CHAPTER I

The Changing Scenario:
The Rise of Feminism and Feminist Criticism

The feminist analysis of the selected works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker attempts a reading that views the three texts as an ethnic, cultural and political response to the racist, sexist, patriarchal and capitalist oppression and domination of the blacks. It demonstrates how the systems of oppression are spawned and sustained by the white supremacist and exploitative culture. The analysis of *The Bluest Eye* brings out the implications of imposition of white dominant culture on black sensibility and that of *Beloved* explores the theme of institutional enslavement of blacks by the whites and the resultant psychic traumas and travails. The critical discourse on *The Colour Purple* focuses on the growth of black female radicalism and freedom in the face of black male brutality.

As the present study is primarily pursued in the overall context of feminism, it is appropriate to study the main features of feminism and feminist criticism, focus on the history, aims, and objectives of the feminist movement and trace the broad theoretical contours of the female tradition in literary criticism. The ideological positions of major feminist theorists are taken into consideration with a view to fixing the point of departure of the feminist school of criticism. The whole discussion is placed in the context of the cultural theory in order to highlight the role of the feminist movement and criticism in evolving and sustaining a viable counter culture. An attempt is made to appropriate culture in political terms.
It is pertinent to begin with the feminist credo: "I ask no favours for my sex... All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy." Feminism, as a phenomenon of history, has two distinct phases. The first phase covers the period from 1830-1920 and the second from 1960 to present times. The first phase feminism has its roots in classical liberal thought. It is defined by an emphasis on campaigns for women's enfranchisement and the extension of civil rights to women. The period, following the achievement of voting rights for women in 1920, is regarded as a period of relative inaction for feminism. The 1960s, however, witnessed the growth of widespread facilities of education for women, entry of women into previously all male professions, the establishment of legislation on abortion and equal pay and the wide availability of birth control devices. These developments created conditions conducive to the resurfacing of feminism during the 1960s which is regarded as the great watershed of late modernity. The second wave feminism is, generally, said to have emerged with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in the United States of America in 1963. The sixties and seventies witnessed the rise of extensive networks of women's groups. Their proliferation gave a further fillip to the growth of feminism.

A. Feminism: Premises, Presuppositions and Preoccupations

The terms “feminist” and “feminism” bear political connotations. This is indicative of women's struggle for the advocacy of their rights and the promotion of political, economic and social equality. There are many well-formulated definitions of feminism. Linda Gordon describes feminism as “an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it.” Adrienne Rich chooses to define
feminism more directly. “Feminism is the place where, in the most natural, organic way, subjectivity and politics have to come together.”3 Rebecca West pretends not to know what feminism is about. “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that other people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute.”4

The anguished cry of the oppressed woman has been best expressed by Nora, who, in response to Helmer’s comment that her most sacred duty is to her husband and children, retorts, “I have another duty, just as sacred. My duty to myself. I believe that before everything else I am a human being just as much as you are or at any rate I shall try to become one.”5

Men and women are, at once, like each other in many ways and unlike each other in many other ways. Primarily, the difference between men and women has a social/cultural base. Feminism refutes the assumption that the biological opposition between the sexes determines social life. Instead, it contends that there exists a contradiction in the social relations between men and women. This cultural/dynamic contradiction is opposed to the biological/static opposition. It is one among a configuration of forces which engineer social change and determine the unfolding of human history and thought.

Feminism, as a theoretical critique, has also contributed to the conceptional decentring of the Cartesian subject. In this context, Stuart Hall has identified five major features of feminism:

• It questioned the basic distinction between “inside” and “outside”, “private” and “public”. Feminism’s slogan had been “the personal is political”.

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It opened for political contest whole new arenas of social life such as the family, sexuality, housework, the domestic division of labour, and child bearing.

It also exposed, as a political and social question, the issue of how we are formed and produced as gender subjects. That is to say, it politicized subjectivity, identity, and the process of identification (as men/women, mothers/fathers, sons/daughters).

It began as a movement challenging the social position of women and expanded to include the formation of sexual and gender identity.

Feminism challenges the notion that men and women are part of the same identity - "Mankind" - replacing it with the question of sexual difference.

Feminists hold the view that there is universal oppression of women that is based on sexual difference. Taking it as a premise, first, they undertake the study of the particular relationship between men and women within a specific society; second, they derive universal features from the particular relationship. In this context, it is illuminating to quote Juliet Mitchell:

"Across the world, throughout history and, indeed, within prehistory, woman’s situation has varied enormously but relative to the man of her society woman has always held a very particular place. Since, the distinction between the sexes, among human beings is a social one (whatever its coincidence with biology), and human beings distinguish themselves from other primates and animals in general by their organisation of society, we can expect the social distinction between the sexes to find expression in ways that are relevant to this organisation."

