or witch hunts, or child marriages, and, also with the employment of the latest scientific technological innovations for female exploitation such as the wide-scale use of amniocentesis for the abortion of female fetuses, or the testing of birth control devices and drugs by multinational companies upon poor women, or the impact of deforestation, in the name of development upon rural and tribal women. In actual fact, the escalation of widow immolation, and dowry problem, is an integral aspect of contemporary society’s consumerism, communalism and commercialism. The Indian movement has to take on issues that are very different from the western feminist movement. Here, the temple prostitution practice, the dowry system, oppression of tribal and Dalit women etc., take on more significance. So also, rapes, wife beating, sexual exploitation at work and child molestations are routine work. It is also a fact, that it was both the anti-dowry and anti-rape campaigns which both launched the
women’s movement in its current phase and united diverse feminists. The rhetoric of women’s emancipation, which is mouthed by successive governments, official machinery, and various political parties thinly, disguises governmental apathy to the plight of women in India. In the urban sector, there is more or less equality, but it is in the rural area that the apparent discrepancies are at work. Child-care facilities, maternity benefits, health safeguards etc are still questions to be tackled. Feminist journals, courses of women’s studies, women writers etc., are catching up fast. The movement in India, perhaps compared to its other Asian counterparts is still very much alive and has a distinct flavor of its own. Historically speaking, changes occurred in India, largely due to the leadership of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and the All India women’s conference. By 1929, women in seven of the nine provinces had obtained the right to vote in provincial elections; in 1935, the vote was extended to a limited number of women in national elections.

Since the early 1980s, there has been a great deal of writing on feminist literary theory. It is also important for us to realize and be aware of the range of possibilities available in feminist literary theory. With so much pluralism, it is largely as a consequence of the co-operative spirit within feminist criticism that the work of the last 20 years can be regarded as a historical development, or evolution, with feminists
building on, and re-defining them according to what has gone before. The main roles available to women are those of wife and mother; being a female in a society usually involves both doing the sort of thing that a mother does, and being the sort of woman she is. Female roles often imply the possession of specific personality traits, like passivity and nurturance. The girl achieves her socially accepted roles through marriage and motherhood. Female roles are more rigid. Therefore, the self-concept is troubled for woman, and the contemporary woman writing reflects these dissonances.

Life in India has coloured the character of woman in innumerable ways, which are too complex to put under one heading. Woman’s quest for liberation is not something new or unique to India. It is already embedded in the social memory of the descendants of many generations throughout the world. A glance at the cultural history of India shows that the subordination of woman was never favored. In the Ramayana, Sita’s identity is seen in relation to her husband Rama. She is repeatedly glorified as ‘Mata Sita’, but as a wife she is a puppet in the hands of Rama. In this way, we find a world of difference between woman’s idealized concept, and her actual situation in her real life. She may be held high as Laxmi, Shakthi, Durga etc, but on practical grounds she is no more than an object of pity, due to harassment, torture and oppression.
Our tradition has generally respected women. The history of ancient India may be said to commence from the period during which the Rig-Veda was composed. Vedic literature, which is the prime source of all our cultural manifestations, depicts a vivid picture of the ancient Indian woman. The position of woman in Rig-vedic society was fairly good. Since the society was patriarchal in nature, the father was the head of the family. Prayers were uttered for the birth of a son during this period. Women also composed certain hymns in the Rig-Veda. The proofs of this are the fact that the Rig-Veda contains hymns by twenty-seven women called brahmavadinis'. Saunaka, in his Brhaddevata, a work on the Rig-Veda, has stated the names of these twenty seven women seers.*

Towards the close of the Rig-Veda period, several restrictions were gradually imposed on the freedom and privileges, which women enjoyed earlier. Nevertheless, the picture of ideal womanhood depicted in the lives and characters of such exalted women as Gargi, Maitreyi, Katyayini, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Indrani etc., would ever remain as embodiments and personifications of all that is pure, noble, and chaste in Indian womanhood. The earliest work Manusamhita contains passages which

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speak very highly of woman who are in conformity with Vedic ideology. In spite of this, we find many contradictory statements about woman in the work. May be this is due to the completion and insertion of different passages by various authors in different times. We find both noble position and derogatory references about women in the work. Manu begins with the fundamental principle that day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males of their families. Women, according to the text, should be protected and honoured at all stages of their life. To quote,

Her father protects (her) in Childhood, her husband protects (her) in Youth, and her sons protect (her) in Old age; a woman is never fit for independence. IX.3.  

