Chapter-II

Views on Feminism : Ancient & Modern
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The term "Feminism" may be defined as the movement for the political, social and educational equality of women with men. The movement occurred simultaneously in Great Britain and the United States. It had its roots in the humanism of the 18th century and in the 'Industrial Revolution', both of which contributed to the emergence of society transistered from a feudal aristocracy to an industrial democracy. Women had been regarded as inferior to men physically and intellectually. Both tradition and theology had ordered their subjection. Women could not in their own names possess any property. They could not engage themselves freely in business, or control the disposal of their children or even of their own persons. Although Mary Astell and others had pleaded earlier for larger opportunities for women, the first great feminist document was Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792).¹

In the French Revolution, women's republican clubs demanded that liberty, equality, and fraternity be applied regardless of sex. but this movement was extinguished for the time being by the Code of Napoleon. In North America, although Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren had pressed George Washington and Thomas Jefferson for the inclusion of women's emancipation in the constitution, the feminist movement really dates from 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Coffin Mott, and a few others, in a women's convention at Seneca Falls, New York, issued a declaration of independence for women, demanding full legal equality, full educational and commercial opportunities, equal compensation and the right to collect wages, and the right to vote. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan Brownwell Anthony, the movement spread rapidly and soon extended to Europe. Little by little, women's demands for higher education, entrance into all trades and professions, married women's property and other rights, and the right to vote were conceded. In the United States after women's suffrage was won in 1920, women were divided on the question of equal standing with men advocated by the National Women's Party versus some protective legislation; various forms of protective legislation had been enacted in the 19th century e.g., limiting the numbers of hours women could work per week and excluding women from certain high risk occupations. In 1946 the UN Commission on the status of women was
established to secure equal political rights, economic rights, and educational opportunities for women throughout the world.

In the 1960's 'feminism', or the Women's Liberation movement as it became known, experienced a rebirth, especially in the United States. The National Organisation for Women (NOW), formed in 1966, had over 400 local chapters by the early 1970's. NOW, the National Women's Political Caucus, and other groups pressed for such changes as abortion reform, federally supported child care centres, equal pay for women, the occupational upgrading of women, and generally removing all legal and social barriers to education, political influence and economic power for women.

With the leadership of Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisolm, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and others, the movement successfully influenced Congress to pass the Equal Rights Amendment Bill in 1972; the Amendment, requiring ratification by 38 states, would bar sex discrimination at the national level.²

The analysis of feminist concept tries to understand the material conditions through which gender has been constructed within specific languages and bodies of literature. The strong wave in the 1960s and 1970s

helped to theorize a women's discourse. In the 1980's "feminism" concentrated on transforming the individual fields, and in the 1990s began a major role in directing academic focus on the concern of the so called 'otherness', 'difference' and questions of marginality. It proved to be the moving force in the advent of culture studies.

The concept of "woman" is the central point in the formation of feminist theory. But as a concept it is radically problematic because it is crowded with the over determinations of male supremacy – invoking in every formulation the limit, contrasting other, or mediated self-reflection of cultural built on the control of women. Recent theorists resist the universalising tendency of cultural feminism and highlight the difference between women and men, in a way that undercuts arguments for the existence of an overarching gendered essence.

Margaret Homans has rightly pointed out that the concept of feminism raises fundamental questions about reading, writing, and the teaching of literature. It operates as an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural analysis and as a political practice. Feminism has transformed the perception of life and literature. Literary theorists believe that feminist criticism does not denote simply the addition of a new subject matter to an existing system of knowledge. It is but a new area of study by adding 'women' to 'literature' which helps in exposing the incompleteness of what
once seemed universal. Therefore, a rethinking on the whole critical enterprise becomes necessary. As argued by Bell Hooks, in the ultimate analysis, feminism dismantles all systems of domination.

Ever since antiquity, women were not given due importance. They were treated as inferior species and source of objects giving vent to the phallic drives of men. Decision either in the family or community was, therefore, arrived at by male-folks only. This made the responsibility of a woman to be confined within the four walls of a room in terms of childbearing, domestic chores and the caring of the young. Such assumptions, however, were challenged and their cogency became controversial in the wake of the Feminist Movement in the sixties. This unprecedented arrival of the so-called Feminist Movement has given rise to such genres as psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis with regard to women.