Juliet Mitchell contends that the contradiction, marking the social relationship between men and women, forms the basis of feminism. At the anthropological plane, it leads to the conclusion that mankind transforms nature into culture with the help of
its labour and social organization. The acquired techniques of labour and the intricacies of language are peculiar to humans. The other primates do not have these characteristics. Humans, male and female, do not live in groups instead they form societies. The whole argument boils down to the point that labour, social organization and language are human characteristics. The universal social distinction between the sexes must be placed within this perspective.

The division of labour, based on the sexual difference, is a universal feature of human society. There is always a distinction between the work, done by men, and the work, done by women. The basic question is not related to women’s work vis-a-vis men’s. Instead, it is a matter of social relationship between the sexes and stems from the physiological and biological arguments that are put forth to highlight the relationship. In this regard, Juliet Mitchell points out: “Mother love is a social requisite even where it coincides with a natural urge.” Obviously, the feminist theorist tends to subordinate the physiological and biological bases of motherly love to social obligations and compulsions.

The taboo on incest is another universal feature. It seems natural because it is, on this basis, that mankind transforms its animal nature into social nature. The social nature is connected with the human kinship system that imposes taboo on incest. Human kinship system constitutes a cultural construct. It is superimposed upon the biological aspect of the individual and determines the socialization of sexuality. The kinship system, like the sexual division of labour, marks a social distinction between men and women. The social division of labour, based on sexual difference and the kinship system, are bound by a reciprocal relationship.
Juliet Mitchell invokes the authority of Claude Levi Strauss to make the point that the sexual division of labour is an artificial device, because the two sexes, in their human ability to labour, could be so alike but are kept distinct and hence mutually dependent. She further argues that Levi-Strauss, on the basis of Marcel Mausse’s view of the exchange of gifts suggests that when one gives a gift, one expects at some point of time to be given something in return. Obviously, kinship system is also based on this principle. In this way, human kinship system and the sexual division of labour reinterpret, at a social plane, the natural reciprocity of primate groups.\(^9\)

Reciprocal relationships are bilateral, based on the theory of give and take. Social relationships, however, cannot be of this dual nature because they do not form a closed system. Hence, the natural division of labour among primates takes the form of socio-sexual division among humans, which further assumes the form of oppression of women through kinship.

In kinship, sexuality is projected in such a way that it prescribes social relations. For the prescription of social relations, the structure of kinship forms the basis of the inter-group and intra-group exchanges of people. It works as a system within the system. As in a class society, so within kinship systems, the main social relationship and its organizing principle are identified. One thing is certain that women are always exchanged among men. The form of family and that of kinship are affected by the conditions of the material base of the group. The form of family is also determined by class structures. The reproduction of human life forms its base. Mankind manipulates external nature for the production of the needs of life. In the process, its own nature undergoes transformation. The exchange of women ensures the reproduction of human
society and the sexual division of labour ties women to childcare that, in turn, assumes the shape of a social institution.

This social institution becomes oppressive for women. When women give birth to children, they lag behind in the sphere of labour and production that determine social change. Thus, the exchange of women for the purpose of procreation becomes the cause of women’s oppression. As mothers, nurses and educators, their productive labour becomes dependent on their fixed social roles. Consequently reproduction gains dominance over production and brings about women’s subordination to men, and the resultant oppression.

B. Feminist Movement - Growth, Aims and Objectives

The rise of feminism in the west is studied in relation to the changing social formations and political structures of Europe and America in the era of bourgeois liberalism. There have been writers and thinkers throughout ages who have focused attention on women’s plight. It is only in the nineteenth century that women’s voice of protest gets crystallized as a movement for the emancipation of the female sex as a whole. It has been a historically significant development and needs to be regarded as the confluence of the historical forces, which operate at different levels, intellectual, economic, social, cultural and political. The seminal and shaping impulses, behind the emergence of organized feminism, were released by Enlightenment, French Revolution, Liberalism, Protestantism, Industrial Revolution, growing surplus of women over men in advanced societies and the rise of the middle class.

The history of feminism unfolds the pattern of a progressively widening set of objectives. In the nineteenth century, the aims and objectives of the feminist political
movement were uniform. The feminist movement did not advance them all at once. For instance, the demand for the right to vote for women was raised at a later stage in the development of the feminist movement. The shift from moderate feminism to radical feminism was a slow process. The timid and narrow aims of the early feminists, with the passage of time, yielded place to the complete radicalization of the aims and objectives of the movement. The growth of the female suffrage movement marked the radicalization of feminism. At the same time it led to a division in the feminist ranks.