The book has laid down certain injunctions for regulating the relation between husband and wife. It says that wife should ever remain obedient to her husband, must never do anything that might displease him and be faithful to his memory after his death, and should not think of any other man. It further states that a vicious husband must be worshipped, but another wife may at anytime supersede a bad wife. Besides this, the husband may leave the wife on other grounds like,

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A barren wife may be superseded in the 8th year; she whose all
children die, in the 10th year; she who bears only daughters, in
the 4th, but she who is quarrelsome, without delay. ³

However the text also makes contradictory statements such as
women under the care of father, husband and children, enjoyed full
freedom, or the position of women not equal to men, but they were given
the full respect that was due to them. On the one hand, women are
considered as fertile, benevolent bestower of prosperity, on the other, she
is aggressive, malevolent, and destructive. This contradiction is present
even in our goddess. We have goddesses like Laxmi, Saraswathi who are
benevolent, along with Kali, and Durga who are aggressive. During the
medieval age, women were the worst sufferers at the hands of the
masculine counterparts. Their activities were limited to the hearth and
home. They had to be content with procreation and the up-bringing of
progeny. They became the instruments of satisfaction of carnal lust of the
males. Rulers and rich landlords packed their harems with women. The
victors captured them as part of their precious booty. Later on women’s
movements emerged, where women raised their voice against inequality
and patriarchal values. In the beginning of the colonial period, the

³ Ibid., p. 19
position of women in India was at its lowest ebb. Sati, child marriages were evidently prevalent. Education to women was considered as a source of moral danger. Openly or surreptitiously, devadasis were harbored in almost all the Hindu temples.

The missionaries, through their English education, broadened the outlook of Indians. Ramabai Ranade, Pandita Ramabai and Francina Sarobji dedicated themselves for the cause of women’s education in India. In 1917, the first women’s university was founded in Poona. The British rule tried to check all these practices, and to put an end to all of them. Prostitution was considered as a social evil. On 4th December 1829, the British passed the resolution to abolish Sati, on humanitarian grounds. Every possible attempt was made towards women’s emancipation. The natural consequence of the abolition of sati was the recognition of the right of the widow to remarriage. Raja Ram Mohan Roy represented the opinion of the enlightened India, and he pleaded for the confirmation of the act of Sati, and put forward arguments to show that the practice of Sati had no religious sanction. Ishwara Chandra Vidya Sagar tried to improve the condition of child widows by educating them, and campaigning for them to marry. Since the time of Vidya Sagar, there had been a steady growth of woman’s education. Women of India gave themselves to the building of their nation and identity nobly and silently.
Pandita Ramabai describes the position of the Indian women in pre-British time as follows,

She is forbidden to read the sacred scriptures; she has no right to pronounce a single syllable out of them. To appeal to her uncultivated low kind of desire by giving her ornaments to adorn her person and by giving her dainty food together an occasional bow which costs nothing are the highest honours to which a Hindu women is entitled.⁴

Sarojini Naidu, a close disciple of Mahatma Gandhi was a born orator and poet, whose intellectual life was the center of her inner being. She sang the melody of India’s glory through her writing, speeches, and poetry. Kamala Devi was a born rebel. She became a youth leader by her courage, patience, and powers of endurance. She was the first among the women to join the civil disobedience movement. Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddi was the first woman legislator in the then British India. She took active part in the enforcement of the child marriage act, and for the abolition of the Devadasi system in the Hindu temples. Smt. Rukmini Devi contributed uniquely to the field of arts and culture. She established the

Kalakshetra to revive Indian art. Annie Besant, being a great sympathizer of women, tried to instill a spirit of equality among Indian men and women. She was the first woman leader, to pronounce her deep faith in Indian women for the success of the political struggle for freedom. She said,

For India’s uplift, the women must have an open field, unfettered hands and unimposed activity. The two sexes were not evolved that one should enslave the other...Womanhood as well as manhood must be connected to the motherland, for in their union lies the strength, the stability, the freedom of India.\(^5\)