Virginia Woolf is right in picturing them as organisms that had been under the shadow of the rock three million years and were now timidly crawling into the lights.

Feminism is neither a fad nor a logical extension of the civil rights movement. The inequities against which the feminists protest—legal, social and economic restrictions on the basic rights of women—have existed throughout history and in all civilizations. Naturally the principles of
feminism were articulated long ago. Women's liberation seems new only because it follows a bill in feminist activism. When the suffragists won the vote for American women in 1920, many of them thought they had achieved the ultimate victory. In the subsequent years, social pressures continued to restrict women's freedom as effectively as the constitutional barriers had done earlier. A feminine mystique evolved, and sanctified the elements of women's experience that proved paradoxically to be most oppressive. Thus, a reawakening of feminist feelings was dawned with the impact of the 1960s.

In the European society before the French Revolution, feminism was thought of as a phenomenon. Most Anglo-American studies of the women's movement acknowledge some forerunners in the English and French Revolutions and in individual figures such as Anne Hutchinson. But only with Seneca Falls does a continuously developing body of feminist thought seems to emerge. French feminism claims a longer past and identifies Christina de Pisan (1364-1430) as the first to have held modern feminist thinker. She was the first ever feminist to spark off the four-century-long debate on women which came to be known as "querelles des femmes". John Kelly says:

*If Petrarch can be called the first modern man, then Christina de Pisan, the poet and author who introduced her countrymen Petrarch and Boccaccio, to Parisian
culture in the early 1400s is surely the first modern woman.5

The term "feminism" was not used by early feminists. Had they given any name to themselves, possibly it would have been something like "defenders" or "advocates" of women. The long line of pro-women writers from Christina de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft defines an outlook within which ideas develop, a theory in the original sense of the term, a conceptual vision takes shape.

There were celibate lay women who sought to live in their own communities in the late Medieval cities opposing misogyny and male subjection; and to support themselves by their collective works. Thus they tried to escape the two major institutions of male power: the family and the church. This movement, however did not gain social acceptance and the state and the church together succeeded in crushing it.

In the 1630s and 1650s many of the radical English sects supported religious equality for women. In this climate, there were women who effectively liberated themselves from the male clerical authority. They sought to control their own conscience, to preach, and to improve women's educational and economic opportunities. These women, like Anne

Hutchinson, were "feminists in action", rather than theorists. They used their ideas to modify or organize social forms in which women might be free of male power and authority over them. Their heirs are the women of the later nineteenth and twentieth century revolutionary movements. By that time feminist activity had stimulated theoretical reflection. The feminist theory later gave rise to a woman's movement for democratic change. New ideas regarding social reorganisation were afloat in the air. The early feminist theorists had carried on their long and patient intellectual resistance against a removal from action. The struggle was carried on mostly by the female members of distinctive modern and literate class representing the upper reaches of a ranked society. They were the forebears of what Virginia Woolf called, "the daughters of educated men" – daughters in revolt against the fathers who schooled some of them for a society strictly forbidden to other women.

The feminism of the 19th and the early 20th centuries focussed on the acquisition of a few political rights and liberty for women, such as the right of married women to own property and enter into contracts, the right of defendants to have women on juries, and the crucial right to vote. A campaign lasting for a century ensued and culminated in the winning of the right to vote in England in 1918 and in America in 1920.
But without the significant role played by Mary Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) in this crusade, this could not have been possible. Ironically, Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest crusaders for the emancipation of women, is remembered by literary historians as the wife of the philosopher William Godwin and the mother-in-law of the poet Shelley. Her whole life and her works were one long protest against the institutions that denied women any other identity except the one they acquired through men. She knew through bitter experience the hardships women faced and were exposed to simply by virtue of their sex. Influenced by the revolutionary fervour of the time, and by her association with a group of radical writers, artists, and philosophers including William Godwin and Thomas Paine, the author of the Rights of Men, she wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792). This book aroused wide and violent response. Horace Walpole resolved never to read it and attacked the author as a "hyena in petticoats". Other writers also attacked and burlesqued with strong objection to its contaminating influence. Ironically, A Vindication of the Rights of Women, which anticipated virtually all the demands of the woman's movement – education, legal representation, the right to vote, the right to property, and admission to professions – was read by very few in the 19th century. Hers is an extreme ironic example of the treatment posterity accords to a feminist writer.
Similarly, John Stuart Mill’s sympathetic attitude towards feminism was one aspect of his belief that the liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of the society. In his, "The Subjection of Women" he says:

*that the principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes – the legal sub-ordinations of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.*

Mill held the view that women's position is not natural but the result of political oppression by men. His analysis of the effects of this use of power on both men and women is exceptionally persuasive. Yet the crux of the book, and the reason for the hostility it provoked, is its radical criticism of the family. He maintained that the masculine domination of the family was a corrupting influence, making boys selfish and girls abject.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* :

*The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of the two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive*

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and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general: whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting critic without reciprocity ....... A man is in the right in being a man, it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine.⁵

The philosophy that fights against the injustice on women, and aims at placing women in a just perspective is called feminism. The word 'feminism', however, must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an immense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems, the meaning should not be restricted to the advocacy of women's rights alone.

The conservatives view that the differential treatment of women, as a group, is not unjust. They admit that some individual women suffer from hardships. But this suffering is not a part of the systematic social oppression. They rationalize the differences between women's and men's social roles in two ways: (i) that the female role is not inferior to that of the male, (ii) or that the women are inherently better adapted than men to the traditional female sex role. Thus while the former claim advocates a

kind of sexual apartheid, the latter postulates an inherent inequality between sexes.

Writers who advance such a view range from Rousseau, through Schopenhaur, Fichte (The Science of Rights), Nietzsche (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), and Freud down in the present time to Steven Golberg with the Inevitability of Patriarchy (Jagger 19).

They argue that social differentiation between the sexes is not unjust since justice not only allows but requires us to treat unequals unequally.

Liberal feminism views liberation for women as the freedom to determine their own social role and to compete with men on terms that are as equal as possible. This tradition has continued in various moderate groups like the National Organization for women (NOW), which agitate for legal reform to improve the status of women.

The classical Marxist feminist opines the oppression of women as historically and currently a direct result of the institution of private property. The solution, therefore, lies with the abolition of that institution. Consequently, feminism must be seen as part of a broader struggle to achieve a communist society. Feminism is one reason for communism. The long-term interests of women are those of the working class.
The Marxists theorize that oppression is the chief characteristics of the fight they are for. They are against the society where a small class of individuals owns the means of production and hence dominate the lives of the majority who are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. Women have an equal interest with men in eliminating such a class society.

Marxists, moreover, recognised that women suffer special forms of oppression to which men are not subject and hence, in so far as this oppression is rooted in capitalism, women have additional reasons to work for the overthrow of that economic system.

Meanwhile, a recent attempt to create a new conceptual model for understanding many different forms of social oppression in terms of the basic concept of sexual oppression has been formulated by the Radical feminists such as Tigrace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone. They deny the liberal claim that the basic of women's oppression consists in their lack of political or civil rights. Similarly, they reject the classical Marxist belief that basically women are oppressed because they live in a class society.

The origin of women's subjection, according to them, lies in the fact of the weakness caused by childbearing; and, women become dependent on men for physical survival. The origin of the family, thus, is primarily a biological factor. These radical feminists believe that the physical
subjection of women by men was historically the basic form of oppression, prior to the institution of private property and its corollary and class oppression. Consequently, the power relationships that develop within the biological family provide a model for understanding all other types of oppression such as racism and class. Thus, the battle against racism is subsidiary to the more fundamental struggle against sexism. Hence, the radical feminists conclude that women's liberation requires an indispensable biological revolution by adopting new technologies. They talk of achieving this through the development of techniques of artificial reproduction.

The above discourse is a briefing of the various existing theories which the feminists have attached themselves to, accordingly. But feminism as a philosophy of study must be conceded that it envisages profound changes in the traditional social structures such as the family, in the economic role and the power of women, a sane personal relationships leading to a just social order.