The history of feminism, as a movement, reveals that organized feminism, at every stage of its development, had been closely connected with the political changes, economic growth and the shifting balance of social forces. The actions of the feminists were a complex mixture of many ideological elements. The desire for liberation was only one element. The feminist movement had a distinct political, social and theoretical context, which provided dynamism to feminism. Though the relationship between feminism and politics varied from country to country and from period to period, it did play a distinct role in defining the objectives of the feminist movement.

C. Feminist Criticism - Concept, Thrust and Approach

Feminist criticism forms an enclave within the women's liberation movement. It has brought about the formation, for the first time, of a powerful female literary tradition. It has acquired a distinct identity by rejecting the exclusive economic focus of the orthodox Marxist thought. As the economic focus is not sufficient for explaining and changing the peculiar conditions of women as an oppressed social group, the feminist criticism shifts the emphasis from class division to gender division. With the passage of time, it has acquired the shape of an eloquent protest against patriarchal premises.
and accompanying prejudices. This protest is directed against women’s universal oppression. Terry Eagleton, thus, brings out the significance of this phenomenon:

For though the oppression of women is indeed a material reality, a matter of motherhood domestic labor, job discrimination, and unequal wages, it cannot be reduced to these factors: it is also a question of sexual ideology, of the ways men and women image themselves and each other in a male dominated society, of perceptions and behaviour which range from the brutally explicit to the deeply unconscious... because sexism and gender roles are questions which engage the deepest personal dimensions of human life, a politics which was blind to the experience of the human subject was crippled from the outset.10

Feminist criticism studies gender relations and how women, as an oppressed social group, experience them. It also takes into consideration the politics of gender, which entered a new phase in the late 1960s alongside the student movement, the third world uprising and the anti war and counter cultural youth movements. Since that time the feminist perspective has acquired a distinct orientation. Consequently there is no innocent or neutral approach to literature in the case of the feminist reader for whom to interpret a work is always to address overt or covert issues that it deals with. A raised level of consciousness and vigilance are needed for this purpose. The most important question that a feminist reader/critic might ask is how the text represents gender identity, what it says about gender relations, and how it defines sexual difference. According to Sandra M. Gilbert feminist criticism seeks: "to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority."11

The feminist reader/critic does not confront a text in order to pass judgement. Primarily, he/she sets out to understand the political unconscious, operative in the representation of women in the text, and how they function as signifiers in an ideology.
For instance, the women in the selected works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are conceptualised as victims of racial, sexual colonial and patriarchal ideology.

The black feminist study of the three texts reveals that black women are doubly accursed and exploited. On the one hand, they are subjected to racial/white domination and victimization as members of the black community and on the other, they are subjugated and abused within the black community itself on account of their gender. The study considers the three female protagonists, situated in a specific cultural and economic context, as paradigms of feminist analysis. For instance, Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* internalizes the western/white standards of beauty under the racial pressure of the dominant culture. The colonization of mind fosters her fatal fascination for a pair of blue eyes. Her praying for the symbols of Anglo-Saxon beauty represents a doomed attempt on her part to live up to an aesthetic code that is essentially different from the concept of traditional black beauty. Within the black community itself, she is violated by her father, rejected by her mother, taunted by the black boys, mistreated by Geraldine and betrayed by Junior. In the intra-racial context, signifying class hierarchy, she is humiliated by Maureen and defrauded by Soaphead Church.

Similarly Sethe in *Beloved* and Celie in *The Color Purple* are trapped in the inextricable web of gender, race and class which reinforce one another in blocking the black women's quest for identity which is regarded as a conceptual category. They impinge relentlessly on the socio-political, psychosexual, cultural and economic aspects of the life practices of black women in America. The emphasis on race, class and capitalism distinguishes black feminist analysis from the approach of mainstream white feminism that lays exclusive stress on male hegemony and subordination of women.
The black feminist analysis shifts the focus to rage and radicalism and regards the two as modes of resistance to racial and sexual oppression and exploitation. Sethe's committing infanticide to spare her child the ignominy of slavery in *Beloved*, the powerful bonding between Celie and Shug in *The Color Purple* and aggressiveness of Claudia and Frieda in *The Bluest Eye* illustrate the positive role that rage and radicalism play in the black women's struggle for survival and wholeness.

The feminist study of the three texts suggests that gender is a complex cultural idea, having a psychological dimension. It is not an entity, strictly tied to biological sex. Gender differs from biological sex in important ways. One is born either a male or a female. However, the ways in which one is considered masculine or feminine is a combination of biology and how culture interprets it. Gender, thus, represents a set of roles, which signify the difference between the feminine and the masculine at the cultural level.

Feminist cultural history delineates the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the patriarchy. It leads to the realization that there is no such thing as an intrinsically feminist text, having a specific historical and social context. It is up to the feminist reader/critic to make a struggle over the meaning of the text in order to perceive it as a feminist text.