Our constitution after Independence granted rights to women atpar with man. This made Indian women’s condition better than that of western women. In theory and before the law, men and women are equal, but in practice women are subject to all sorts of discrimination. Before Independence, the major concern of scholars was to depict a linear and glorified account of women’s position. The first two decades of Independence were dominated by the studies of middle class, educated, urban woman who were taking up jobs, and facing the conflicts brought

on by their dual roles. The research after 1975 on women was quite different. It exposed the shocking condition of Indian women even after three decades of Independence. The declaration of the year 1975 as the International year of women, led many activities on and questioning of women’s issues.

The women’s movements after the seventies has been largely responsible for critiquing the social system, generating new perspectives on women’s inferior status and initiating measures which could combat the forces oppressing women. Due to the struggle and protest launched by women, the ruling government introduced many of the measures. The enactment of amendments to the rape law, to the dowry act, the institutional structures such as family courts, setting up of the national commission for women, and women police cells are few illustrations of action taken because of the demands made by women’s groups. The challenges faced by the women’s movements are not unique. The gains of the moments are both tangible and non-tangible, achieved through considerable struggle and suffering. In the end, a quote from Susan Faludi is worth thinking about. She says,

A backlash against women’s right succeeds to the degree that it appears not to be political, that it appears not to be a struggle
at all. It is most powerful when it goes private, when it lodges inside a woman’s mind and turns her vision inward, until she imagines the pressure is all in her head, until, she begins to enforce the backlash, too-on herself.  

In order to eliminate all these wrongs that Indian women suffered, a fundamental change in the very system is necessary. A new society based on new socio-economic relations and a new liberal democratic system is necessary for making women conscious of their subjugation. As Sudhir Kakar in his book *The Inner world* says, as Indian woman does not stand-alone, her identity is wholly defined by her relationships to others. The dominant psychosocial realities of her life can be condensed into three stages. First, she is a daughter to her parents. Second, she is a wife to her husband and daughter in law to his parents; third, she is a mother to her sons. He says,  

**Indian identity is not a garment that can be put on, but a sense of continuity and sameness irrespective of where the person finds himself during the course of his life.**

A man’s identity is what makes him recognize himself and be recognized by the people who constitute his world. The cultural part of our personal identity, as our modern neurosciences tell us, is wired into

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our brains. The culture in which an infant grows up constitutes the software of the brain, much of which is already in place by the end of childhood. Even if our generic endowment were to determine fifty percent of our psyche, and early childhood experiences another thirty percent, there is still a remaining twenty percent that changes through the rest of our lives. This twenty percent is the “process”, that needs to be highlighted and discovered. The next part of this chapter introduces the concept of Identity.

Identity:

The American Heritage Dictionary (1993) defines ‘Identity’ as,

The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitely known or recognizable; a set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group;

The term identity, from its origins in the clinical context, where a patient was described as having an identity disturbance, which prevented him from experiencing himself as a consistent and continuous being with a past, a present and a future, has become quite varied. Its usage has expended into many different fields. The terms ‘identity crisis’ and the ‘search for identity’ are no longer confined to the individual, but can characterize a group, an institution, a class, a profession, or even a nation.
The sense of identity is neither completely conscious nor unconscious, although at times it may appear to be exclusively the one or the other. It is not to be confused with the concepts of role or character, although there may be a certain overlap in all three. It cannot be completely identified with terms as self-conception and self esteem, and a disturbance in the sense of identity is not the same as role of conflict, or a conflict in values, although occasionally it may be manifested as either.

Erik H. Erikson:

Erik H. Erikson is known as the architect of modern identity theory. He has given identity many meanings. His major contribution to the notion of identity is the formation of individual identity, the sense of self-sameness and continuity in time and space. The collective sense of identity characterizing the individual’s significant social groups, i.e., his caste, class, nation or culture gets transmitted to the infant’s earliest bodily experience, entering the very core of his ego, and thus becomes inextricably intertwined with his personal sense of identity, which emerges from, and is yet more than a sum of his earlier accrued identifications.

