Chapter 5

Cross-Cultural Connections

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference.

Audre Lorde

This chapter attempts to interweave a pattern out of the disparate issues of feminism in different cultures as witnessed in the narratives that were selected for comparative study. In the age of accelerated globalization, migration and displacement cross cultural feminist exchanges and dialogues become a basis for negotiating culturally-differentiated feminist positions. The current globalization process necessitates an approach to feminism which is both situational and relational. Through these selected works the study tries to convey some sense of the multiplicity of voices and positions within the field. This comparative study of feminist theory and literature from the ‘third world’ contexts, as well as works produced in the west, makes it clear that research in feminism cannot benefit from retreating into regional particularism and separatism. Instead strategic alliances and eclectic borrowings would be beneficial to all women. With the potential for difference and differentiation within feminisms in mind we need to explore the possibilities for a unifying definition of feminism which does not assume a fixed frame.

The ‘difference debate’ within feminism is a proof of self-reflective critical consciousness. The way forward I would suggest is in recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of standpoints and the ways in which they not only divide women across the world but also the ways in which they can facilitate an issue-based coalition.

The plural form of the noun feminism forced recognition of difference as a way of refusing the hegemony of one kind of feminism over another. Emerging out of the volatile and deep divisions within national and international kinds of feminism by the late 1970s, the politics of pluralization forcibly interrupted the tendency of some
(especially white, heterosexual, western feminists) to attempt to speak for all, as if patriarchy were a monolithic cultural formation, as if women were the same everywhere, as if the female subject of feminism were homogeneous. This pluralization has contributed profoundly to the expansion and diversification of feminism. (Friedman 4)

I had set out to do a truly comparative feminist study of different regions of the world, where political history and culture was different. It was quite compelling to find cross connections and similarities in experiences of women despite these differences. In both Africa and Indian subcontinents women’s issues and interests have been historically subsumed by and treated as secondary to issues of national liberation, racism, democratization and other movements of social change. It was believed that once these social changes will be obtained it would automatically bring about the emancipation for women. However, social changes in other fields did not bring about a resolution of women’s issues. Hence, feminism had to take up this task independently. Common to all feminist writings is that they are rooted very much in reality. All the narratives indicate alternatives for a different living as against the life of repression and subjugation. The narratives depict the condition of women in diverse social settings highlighting issues that concern a particular group of women at a particular time, and yet, there is a sameness of concerns.

Feminism tries to make a continuous and sustained effort in many countries to bring to the fore issues of women. Gradually these issues are being taken up and many feminist agendas have merged into mainstream human rights and justice movements.

Many feminist goals have been accepted as part of consensus politics in numerous, though far from all, countries. For example, goals of equal pay for equal work, of equal access to education, of reducing male violence against women, and of equal rights to vote and participate in government are now widely accepted. (Walby 148)

It has been observed that feminism in any form intersects with the justice projects of human rights and of social democracy in all parts of the world. Yet what we see today is a tokenism of the feminist gains. A very small ratio of women has benefited from feminist movement so far. Women in the developing and
underdeveloped countries have not received many basic human rights that many women in developed countries have had. Gross inequalities continue to penetrate our society, implying the need for feminists to address these imbalances. “The goals of feminism have not yet been achieved, even though there have been many partial successes. Many goals remain elusive, despite centuries of efforts. There are gender inequalities in the institutional domains of economy, polity, violence and civil society” (Walby 25). Since, societies do not evolve at the same level simultaneously, by juxtaposing gynocritics from different cultures and analyzing their standpoints, this research has endeavoured to bring in a broader-based representation of feminisms across cultures. This would help in identifying an agenda within which feminism can travel around in diverse cultures. Thus, feminism can avoid narrowness by ensuring the inclusion of a multitude of points of view.