Feminist criticism is a mode of critical discourse that takes into account the culturally determined gender differences. It, generally, focuses on the alienating effects of phallocentrism, reflected in society and literature. To dismantle the bases of phallocentrism and reductionist aesthetic, feminist criticism denounces patriarchal supremacist values, masculinist assumptions, and male domination. Patriarchy, as
Adrienne Rich explains, is:

"... the power of fathers: a familial, social, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquettes, education and division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which female is everywhere subsumed under the male."

This view of patriarchy poses a fundamental challenge to critical conventions and orthodoxies, regarding two issues i.e. revaluation of subjectivity and the category of experience. As a result, feminist criticism acquires the revolutionary thrust that finds expression in the denunciation of patriarchal dictum in literary practices and repudiation of the secondary or the subservient place that has been accorded to women in a pervasively patriarchal set up. Simone-de-Beauvoir observes, "This secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of education and social traditions under the purposeful control of men."

Feminist critics share three basic aims. First, they seek to rediscover the works of neglected women writers and to reinterpret them from a feminist perspective. Second, they wish to offer to the female readers, new methods of approaching a text. In doing so they wish to focus on techniques of signification like the mirroring of mothers and daughters, role-playing and transvestism. Third, they seek to create a community of readers and writers who understand and use language, spoken by women and for women.

The pursuit of these aims tends to lead to the establishment of a non-patriarchal feminist criticism, which has no definite beginnings. It came into being when women became aware of their relationship to language and grew conscious of themselves as writers, speakers and auditors. Its first rumbling was, perhaps, felt in the seventeenth
century when it was pointed out that many classical sources recognized powerful deities and influential muses as women. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) prepared the ground for feminist criticism and practised a nascent form of this type of criticism by unveiling gender politics behind sentimental novels.

In the twentieth century feminist criticism got underway with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone-de-Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949). *A Room of One's Own* offers a critique of male privilege, female oppression and exclusion, the effects of poverty and sexual constraint on women's creativity. In this epoch-making essay, Virginia Woolf questions why women are largely absent from history books unless they are queens, mothers or mistresses. She also opines that economic independence is the essential pre-condition of an autonomous woman's art. Like her predecessor, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf also believes that women's literature holds out the promise of a distinctly female vision.

Simone-de-Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* has made an original contribution to feminist thought. Its fiftieth anniversary was observed in 1999. The occasion marked the arousal of renewed interest in this classic as a source of new philosophical insights. The secondary place of women in the world is one of the major themes that Simone-de-Beauvoir takes up for exploration in *The Second Sex*. She points out: "Since patriarchal times women have, in general, been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men... inspite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race." She laments that patriarchy has conditioned women to such an extent that they have come to accept their subordinated position. It is further argued
that marriage and motherhood also signify the acceptance of women’s subordinated position. Highlighting the role of culture and civilization in producing the creature called woman, she observes: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, which is described as feminine."  

It is generally thought that this statement highlights the differentiation between sex and gender. But this interpretation can be contested on the ground that sex and gender co-exist and the biological factor has a direct bearing on the being and existence of women. As the body is subject to both the biological and the cultural determinism, a woman is, at once, sex and gender.

_The Second Sex_ draws heavily on facts and myths, taken from literature, biology, psychology and history. Simone-de-Beauvoir’s critique has also been strengthened by the theoretical approaches, drawn from Psychoanalysis and Marxism. She, however, does not completely agree with either of the approaches. She feels that the approach of Freud is too deterministic and the concepts, such as penis envy, are a part of the symbolic power that men hold over women. Similarly, she thinks that Engels’s analysis of capitalism and the oppression of women offer an inadequate explanation of the phenomenon of economic oppression of women by men. Simone-de-Beauvoir feels that women can never be portrayed adequately in the texts, written by males, because men are driven by their own male-centred myths, presumptions and prejudices.

The nascent phase of feminist criticism corresponds with the earliest developments of the modern American feminist movement in the late 1960s. It gathers momentum under the impetus of books like Betty Friedan’s _The Feminine Mystique_ (1963) that extends the feminist argument beyond the confines of patriarchy and takes
Figes’ *Patriarchal Attitudes*. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet fixes the critical gaze on the image of women, reflected in literature. Kate Millet maintains that literature has betrayed women. She opposes the cultural repression of women in contemporary society and studies the role of patriarchy and the pattern of dominance and subordination in male/female relationship. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet makes three charges against male writers. First, the male writers misrepresent females in their books. Second, they associate deviance with femininity and thus distort sexuality. Third, the narrative structure of fiction, devised by male writers, is a handiwork of masculine culture. In her onslaught on the male literary citadel, Kate Millet draws on a host of disciplines i.e. biology, sociology, education, anthropology and psychology to present feminism as a subversive alternative to the political power that men exercise over women. Thus, she extends the scope of feminist criticism by weaving distinct philosophical themes into its texture. But literature remains central to her because she thinks that literature presages social history.