According to Erik H, Erikson,

Identity, to be sure, doesn’t originate (and does not end) in adolescence from birth onward; the child learns what counts in
his culture's space–time and life plan, by the community's
differential responses to his maturing behaviour. He learns to
identify with ideal prototypes and to develop away from evil
ones. But identity formation comes to a decisive crisis in youth
a crisis alleviated or arrogated by different societies in different
ways.⁸

If there is recognition of adolescence as a distinct development
phase, society will afford opportunities to the young to work through this
phase to attain adult identity. Our identity is a special marker of how we
define ourselves at any particular moment in life. Discovering and
claiming our unique identity is a process of growth, change, and renewal
throughout our lifetime. Identity formation is the result of a complex
interplay among individual decisions and choices, particular life events,
community recognition, and expectation, and societal categorization,
classification, and socialization. It is an ongoing process that involves
several key questions such as who am I? Whom do I want to be? What do
others think I am and want me to be? Who and what do societal and
community institutions say I am? Answers to these questions form the
core of our existence. In the following pages, an attempt is made to

Macmillan Company and the Free Press. 62.
examine the complex issue of identity by Erikson, and its importance in women's lives. Gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, and language are all significant social categories by which people are recognized by others. Indeed, on the basis of these categories alone, others often think they know who we are, and how we should behave.

At especially important junctures during the process, individuals mark an identity change in tangible ways. Changing the name is one way of marking an identity. Another way of marking an identity is by altering your physical appearance: Changing the wardrobe or makeup, cutting the hair very short, or letting the gray show after years of using hair coloring. Other markers of a change in identity include redecorating the home, or physical relocations to another neighborhood, another city, or another part of the country in search of a new home. When we critically analyse the issue of identity, we come to know that identity is much more than an individual decision or choice. Rather, it is a set of complex, and often contradictory, and conflicting psychological, physical, geographical, political, cultural, historical, and spiritual factors. Identity formation is a lifelong endeavor that includes discovery of the new, recovery of the old, forgotten, or appropriated, and synthesis of the new and old developed over the course of one's life. In order to reach Identity theory, we must
first view identity theory, as male theorists who assume a male paradigm for human experience now constitute it. Erik Erikson, known as the architect of modern identity theory, cited his popular ideas in his works. Another identity theorist Heinz Lichtenstein significantly influenced literary criticism.

Erikson popularized the idea of the ‘identity crisis’ through which perplexed youth passes on its way to adulthood in identity. Although Erikson believes that both sexes pass through the same stages on their way to maturity, he also believes in basic biological and psychological differences between the sexes. In this theory, the paradigmatic individual achieving a mature identity is male, whereas the female has a specialized role as child bearer. Her biological structure, her unique ‘inner space’ is congruent with this role, and she seeks to fill and protect this inner space rather than force into outward accomplishments.

Heinz Lichtenstein:

Heinz Lichtenstein is one of the pre-eminent psychoanalytic theorists of identity. He had demonstrated that one could read someone’s personality in terms of a core “identity theme” established in early object relations. His more idiosyncratic theories on ‘human identity’ have been less widely accepted, but they have a significant impact on recent literary
criticism. Lichtenstein believes that each child very early forms a 'primary identity' in response to the expectations implicitly expressed by its mother. This core identity sets the pattern according to which the person thereafter relates to other people and to the world. The self is defined by him as,

“The total potential range of all possible variations of the individual which are compatible with its primary identity and a person may risk death rather than give up identity”.

“Loss of identity is a specifically human danger, and maintenance of identity is a specifically human necessity”.

Heinz’s frequent use of the word ‘Human’ implies that identity is an existential and moral imperative as well as a psychologically descriptive category. It also implies that his concept works equally well for all humanity. Neither Lichtenstein, nor Erikson, use gender as a significant variable in their theory. Neither offers a theory of female identity as distinct from male identity. The theories may help us to understand the aspects of personality and writing that are similar for both sexes, but they give us no help with the special understanding of female

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10 Ibid p.77
identity. Recently feminist theorists have evolved reasonable and comprehensive psychoanalytic explanation of gender difference.