An analysis of the selected texts has allowed a display of the mechanics of different patriarchies in different locations, outlining the way these social structures determine the social position of women. The works of gynocritics from different cultural locations were analyzed keeping the intricacies of intersection of class, race, political and historical background in mind. This research enables to acquire an expanded perspective on the lives of women in different cultural locations. While doing this comparative study I was constantly aware of gender as related to other grids of identity and thus focused on foregrounding of issues related to women in diverse cultures. An insight that came forth was that it would help if we share our practice, as much as possible to make a collective endeavour to improve the condition of women all over the world.

The juxtaposition of writers from different cultural contexts has also opened a case for cross-cultural exchange of knowledge gains and a sharing of activist strategies. The comparative study helps us to draw together the insights gained from multiple perspectives. These narratives unveil the victimisation, resistant strategies, and make visible the diverse issues that concern women in different times and locations. These texts have also unveiled various manifestation of male control, mediated through religion and other social institutions. In order to build a politicized, mass-based feminist movement, women must work harder to overcome the alienation from one another that exists. There is a need to find fractals of self-similar structures within narratives across cultures. These women writers also display a certain thematic
and formal coherence in their writings. Marriage, motherhood, emotional and economic independence, women’s education, their political and economic marginalization, their resistance to oppression and role in the nation-state are among the recurring motifs witnessed in their fiction.

There is a need to capture the multiple and overlapping nature of social differences, the way in which individuals are simultaneously located within several different social groupings, which have varying significance and priority according to time and place. The complexity and partially overlapping and cross-cutting nature of social divisions, rather than that of reified differences, is the central issue for feminist politics. (Jakobsen)

In this comparative study a sustained argument in the writings of women writers was conspicuous and the arguments followed a pattern. In all the narratives there is an evolution from, self as socially constructed to a conception of selfhood as essential and beyond social that informs feminisms across cultures. Reform was a key issue for feminism in every form in the feminist writings. “Women writings focus attention on both the manifestation of a female sensibility a feminist reality and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality” (Jain, 1996: 2). Women writers through their narratives show how women are confronted with opportunities of resistance and their attempt at making new meanings in opposition to the dominant ideology. Feminist writers have attempted to recover, explore and express through literature those aspects of social relations that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within the web of social relations that make up any society.

The work of these writers bring to the fore an extensive set of women’s issues. They represent a vanguard for future improvements in women’s rights and status. Through this research, I have tried to construct a sort of cosmopolitan geo-political literacy in terms of feminist issues, which started with a humble curiosity and openness to be confronted and questioned. Only through this confrontation with other cultures, comparing life-styles and priorities, can women achieve insights to negotiate alliances, shared commitments and consensual thought. In other words, this research contributes to deconstruct any rigid idea that a universally shared interest or identity is a pre-given reality.
Feminism is a multidimensional concept and it differs from culture to culture and from people to people. Yet strategic cross connections can be made to prevent the movement of feminism from fading. Feminism can avoid narrowness by ensuring the inclusion of multitude of points of view.

Cross cultural feminism is a platform for insightful international dialogues. We have already begun to explode generalizations in feminism and the feminists are delving into diversity of problems faced by women in different cultures.

The similarities or curious recurrences of certain patterns of male supremacy in cross-cultural views are being questioned, especially from the socialist-feminist perspectives, in relation to the particular historical and economic factors and cultural customs evident in women's lives. From early celebration of universality and sameness, the movement is more and more concerned with the implications of differences among women's experiences and understanding the political factors at work in those differences. (Joseph and Lewis 67)

Encompassing of varied forms of exploitation of women is the present agenda of feminism as a movement. In the course of my research I realized that while doing a feminist study one should not be trapped within framework of a specific set of representations. Instead one should try to ever escape finite and partially conditioned ideas. As someone has rightly said, “The horizon is not one of entrapment, but an opening”, in this case to other cultures and times. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. Theory, including feminist theory has always been a search for meaning and provisional consensus. Contradictions and debates in feminism are fertile ground for future developments.