In *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970) Eva Figes argues that feminist cultural history unfolds the ways in which the social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group. She asserts: “Women have been largely man made.” She further opines that criticism should promote the writing, which faithfully captures women’s experiences and denounce the artistic representations, which reflect a bias against women.

Germaine Greer, in *The Female Eunuch* (1971) takes into account the images of women; captured in literature and projected by popular culture in order to study the subservience of women in a male dominated society. Her avowed aim is to free women
into account women's response to it. The Feminine Mystique provides feminist criticism with a handy and workable model of cultural analysis. It has taken shape as a response to the challenge of a particular moment in the history of the cold war and the post war situation. Thus it addresses a specific generation and its problems.

Though Betty Friedan does not have the radicalism and comprehensive vision of Simone-de-Beauvoir, she shares her predecessor's disenchantment with patriarchy and protests against the tendency, represented by the graduates of the 1950s, of narrowing down the boundaries of their lives to marriage and children. Betty Friedan has translated the philosophical ideas of Simone-de-Beauvoir into popular language. She holds the view that women should demand a different treatment by resorting to political campaign. Her thinking, however, undergoes a change that is reflected in The Second Stage (1981). It advocates partnership between the sexes, which has been resented by militant feminists.

Mary Ellman's Thinking about Women (1968) assails the pre-suppositions and prejudices of masculine criticism and articulates the feminist critics' growing concern with rediscovering and reinterpreting the lost works of women writers. She lends support to the creative enterprise of contemporary women writers who are concerned with revealing what it means to be a female. She gives expression to the hitherto unheeded perceptions and experiences of women. Thus, Mary Ellman has created a climate of thought, which has gone a long way in promoting the status of women writers and bringing recognition to them.

In the beginning of 1970s, three revolutionary books were published, which are Kate Millet's Sexual Politics, Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, and Eva
Figs' *Patriarchal Attitudes.* In *Sexual Politics,* Kate Millet fixes the critical gaze on the image of women, reflected in literature. Kate Millet maintains that literature has betrayed women. She opposes the cultural repression of women in contemporary society and studies the role of patriarchy and the pattern of dominance and subordination in male/female relationship. In *Sexual Politics,* Kate Millet makes three charges against male writers. First, the male writers misrepresent females in their books. Second, they associate deviance with femininity and thus distort sexuality. Third, the narrative structure of fiction, devised by male writers, is a handiwork of masculine culture. In her onslaught on the male literary citadel, Kate Millet draws on a host of disciplines i.e. biology, sociology, education, anthropology and psychology to present feminism as a subversive alternative to the political power that men exercise over women. Thus, she extends the scope of feminist criticism by weaving distinct philosophical themes into its texture. But literature remains central to her because she thinks that literature presages social history.

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from the shackles of mental dependence that is bred by patriarchal values, prejudices and potent stereotypes. She holds the view that women’s passive response to patriarchy is the cause of their malady. She presents a comprehensive study of many sections of women in the U.K. i.e. black, lesbian and working class, and succeeds in arousing the dormant consciousness of women. In her later book, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (1984), her attitude to the sexual revolution undergoes a change. She has come to believe that males need a fair deal as well. The militant feminists have taken objection to this altered perspective of Germaine Greer.

Tillie Olson’s essay “Breaking the Silence” (1972) is to be regarded as a vital contribution to feminist criticism. She makes a conscious effort to make a palpable departure from the tradition, dominated by men exclusively. A sustained effort is made to chronicle tradition, shaped and defined by women themselves. Most feminist critics ignore the concept of class. They do not bring class positions into focus and lay exclusive emphasis on sex and colour only. Unlike them, Tillie Olson brings the issue of class into the picture and highlights its role in determining men’s dominance over women.

In the mid 1970s, Julliet Mitchel and Jacqueline Rose harnessed psychoanalysis to the exposition of feminism. Julliet Mitchel argues in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) that Freud presents a pessimistic view of women and reinforces patriarchy. Freud’s theory is not an authentic interpretation of a universal human nature. However, she endorses what is relevant to feminism in Freud’s theory of undifferentiated infant sexuality. She further observes that psychoanalysis explains how human beings acquire sexual identity by repressing desires, which are culturally unacceptable. She also points
out that psychoanalysis does not assume that sexual identity is synonymous with anatomy. Juliet Mitchell draws heavily on the work of Jacques Lacan who has reread psychoanalysis in the perspective of Saussurean Linguistics.