Sigmund Freud, exploring the undiscovered regions of the mind, looks at the implications of sexuality and the unconscious imagination for human subjectivity. A person’s selfhood is usually referred to their personality and character, which in turn defies them. Freud says that the self does not exit as such, but that it is made, constituted through the unconscious operations of desire. He poses the question of self in relation to human sexuality in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. He suggests that identity is made or created. The ego is formed through the unconscious selecting, or screening of objects by identification. This identification with another is made a part of the subject by incorporation. Identification and incorporation are thus twin boundary posts in the structuring of identity. Freud’s theories regarding femininity have their origin in his theories of the unconscious, and the meaning of sexuality in human life. In Freud’s view, the development of the feminine character is shaped at the outset by one essential characteristic – the male organ which is missing in the female. All feminine character traits such as interests, attitudes, emotions and wishes are reactions to this basic ‘defect’. According to Freud, the boy and the girl, earlier share the same sexual history, i.e. masculine one. The little girl discovers her
castration. This disillusioned her regarding her mother as well as herself. Her desire for the penis makes her turn away from her mother, and it is this repression of her active libido accompanied by the destruction of her love for her mother that makes it possible for her to later adopt the role of a wife and mother.

Nancy Chodorow:

Nancy Chodorow is an American feminist. She has extensively pursued the question of why women desire motherhood. Her explanation of personality differences between the sexes has gained widespread acceptance. Nancy Chodorow, in her books, *The Reproductions of Mothering*, seeks,

To move beyond descriptive generalizations about sexism, patriarchy or male supremacy to an analysis of how sexual asymmetry and inequality are constituted, reproduced and changed.  

She believes such an analysis must focus on social structurally induced psychological processes rather than on biology or intentional role training. Being social rather than biological, her analysis

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implies that personality differences between sexes are historically variable. Because she does not formulate her explanation of these differences in terms of identity theories, which ignore women, her insights may contribute usefully to a theory of female identity pertinent to the analysis of writing by women.

Chodorow’s model of male personality corresponds roughly to Lichtenstein’s model of the male who has developed a primary identity. She argues that a boy defines himself as a male negatively, by differentiation from his first caretaker, the mother. He gets autonomy as he outgrows the mother-child symbiosis. His Oedipus complex seals his separation from the mother, and his adoption of the role of the father, and he perceives himself as active, independent, and individual valued by his family and by the society.

The way a girl is brought up, coupled with the threat of a loss motivate some renunciation of Oedipal wishes. The girl does not give up her infantile genital organization and does not develop a strong super ego. According to Freud, her wishes simply modulate over time. One could infer from this that this gradual giving up of Oedipal wishes disappointedly could develop the passivity that Freud considers feminine. The female desire remains only for the missing organ, not for the man,
which is later transformed into the desire for a baby, even there a baby boy. Psychoanalysts have relied on woman’s desire and willingness to articulate their fantasies, wishes and hopes. It is said that Freud’s efforts consist through analysis, of attempting to pull women out of their reserve and silence, by giving them the right to speak. Chodorow says that a girl’s personality takes different shapes as she grows. A girl forms her gender identity positively, in becoming like the mother, she must develop in such a way that she can recreate the mother infant symbiosis when she herself becomes a mother. As a result, women develop capacities for nurturance, dependence and empathy more easily than men do.

Both Erikson and Lichtenstein occasionally describe identity as an ‘evolving configuration’, but they see the ‘process’ of identity formation as a developed mental progress towards the achievement of an autonomous individual, the paradigm for which is male. Erikson describes this process through distinct stages that have a biological base. In contrast, Chodorow portrays female personality as relational and fluidly defined, starting with infancy, and continuing throughout womanhood. She does not see female personality formation as a predetermined progress. She believes women are socialized, so that mothers can regress to earlier stages of development in the services of maternal nurturance.
We have seen that the male identity theorists believe that an individual’s primary identity, formed in early childhood, is enacted and confirmed through infantile identification, and the acquisition of appropriate social roles. In Chodorow’s theory, the fluid nature of female personality arises specifically from the mother’s relationship with her daughter. The daughter acquires empathy and the capacity for symbiotic merger through her infantile identification with her mother. Thus, inevitably we have to return to the special nature of the mother daughter bond, while discussing the female identity. Often there is a conflict between a ‘personal identification’ with the admirable aspects of the mother, and a rejection of ‘positional identification’ with the mother as victim. According to Chodorow, the young girl must identify with her mother and also separate from her. In order to be a mature mother, a woman must develop an identity sufficiently flexible, so that she can merge emphatically with her child and still retain an adult sense of herself as nurturing yet independent. This maternal stage of female identity bears special relevance towards women’s literary identification.