Feminism originated in the west and has travelled to other parts of the world translating and adapting according to the demands and needs of women in different parts of the world. When the interaction of feminisms is creative and complexly innovative, energizing possibilities for social transformation emerge.

Portrayal of exile and struggle to recuperate the female body in the writings of women from disparate cultures is evocative of a just future for women all over the
world. Through their narratives these authors challenge the conventional system that always expects women to compromise. Women’s marginalization brings to surface the baneful influence of gender discrimination. All the gynocritics have denounced women’s socio-cultural predicament caused by their entrapment in male dominant socio-economic culture and political hegemony of patriarchal society. These novels articulate counter-cultural spaces for women. In other words they invert traditional notions of womanhood. Defiance was an essential component of the act of writing in these narratives. It is one of the subversive feminist politics in the narratives that connects women writers across cultures.

Novels are left open-ended, no conclusions are arrived at, and they all defy our expectation of closure. Tension between individualistic urges and societal expectations prevail cross-culturally. There is a sustained questioning of patriarchal value systems. The narratives seek to unsettle perceived hierarchies and force a rethinking of accepted social frameworks.

These writers have elected to interweave fiction, mythology, politics, and history whether personal or public in their writings to bring forth women’s issues. All narratives chart the progress from passive victimhood of the protagonist to an awareness of her own potential. Women writers across cultures have adopted literature to present both the socio-cultural forces which demand woman’s submission and the ways in which women rebel and assert themselves. However, no facile solution is offered, only a vision of female self-empowerment as a mode of survival in a difficult hostile world is hinted at. The women writers from different cultures envision a utopia not only for women but for the entire human kind, thus, envisioning a third level of inclusive transformation. This aspect was found in all the four texts that were analysed during the course of this research. These women writers pointed towards a need to evolve new social models appropriate for the changing social fabric. Women’s subjugation, instead of being treated as an isolated issue is presented in relation to a network of other power grids operating in diverse settings.

This comparative study also highlights the re-theorising of feminism in ways that are meaningful in today’s contexts. Breaking away from the tendency to think in dualities and binaries, it alerts us to the multiple meanings latent in the term ‘feminism’, which can in various instances denote a whole spectrum of attitudes,
ranging from total subjugation to assertive self-empowerment. Choices are finite, determined by culture specific parameters but when writings from different cultures are juxtaposed in a comparative study what unfolds is a plethora of choices and strategies which earlier could not be imagined. Sylvia Walby contends:

There are many different ways in which the subject of feminism is constituted, including promoting womanhood, claiming the equal treatment of women with men, and imagining the transformation of gender relations. There is not a single approach, but rather a mix. A range of frameworks are invoked to support these projects, including justice frameworks of equality and human rights and mainstream frameworks of economic development and crime reduction. The claim making includes both the universal and the particular. There are both shared and common goals and diverse projects. There are specificities due to the inequality. But there are also similarities due to exchange associated with globalisation and partly due to exchange associated with globalisation and partly due to exchanges of gender inequality. (50)

Though creative writers seldom base their fictions on a conscious deployment of theoretical conception, yet understood in their narratives are certain assumptions about subjectivity, gender roles, and relationship between self and society. It is a fact that women’s liberation cannot be a uniform exportable ideology. It has to be defined and achieved contextually. If feminism is to be internationalized, it must have the flexibility to become a distinct, but interconnected struggle within a wider and holistic movement towards social change and human freedom. Universal concepts cannot be carried over from one culture to another in all their pristine purity. Temporal spatial realities modify and alter them. This is specifically so in cases of gender where political ideologies, economic forces and religious construct influence gender relationships in different cultures differently. Issues need to be examined within the broad perspective of the country’s socio-political ideologies. Feminism is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever-shifting local and global exigencies. It takes different forms in different places, with diverse priorities and strategies; but there are major commonalities despite the variation.
Feminism today, with all its local variation, is best understood to be a truly global phenomenon: a product of transnational dialogues and disagreements, coalitions and networks. In spite of the common perception that feminism originated in the West and diffused to the rest of the world, the contributors show how the influences have historically been multidirectional and a product of transnational mutual learning and sharing. (Ferree and Tripp viii)