Jacqueline Rose also draws on Jacques Lacan’s insights and takes Juliet Mitchell’s argument a step further. She argues that psychoanalysis is indispensable to feminism as it provides a culturally enjoined theory of sexual identity, which is constantly resisted. She, thus, sums up the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism:

Feminism’s affinity with psychoanalysis rests above all, I would argue with this recognition that there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life. Viewed in this way, psychoanalysis... becomes one of the few places in our culture where it is recognized as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all.17

Both Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose employ psychoanalysis to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of the oppression of women. They analyze unconscious resistance and undifferentiated infant sexuality which signify that mother is the common object of desire for little boys and girls. On this basis, they find fault with patriarchal assumptions and exhort victims of male domination to strike back.

Patricia Sparks’ *The Female Imagination* (1975) lays bare the theoretical foundation of the distinction between male and female subject matter and exposes the sexist bias, of males who study the literary text in the light of the influences of patriarchal thinking. Her approach highlights the need to situate the text in a particular context, defined by conditions, based on the division of labour, the structure of the family, its effects on female authorship and the control of reproduction and sexuality. It is also contended that the institution of literature, based on the ideology of masculine discourses
and value judgements, plays a significant role in the fixing of the parameters of patriarchal perspectives on the text.

The late 1970s witnessed the publication of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979). They have sought to study unrest, self-doubt, low self-esteem, rootlessness, renunciation, and most important of all, the anger against society which mark the writings of Victorian women.

Ellen Moer’s *Literary Women* (1976) is a significant contribution to feminist cultural history. It provides an incisive analysis of the manner in which women took to working in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is argued that writing gave women a brilliant opportunity to express themselves, as it required no formal professional training and special equipment. It also enabled women to make money, which, in turn, rendered them marriageable.

Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1970) identifies a female sub-culture, which has three developmental phases: feminine, feminist and female. She points out that during the feminine phase, dating from 1840 to 1880, women wrote to equal the intellectual achievement of male writers. They internalized the male assumptions about female nature. The English women writers adopted the male pseudonyms to cope with the double literary standards. In the feminist phase (1880-1920), women were in a position to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and employ literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. It redefines the women writers’ role in terms of commitment to the cause of their suffering sisters. In the female phase, ongoing since 1920, women came to regard the female experience as the source of an autonomous art. They rejected imitation and protest as two forms of dependency.
Elaine Showalter’s *Towards A Feminist Poetics* (1979) is in the nature of an introduction to the feminist school of criticism which forms part of an interdisciplinary effort to reconstruct the social, political and cultural experience of women. With a view to imparting rigour and precision to feminist poetics, she divides feminist criticism into two major types i.e. the feminist critique and gynocriticism. The first takes into account the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women, and the representations of women in a male-constructed literary history and theory. Primarily it deals with woman as reader. The second deals with woman as writer and studies the structures, themes and genres in women writing. Gynocritics devise a female framework for the analysis of women writing and evolve a new model, based on the study of female experience. Obviously Feminist criticism has set new standards and trends. In this regard, Elaine Showwalter points out: “other models of modern criticism are learning lessons from our movement and beginning to question their own origins and directions.”

Rosalind Coward and Rachel Bowly have contributed a great deal to the understanding of the ideological basis of feminist discourse. They have analysed women's problematic from a non-patriarchal perspective. In *Female Desire* (1982), Rosalind Coward shows the gap between what the patriarch thinks women enjoy and what is actually enjoyed by women. In patriarchal thinking women’s enjoyment is perpetually recast as desire for something beyond and the ideal. The feminists do not agree with this position. Rachel Bowly, in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Diesser, Gissing and Zola* (1985), also examines the construction of desire in a patriarchal set-up. She studies the forms of female desire, notably in the representations of women as the victims of a
boundless, “longing and lacking” and the insistence on the maintenance of status quo. Stephen Heath’s *The Sexual Fix* (1982) explains this phenomenon by stating that the function of desire, in a capitalist, patriarchal system is to “propose and confirm sexuality to which we are then referred and held in our lives, whole sexual fix precisely.”

Toril Moi has not only brought recognition to the French feminist theory but has also made a notable contribution to feminist theory and criticism in general. She has made a palpable departure from the beaten path of feminist theory by weaning it away from the post-structuralist metaphysics and recognizing the male promotion of feminism. She has been able to bring gushes of fresh wind in the hot house of feminism through her interpretation of Simone-de-Beavoir’s *The Second Sex*. Her latest book, *What is a Woman and Other Essays* (2001) carries forward and strengthens the argument of her earlier books i.e. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994), *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985).

Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Irigary have related ideas, drawn from philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis, to feminism. The French feminist theory differs from the Anglo American criticism, which is interested in locating the female tradition, buried in literary history. According to Elaine Marks, French women writers are: “Looking for women in the unconscious, which is to say in their own language, ‘Cherchez la femme’ might be one of their implied mottos; where repression is, she is.”