Incorporating feminist psychoanalytic insights, the concept of female identity shows us how female experience is transformed into female consciousness, often in reaction to male paradigms for female
experience. The concept of female identity provides us with sophisticated and various theories to explain differences between man and woman. Female identity is a process and women engage themselves in creating their female self. Identity, as Duncan Kelly would put it, is a

Self-reflective and self-conscious projection of shared and remembered symbols, myths, traditions, religion, history, language, food, clothing and such other factor. It is also an affirmation of difference because when I know who I am, I also know who I am not, or how I am different from the other.\(^\text{12}\)

However, differences are derivative and not constitutive of one’s identity. They can be lessened but real identity can only be maintained by remaining true to one’s own self and not by emphasizing the differences. Bhikhu Parikh, while Defining British National Identity, says,

Our membership in a club is a contingent fact of our lives as it would not change us profoundly if our membership ceased. By contrast, our gender, culture, religion, values, moral commitments, dominant passions, psychological and moral

dispositions and so forth are integral to us. We cannot abandon them without becoming different kinds of persons.  

We inherit our genes, but are shaped by circumstances of our childhood and upbringing, the people we interact with, both in our public and private spheres. We are shaped by innumerable influences, both hereditary and environmental. When external factors change, we can reinvent ourselves to a certain extent. We undergo transformation and become different kinds of persons, when some of the factors change over time. However, our roots always remain with us and modify our experiences. The most common terms for which we find a significant difference by gender are primary identity, gender identity, infantile identification, social role, the identity crisis and self-concept.

Primary identity is a hypothesis about one’s permanent essence, or a way of being, and formed in early infancy. Gender identity is to know which sex one is socially assigned. Female infantile identification seems more problematic than male ones. In classical psychoanalytic theory, a boy’s Oedipal phase is considered resolved when he identifies with his father, becoming like him in order to have what father has, that is, adult patriarchal power and sexual access to woman like mother. This theory

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has been less definitive about how girls identify with their parents. Primary identity, gender identity, and infantile identification are all components of adult identity that form early in childhood. Children and adolescents learn various social roles and group identification around which their self-concept consolidates. The social roles are highly polarized by gender and more options are available to boys than to girls.

During the past few years feminist critics have approached women’s writing with a view to find what makes women’s writing different from men. The common answer that women’s experience are different in a profound way than that of men. The other main explanation of female difference posits a female consciousness that produces styles and structures innately different from those of the masculine mind. The concept of female identity provides a key to understanding the special qualities of contemporary writing by women. India was and continues to be a patriarchal society, with the general subordination of women and their disempowerment that patriarchy normally entails. Caught in the crossfire of ideologies that seek to defend the traditional vision of Indian womanhood and those that seek to free her from the inequities of religiously sanctioned patriarchies, the modern Indian woman is engaged in a struggle between two opposing forces in her psyche as she seeks to reconcile traditional ideals with modern aspirations.
The difference is clearly visible in the area of education. Earlier girls were not allowed to have education. But now, the idea of some school education for girls has gained wide acceptance all over the country. Middle class parents even welcome higher education for their daughters. University education will enable the daughter to contribute to the family income after marriage and also make her independent, a possibility that has recently dawned on the middle-class horizon. The daughter is thus encouraged to work hard at her studies, and her academic achievements are greeted with parental pride and pleasure. Indian women, who were the symbol of retreat into personal regression and self-pity, are now a symbol of growth, purity and development. They are emerging out of darkness, throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependence and resignation and reaching out for an equitable share with man. They strive for sufficient courage and power to stand their ground and they have enough spirit to shape up their unfair lives. Their awakening leads to a re-appraisal and a true vision of their world. The modern Indian woman cannot hide behind her four walls. She has to face the challenges of the outside world. Her identity in other words, is evolving.
Chapter 2 Feminism and Identity

The next chapter in this thesis makes an attempt to read Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* keeping in mind the dictum ‘female identity is a process’, as a take off point in releasing the meaning of Identity.