These fictional works also posit the universality of human nature in suffering. These texts invite the reader’s intervention and serve the strategy of ‘consciousness raising’ essential for feminism. It is also evident that in these feminist writings, the plot is deliberately structured to invite reflection on women’s position in the represented society. These representations by women writers offer a constellation of innovative worldviews and liberated perspectives on feminist issues.

In order to keep the feminist movement alive there is a need for a comparative study of theory and practice, a coalition of common interest. This comparative study is a small step towards the understanding of women’s writings from diverse cultures yet universal in appeal, working for a common goal of social change. This research attempts to highlight the newer political agendas in feminism from diverse settings. There is a necessity to pay close attention to the specificity of place and context while building connections across struggles in different places. The common theme which connects diverse theoretical positions from various cultures under the label of ‘feminism’ is the claim that paying attention to the ways in which social reality is ‘gendered’ has a productive impact on how it is to be understood, judged and may be changed.

The attempt here is not to smother differences, opposition and plurality in the name of self-similar agenda of feminism. An overarching ‘feminism’ is no longer tenable and the best we can hope for is a series of mini-narratives which are provisional, contingent, temporary and relative and which provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in a particular local circumstance. Feminism cannot be addressed separately from politics or isolated from other interconnected factors like culture and religion. Cross cultural research on gender reveals several important findings: On one hand, gender seems to be a nearly universal feature of all human
societies. On the other hand, the actual contents of gender definitions have an astonishingly wide-ranging cross cultural variability. Alternative versions are produced by a study of gynocritics in varying cultural locations and discontinuous histories and their implications on feminism as a movement. This results in envisioning new possibilities and directions for feminist practice.

Such practice (current feminist politics) is increasingly a matter of alliances rather than one of unity around a universally shared interest or identity. It recognizes that the diversity of women’s needs and experiences means that no single solution, on issues like child care, social security and housing, can be adequate for all. Thus, the underlying premise of this practice is that while some women share common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal . . . . This, then, is a practice made up of a patch-work of overlapping alliances. (Fraser, Nancy and Nicholson, Linda 35)

These narratives from different locations have common interventionist and transformative potential for social change in their respective locations. Women writers may not have shared strategies of resistance but they do have a common agenda of improving the lot of women in their society. The different forms of feminism can be better understood in the cultural and materialistic codifications of their own experiences and philosophy. Diverse issues of feminism can only be investigated in respect to its cultural and symbolic fields where it stems from.

In all four narratives the protagonist is shown to be implicated by her body and seeks to find an escape from it. In Water Kalyani chooses to end her life in order to escape the destiny attached with it. Janet cannot bridge the body-mind divide which becomes a hindrance in her achieving her academic pursuits. Similarly, Mara in Beyond the Horizon ends up as a prostitute who has to offer her body to men for her survival. Her body becomes a territory which is exploited by all. Woman’s body is treated as a territory which is usurped by man due to her vulnerability. Her husband uses it to gain material wealth by prostituting her; Mara subverts the patriarchal agenda and uses it for avenging her husband and for her own survival. In The Dark Abode Kuki is entrapped in a loveless marriage where her body and soul live a
divided self, she establishes a surreal relationship with a man who is culturally different from her. Her soul finds an outlet through her emails which unbound her soul from her bodily physical existence. Thus, we find woman’s body becoming a site of exploitation across cultures. The protagonist either attempts to liberate or develops a loathing towards her body. Female body is in a state of exile including self-exile and self-censorship. All protagonists kind of undergo an internal exile where the body feels disconnected from it, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency. It is only when the protagonists transcend this exile, resist domination they are enabled to reconnect to their bodies. In Water and Death in a Tenured Position the resistance fails, it results in suicide and self-destruction; personal isolation and anonymity in case of Mara. The gynocritics through their works reinforce to establish self-control over women’s bodies. Why should women always negate their body?