It is justified by the feminists’ placing of the question of language on their political agenda during the 1970s. Language is no more treated as gender neutral. French feminists, Lucy Irigary and Helene Cixous, have pointed out the difference between men and women in their use and abuse of language and demonstrated that
language and sexuality are interrelated. Lucy Irigary argues that libido determines the use of language. She points out that female sexuality is unfixed and centred while male sexuality is fixed and centred. As a result, man's language is logical, rational and comprehensible and woman's is illogical, irrational and incomprehensible. Although Helene Cixous is less inclined towards grounding essential sexuality in language, she claims that, in the patriarchal setup, women have a more immediate relation to feminine discourse than men.

Helene Cixous and Lucy Irigary both draw heavily on Jacques Lacan's work on psychoanalysis and language. However, at times, they are critical of Lacan. Lucy Irigary refutes Lacan's theory of desire in language by putting forth the view that female desire and sexuality are constituted and formed, by its total, 'otherness' to male sexuality. The refutation of Lacan's theory offers to the feminists, a way of appropriating and comprehending psychoanalysis to affirm a positive mode of female desire. Lucy Irigary contends that female desire is a potent force that can dismantle patriarchy.

Mary Jacobus is another feminist critic who has employed the psychoanalytical theory within a historical framework. In *Reading Women* (1986), Mary Jacobus does not argue against or in favour of psychoanalysis. She simply uses it and does so with brilliance. She shares the concerns of the French feminists with regard to the manner in which the female subject inscribes herself in writing. Mary Jacobus urges feminist readers to stop seeking out woman as if she were something in a text but to start perceiving her as something, which is eminently textual. She says: "Perhaps the question that feminist critics should ask themselves is not, 'Is there a woman in this text but rather' Is there a text in this woman?"
However, all feminist critics do not approve of the shift from writer to reader. For most lesbian and black feminist critics, the role, played by the author as the source and fountainhead of textual meaning, is of crucial importance. *In What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism* (1988), Bonnie Zimmerman suggests that one should not rule out the identity of the author, because in doing so one risks losing the specificity of an essential lesbian sexuality.

Black feminist critics have also established an integral relationship between the author and the text. The black feminist critic, Barbara Smith urges the black women writer: "To think and write out of her own identity and not try to craft the ideas or methodology of white/ male literary thought upon the precious materials of black women's art."23

Belsey and Moore hold the view that rather than only positioning black and lesbian women as victims of the coercive part of white male critical norms, Bonnie Zimmerman and Smith offer positive black and lesbian subjectivity that counters and resists them.24

The French feminist critic, Alice Jardine, argues in *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (1985) that gynesis is the "putting into discourse of women."25 She claims that gynesis is the expression of the uncertainty that has traditionally been associated with femininity. She defines femininity as the result of the excesses of patriarchy and contends that femininity has no relation to biology. Gynesis, therefore, is not essentially concerned with women. It refutes all existing schools of thought. It goes beyond the history of sexual identity. Language, as a result, no longer guarantees identity or meaning. Chaos, disorganization and non-transparency mark all figurations.
Out of chaos, created by the total eclipse of master narratives, a new space emerges. This space holds great significance for feminism. Julia Kristeva identifies this utopian space as the conceptual territory, occupied by the third generation of women. It is an area where sexual differences are forgotten. In this context, Belsey and Moore observe: "Kristeva and Jardine’s non-essentialist theories of subjectivity and sexuality as unfixed and ‘in process’ pose a radical challenge to the common sense belief in the unified subject who issues controls and fixes meaning."26

In the work of Julia Kristeva, the coalescence of political and psychoanalytical theories is discernible. Lacan’s pronounced influence on her feminist thinking is problematic because the symbolic order of Lacan represents the contemporary patriarchal, sexual and social order, based on phallocentrism. In her book La Revolution (Our Language Poetique)(1974), Kristeva opposes the “Semiotic” to the symbolic and argues that the “Semiotic” springs from the pre-Oedipal phase of the child while the symbolic is evocative of the authority of the father. The Semiotic represents the child’s bond with the mother’s body. Thus it is connected with femininity. The semiotic is the ‘other’ of language and Kristeva uses it as a counterpoint to symbolic order.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism (1985) argues that feminist criticism enables us to understand the paradigms of patriarchy while at the same time it identifies specific pressure points for change. She points out that the problem is not only who is speaking, how is she speaking and to whom is she speaking but on whose behalf is she speaking. Gayatri Spivak addresses the post-colonial issues, having a bearing on the women of the third world and studies
them vis-a-vis the first world feminists. She is critical of French feminists because of their indifference to the historical approach and textual analysis.