On a fundamental level a notion of the body is central to feminist analysis of the oppression of women because it is upon the biological difference between the male and female bodies that the edifice of gender inequality is built and legitimizied. The idea that women are inferior to men is naturalized and, thus legitimized by reference to biology. This is achieved through a twofold movement in which, firstly, women’s bodies are marked as inferior by being compared with men’s bodies, according to male standards and secondly, biological functions are conflated with social characteristics. (McNay 17)

As Bordo also points out, feminism of the late 1960s and 1970s viewed, “the female body as a socially shaped and historically ‘colonized’ territory” (Bordo 21). Such a view, though, classifies women and the female body predominantly as victim, living passively and submissively within patriarchal society, a tabula rasa awaiting inscription. These narratives emphasize the need to reclaim woman’s body from the abusive strategies which have degraded the essential goodness of the woman. According to Jasbir Jain, “Being fully aware of the social construction of gender, the attempt for the time being is to free feminism from the underpinnings of ideology and relate it to the relationship between the biological body and its location in a social environment, and to examine the nature of this gendered reality” (2011: 3).
Narratives across cultures represent deprivation, disillusionment and then a movement towards gradual awakening and finally a confrontation with the reality. All protagonists live a fragmented/divided existence in a nebulous borderland; in search of coherence. Works written by these women authors are open ended because the quest for female identity and its full realization in a multi-faceted, oppressive society seems to be endless but always advancing. Mara, Kuki, Chuhiya and Janet confront the disenchantment with marriage, they all try to impose an order on the chaos that threatens to engulf them in their respective contexts. The authors in the narratives engage themselves with the idea of a “heteropia” with an alternative possibility. But eventually it proves to be a stop-gap arrangement, a succor for a while where the protagonists undergo a process of healing, discovering their strengths and weaknesses. They eventually return to the main-stream to renew their links with the world. Only in case of Kalyani in *Water* and Janet Madlebaum in *Death in a Tenured Position* who give up all hope and are unable to return to reclaim their lost self and their capacity for agency. On the other hand Mara, Shakuntla, Chuhiya never give up their hope of returning to the mainstream. They move towards a resolution as there is no progressive growth in severing ties with the society.

Epistemology is the knowledge of “truth” of things and the concomitant desire to persuade others to accept its value. The relationship between epistemology and feminism is dialectical. Feminism poses to challenge many “truths” of patriarchy. Feminism has long found epistemology, the study of ways of knowing as one of the most useful instruments for its gains. Admittedly I perceive the dismantling of the patriarchal epistemology as a unifying theme in the fictional work of the women writers. However, diverse and disparate the contents of these women writers may be they are linked with a common thread of epistemological inquiry. Their writings represent necessary and worthy counter-hegemonic initiatives to explore alternatives to the epistemology of patriarchal domination.

The political dimension of literature is evident in the works of all the women writers taken up for this research. Politics in their narrative is the constitutive ground of their works. Political dimension notwithstanding their works are also firmly tethered to an aesthetic vision. As rightly said that visionary dimension is essential to politics of change. Frye illuminates the revolutionary potential of women’s literature: “They do more than ‘represent’ the available possibilities in women's lives. They do
more, even, than create new ‘role’ models. They take an active role in the broader pattern of cultural change” (199).

Literature is important for the study of feminism in diverse cultures because it constitutes an indelible record of women all over the world; it represents the complicated present of women and helps in framing the present and future possibilities for feminism. It has been rightly pointed out by Friedman “People know who they are through the stories they tell about themselves and others” (8). But it is a daunting issue that makes study of feminism and women’s writing difficult, as argued by Payant, Katherine B:

Does a writer see her art as a form of praxis, as a Marxist critic would say, a means of promoting feminist ideas to her readers? Does she see herself as an artist/storyteller who describes the world as she sees it, and that way happens to be feminist? Or both of the above? Is she essentially an apolitical person whose work simply reflects current ideas in her society? Many authors do not leave us signposts advertising their intent, and are often reluctant to admit their work is influenced by social and political ideas. They are well aware of the prejudice in the literary world against writing with a political bias. (5)

Surprisingly, there are a few fiction writers who confess being feminist writers.

The effort behind this research is not to evaluate novels purely as works of literature; it has been to see how responsible and responsive these are to the women’s question in various contexts. There has been a conscious effort to evaluate the politics behind the writings by women writers. Cross cultural feminist studies is valuable in understanding groups of people, and consequentially their intellectual, economic, and political capability as vital and contributory to the global community. The idea is to explore feminist issues of location and culture and move into a dialogue between the various feminist issues. The differences enable us to critically examine moments of cross-cultural identification and tolerance. It also warns us of the cultural intrusion in the name of feminism; which is nothing short of neoliberal imperialism. “In bringing together third world feminism and Western feminism as one politic”, Mohanty makes the point, “that feminism must strive to become truly international and cross-cultural” (1992: 91).
Feminists from dominant countries (developed nations) should see that they are not making the issues of underdeveloped nations less visible and also they should not try to elevate inappropriately the practices of those in dominant countries.

Postmodernism has broadened the vision of feminist research. As pointed out earlier in the introduction, instead of seeing women as a homogenous group, postmodernism challenges the feminist construction of the universal category of women. Postmodern feminists contend that women experience various and compounding layers of oppression that intersect with gender on the basis of ethnicity, age, sexuality, socio-economic status, geographical location and other dimensions of difference. Postmodern critical thinking has assisted us to reconstruct possibilities for agency, acknowledge complexities of context and identity, and value a range of knowledge systems. Chandra Talpade Mohanty is of the view that:

In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (“Under Western Eyes” 2002)

This research is intended to capture these diverse traditions while at the same time recognizing the things they share in common. It is a small step to recognise new energies and context for the study of women’s writing world over. Forming a single feminist community obviously poses problems, and many feminist writers of colour have criticized mainstream feminism for its tendency to dismiss difference. bell hooks wrote of this very problem, noting that feminists need to redefine their senses of what constitutes a communal identity:

Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together,
so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. (Kathy J. Whitson 65)

The essential importance of autonomous political movements is recognized and acknowledged, yet it is believed that political interaction is necessary in order to make possible the collaboration and alliance needed for change. It is crucial for political movements to allow for the development of unified liberation struggles which are not riddled with contempt based on gender, race, or other factors.

The feminist movement is constantly changing, expanding the scope of its struggles and producing new groups with new priorities as different women become involved and expand its sometimes narrow initial demands. According to Joseph and Lewis:

It also changes in relation to the changing political contexts and urgencies that the development of U.S. capitalism and imperialism throws in its path. The movement itself represents a multiplicity of confrontational activities and organizational strategies which address different aspects of women’s oppression and stress different dimensions of male domination. Because the movement as a whole challenges the unjust distribution of power, rights, and privileges, as well as forms of oppression and exploitation, it constantly has to deal with dimensions of all of these which cannot be explained by sexual oppression alone. (50)

What is of utmost importance on feminist agenda at a particular place and time may undergo a change. Once certain goals are achieved feminists will try to find new agendas to improve the condition of women. There cannot be a fixed frame for the feminist project in a society. Sylvia Walby contends,

There is no simple, monolithic, timeless category of ‘woman’, whose interest would be obvious; rather there are changes in who women are, in how they are positioned, and also in how they perceive their interests and imagine them being taken in forward. Changes in gender regimes alter the nature of what constitutes women and gender
relations with implications for the development of, and changes in feminist projects. (Walby 123)