The feminist critique has benefitted by the theory and practice of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and post-modernism. The post-structuralists seek to ‘deconstruct’ the hierarchical opposition between man and woman. In the man centric society, woman is regarded as the opposite, the “other” of man, non-man, defective being, an alien and inferior. Man is what he is only by excluding the opposite or other. The post-structuralists point out that man’s very identity is jeopardized by his excluding “the other”. Woman “the other” is intimately related to man. She is an essential indicator of what he is not. Man’s existence is dependent on this “other” because what is alien is also intimate and what is outside is also inside.

Derrida throws his theoretical weight on the side of feminists when he describes the modern society as phallocentric, thereby meaning that Phallus is the symbol of patriarchy and the male principle. At the same time, it is logocentric, implying that the discourses of modern society are capable of helping man arrive at the full/fixed truth. He has combined the two and coined the term phallogocentric, which means that those who exercise sexual/social/political powers hold on to it with tenacity.

The wielders of sexual/social/political power promote the belief that girls and women are inferior to boys and men. It is strengthened by early sexual and familial development. Feminists attach great significance to psychoanalysis because of this pervasive prejudice. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has revised Freudianian theory with the help of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of discourse. Though
not a protagonist of feminism, he has influenced the feminists. His work is relevant to them because they are concerned with the human subject.

Lacan identifies two stages in the infant’s development i.e. imaginary and the minor stage. By imaginary he means a condition in which the infant does not have any definite centre of self. It pertains to the pre-Oedipal state. In the mirror stage, the infant’s awareness of a unified self-image grows from within the imaginary state of being. It is at this point that the ego starts taking shape in the crucible of narcissism. Consequently the infant locates something in the external world with which he/she identifies. It is the other body, which is usually the mother. Then the father emerges on the scene. He symbolises what Lacan calls Law, enforcing taboo on incest. As a result, the child’s libidinal desire for the mother sinks into the unconscious, which, according to Lacan, is “structured like a language” and represents the “discourse of the other” which is constituted by language, the unconscious, the parents and the symbolic order. Lacan’s emphasis on “the other” is denotative of the sexual difference, which becomes pronounced when the father disrupts the harmonious relationship between the infant and the mother. The transcendental signifier in Lacan’s theory, the Phallus, denotes the signification of sexual difference.

Post-structuralism, as a mode of thought, encompasses the work of Michel Foucault. The field of, what Foucault calls, discursive practices, embraces the feminist discourse as well. His concept of resistance, inherent in power relationships and that of resolution, forming a point of culmination of resistance, have a bearing on the feminist critique and the positioning of feminist writers/critics/ readers.
Feminism has created the conditions and ambience of a distinct discourse on post modernism. It has been used to highlight certain facets of postmodernism i.e. its discernible break with high modernism, the elitist/culture, and the shift from grand narrative to small narratives, from global to the local, from the homogenous to the heterogenous. The feminist criticism, drawing sustenance from the differences between the female and male viewpoints, acquires a post-modernist dimension in the sense that it regards heterogeneity and difference as forces of liberation and rejects the totalising discourses which undermine the significance of fragmentation, heterogeneity, indeterminacy and “the other.”

The central question taken up in the feminist analysis of the selected works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker encompasses the notions of heterogeneity, fragmentation, indeterminacy and differences, represented by the blacks' minority ethnic group. In the process the modernist notions of high culture patriarchy, elitism and homogeneity are supplanted by the black aesthetic in general and black women's radical traditions in particular. *The Bluest Eye, Beloved* and *The Color Purple* focus on a minority ethnic group, existing on the fringes of the elitist white culture. The female protagonists' quest for identity and authentic existence has ideological engagement with colonialism, as reflected in the homogenizing power of the mainstream culture, its impingement on the psyche of the blacks and the concomitant issues of culture, community, ethnicity and identity. Thus, the three texts present an argument in favour of post modernism in so far as they address cultural heterogeneity and differences, indicated by the three black female protagonists and contextualize patriarchy and authoritarianism of the dominant class that oppresses them 'the other.'
While feminism posits the women as 'the other', racism regards the black as 'the other'. The interrelatedness of sexism and racism in American society generates the psychological, sexual and political trauma, which, in turn, becomes the propelling force of identity politics and black feminism. Black feminism relates racial politics to the issues of self-identity, patriarchy, nationalism, nativism, primitivism, gender and class in the context of modernism and post-modernism. It draws theoretical sustenance from the black literary tradition, shaped and strengthened by black women writers from the eighteenth century beginnings to the present times. The black literary tradition unfolds itself within the broad framework of African-American history from 1779 to contemporary times.

In the second chapter, six distinct phases of African-American history are taken into consideration in order to examine black literature and relate it closely to the life and circumstances out of which it grows. Black women writing and black feminist criticism are studied in the context of the intellectual, social and cultural history of the blacks. The historical perspective of black women, fiction and literary tradition forms the prelude to the feminist study of the selected works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.
References