These works are valuable feminist representations in different locations that recognize the essential importance of autonomous political movements. Yet it is believed that political interaction is necessary in order to make possible the collaboration and alliance needed for change. It is crucial for political movements to allow for the development of unified liberation struggles. To build a mass-based feminist movement we need to have a liberatory ideology that can be shared with everyone. That revolutionary ideology can be created only if the experiences of women in the margins who suffer sexist oppression and other forms of group oppressions are understood, addressed and incorporated. For this representations from even the remotest parts of the world should be sought. There is a need to embrace and include women from all over the world to achieve an oppositional and more comprehensive liberatory feminist agenda.
Afterword

Taken together the works of women writers across cultures presents a versatility of
feminist practice. Feminism, thus, is a site for the interaction of multiple strategies,
offering a spectrum of possibilities raging from subversion, making visible, positive
delineation, self-assertion, revolt and resistance. It provides a fertile ground for
envisioning transformation but always within specific contexts and with a room to
accommodate difference. The analysis of the representations of women writers from
diverse cultures within the chosen texts unfolded no homogeneity but certain overlaps
and shared features, particularly the questioning of the stereotypes and a
transgression of the protagonists against the suffocating structures of patriarchy, and
in some cases the dismantling of stereotypes.

Varying with the location, many feminist issues cross national boundaries. For
instance, the female body is deployed as a figure which shows how patriarchal
significations are inscribed and then deconstructed by the women writers in the course
of their narrative in different cultures. Mara and Kalyani’s body becomes a symbol of
their commoditization. On the other hand Janet seeks a freedom from her body which
is symbolic of her revolt and a statement against the patriarchal absolutism. In case of
Kuki, she learns to valorise her body for its positive strength as depicted in The Dark
Abode. In these texts the body emerges as a metaphor that can possess repressive as
well as transformative potential. The female protagonists are extracted from being
embedded in the patriarchal structures of power which force them to rethink the
roles they have played in the past. They come out of the situation with a sense of an
altered understanding of their situation with better insight into their situation.
Inversion as a strategy for voicing the issues of women in diverse settings has been
used by all the four authors; it emerges as a unifying factor in all the works.

A cross-cultural, trans-continental comparative study of women writers
enforces a rethinking of conceptual categories. In case of American feminism we can
comfortably talk about postmodernism and post-feminism in the interpretation of
texts, but in texts from Africa and India these concepts appear to be irrelevant
paradigms. In the Indian context religion plays a very important role in understanding
the condition of women in all spheres. Religion interacts at multiple levels in Indian
society and it is deeply embedded in the cultural psyche of the people. Similarly, in case of Africa racism and colonial factors become more important. Their comparative study suggests the need to think beyond the fixed terms of reference and instead adopt a more inclusive understanding of women’s situation in diverse cultures not only in theory but also in practice.

In all the fictional works analysed for this research gender was not an isolated issue. Gender intersected with other axis of power grids responsible for the subjugation and exploitation of women in different cultures. According to Walby, “The goal of reducing gender inequality offers a narrower definition of feminism than does a goal that extends to advancing the interests of women” (Walby 4).

The abstract category of ‘woman’ also stands dismantled in the face of heterogeneity of experience of ‘women’ from different cultures. The contexts are complex and simple categorization on the basis of oppression will not solve the problem. Theoretical insight that emerges from this cross-cultural study is that theoretical frames like radical feminism, liberal feminism, postmodern feminism, post-colonial feminism prove inadequate and there is a need to find alternate frames of references depending on the contextual analysis of a woman’s situation. A woman’s situation takes specific forms according to the personal, historical and cultural situations in which she is embedded.

Even though these works are fictional the subject matter and the characters are constructs that however draw inspiration from the real life situations. These constructs foreground the link between public and private spheres, and the inextricable link between the aesthetics and politics of literature.

There are no overarching ideals that define feminism as a unified movement in the present but there are overlapping concerns within the diversity of the movement as evidenced in the comparative study of authors from different geographical contexts. Each chapter dealing with narrative also inscribes a cultural script that was written to stand alone, making its own particular contribution to feminist theory as a self-contained entity and gesturing to some degree toward the overlapping concerns across cultures. The intention in juxtaposing feminist writings from different locations was to bring into focus the diversity and interface of feminism with other cultural factors in the formation of identity of women.
Gender needs to be supplemented with other categories that effect women in different locations. This research is an acknowledgment of and commitment to learning more about women’s concerns in different parts of the world. It highlights the rich complexity and unresolved contradictions within feminism.

This awareness of multiple local formations of feminism goes hand in hand with comparative analysis of similarities and differences in a global context and with mapping how feminism travels from one site to another, that is, with how feminism circulates globally, moving across lines of difference and changing in the process of transplantation. (Friedman 108)

Comparative specificities in this research embrace both difference and similarity without homogenization. It would be worthwhile to add that cross-cultural comparatives affects a kind of categorical “travel” that denaturalizes “home”, bringing to visibility many of the cultural constructions we take for granted as “natural”. Sharp juxtapositions of different locations often produce startling illuminations, bringing into focus the significance of geopolitical mediations of other axes of difference.

It is also observed that the reason for the starting of feminist movement in different locations was tethered to different cultural ramifications. In the Indian context it started with the widow remarriage and abolition of sati. The feminist movement in Africa was an off shoot of the activism and struggle against the colonial rule and racist ideologies of the west. In America feminism took its impetus from the civil-rights, peace and other protest movements and revealed the frustrations of middle-class women for being without a career and trapped in domesticity. Now the feminist movement has evolved into many forms with the changing times. Women from remote areas who were earlier not aware of this movement have joined the movement. They have brought new concerns and agendas into feminism. Certain concerns of feminism have already merged with other human rights movements and new issues are being taken up by feminists from different parts of the world. Feminist literature is an important tool of social activism and it pushes the boundaries of mere aestheticism in literature.
All these fictional works resonate with the possibility of constructing a new
type of responsibility for the feminist writer situated in a particular context. They have
to respond to resistance through cultural activism and their writings become a form of
textile activism. We cannot deny the political dimensions of literature. Politics and
literature is inextricably linked together. The comparative scope of their study further
aims to strengthen solidarity among women with common struggles across national
borders. Feminism is always spawning newer forms and evolving constantly. This
research brings together different points of view to lace together, perpetually
provisional feminist treatise that showcase the evolving nature of feminist issues.
Such a research will do much to highlight the newer political agendas in feminism.
There is a necessity to pay close attention to the specificity of place and context while
building connections across struggles in different places. Some people have declared
feminism as dead or something which is obsolete and a spent force. To these people
Sylvia Walby befittingly replies back:

Feminism is not dead or in abeyance, but alive and engaged; its
activities and projects address all major areas of social life; feminism is
exploring its new tensions and solutions. There are potential syntheses
of feminism with other projects, including those of economic growth,
environmentalism, human rights and social democracy, with
implications for these projects and for the wider society. (13)

The political priorities of different groups of women may change along with
changes in their economic, cultural and domestic situations. The category ‘woman’ is
internally divided by many other forms of difference and inequality, with which there
are complex intersections. The potential of such a comparative study could lead to
new ways of thinking about old problem, ways that combine elements in innovative
ways.

The present study is a foray into the evolving nature of feminism. It opens up
possibility of research in innumerable positions that are transforming the feminist
field with ever new contestations of patriarchy. Implicit in the changing nature of
feminism are also the contestation of normative feminism and the destabilization of
norms within it.
Women writers all over the world have delivered fresh and exciting insights into the theoretical foundations of planning and their practical implication. They become instrumental in bringing about a transformation in the social condition of women through their counter narratives. Artistic vision is always ahead of the society and their creations are not merely a small revolution but a giant leap in the societies' progressive transformation.