To understand and sympathise the sensibility of feminism in its wholistic perspective, it is important to observe that Indian feminism presents an altogether different picturesque scene. Regardless of whether it is based on capitalist or on socialist political ideologies, all the countries of
Europe and North America claim equality as one of the core principles of their political philosophies. Beginning with the liberal ideals of Locke or Rousseau, that triggered the French Revolution on to the Declaration of Independence that led to the birth of the American constitution and the consolidation of the U.S.A. as a democratic federation, European and American societies have since the last three or four decades of the eighteenth century loudly asserted equality. However, they have not yielded to the acceptance of women folk as equals. The long and painful suffragette movements constituted by women, the bitter struggles for the acceptance of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of women's right to abortion and to the practice of birth control, are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality that has persisted and that women had to fight for in spite of the commitments they were made. Under the circumstances, feminist situation in India poses a dissimilar dispensation. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the family concerning age, sex, ordinal position, consanguinal and affinal relationships or within the community referring to the caste, lineage, learning, wealth, occupation and relationship with the ruling power have been maintained very strictly. The Indians followed these practices urged and integrated by means of a complex combination of custom, functionality and religious belief.
The oppressiveness and the harshness purported by virtue of all these hierarchies are somewhat appeased by a strong sense of deference to superiors, a sense of mutuality, a series of behavioural codes which bend superiors to fulfil their obligations to their inferiors and, above all, by a philosophy of self-denial, and the cultural emphasis on sublimating the ego.

The situation of women in India is in fact quite miserable and a great deal needs to be done on their behalf. It is a pity that the Indian statement of their problems is often couched in statements that sound alien and which, therefore, fail to hit the mark. In order to gain massive support for women's cause in the country, it is necessary that Indian feminists understand the Indian context thoroughly and that they phrase their criticism, their arguments and their demands on behalf of women with sensitivity to the Indian aura.

The conceptual bearings of 'equality' as a correlate of the concept of individual freedom, is alien to Indian society. It was first introduced into Indian culture through western education and through the exposure of western educated Indians to liberalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, this notion of equality did not become operational as a principle to Indian life until the country achieved independence and
adopted a democratic system of government some fifty years ago. At that point of time, the constitution of India granted women political status fully equal to that of men. Thus Indian women did not have to bear the brunt of injustices that women in the west had to suffer because of the continuing gap between political ideals and realities. Nor did they have to suffer the kind of indignities European and American women have had to experience in the course of their efforts to bridge this gap.

Truly speaking, the history of India reveals an almost opposite experience. As western educated Indians came to be acquainted with European liberalism, they were profusely stimulated to reflect upon their own value system and to examine the inequalities, injustices and oppressions of their own culture. This introspection was a moving force for a strong movement for social reform.

The tenacious struggle of Raja Ram Mohan Roy for the abolition of sati is an indispensable crusade which also marks the beginning of the movement for reform on behalf of women. Launched during the third decade of the nineteenth century, this movement constituted an important landmark in the Indian effort towards the emancipation of women. Several aspects of this movement deserve consideration as features that illustrate
the uniqueness of the Indian context and mark the issue of feminism in India as distinctly different from the issue in the west.

Describing the reaction to the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes:

The most distinctive feature of this movement is that it was initiated by men. It was only towards the end of the century that women joined the fray. The list of men who championed the cause of women is long... Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Malabari, Phule, Agarkar, Ronade, Karve ..... to mention but a very few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the practice of sati, the custom of child marriage, the custom of disfiguring widows, the ban on the remarriage of upper caste Hindu widows and a host of other evil practices that affected women. It further reveals that while they concentrated on removing evil practices these men were also actively engaged in advancing the status of women by promoting their education, by obtaining for them legal rights to property, and by requiring the law to take cognizance of their status by providing them with some basic rights in matters such as adoption.6

These nineteenth and early twentieth century benefactors of women endorse a feature of significance in that they pushed reform on behalf of women in the face of total unwillingness on the part of the British.

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government to interfere with Indian customs. The British, however, were unwilling to interfere with Indian custom for the simple reason that they feared that tampering with tradition would make them unpopular and destabilize their rule. Thus, as rulers, concerned about the stability of their empire in India, they were willing to put aside their liberal values and moral convictions, and to allow their subjects to continue with inhuman practices against women. It was only because of the dogged persistence of their western-educated subjects that they were compelled to yield. The quality of this doggedness is evidenced by the fact that when, towards the end of the century, the interest of the reform movement coincided with that of the nationalist movement for freedom; several of the reformers, who happened also to be committed nationalists, attributed prior to reform. The conflict between the obligation for reformation and the commitment for the struggle for self-rule, thus, was highly significant in shaping the status of women in India at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some of the Indian elites who obtained western education through the exposure to European morals and philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century had a critical implication for Indian thought, mores and culture. The powerful influence of European liberalism on Indians was, as pointed out earlier, to stimulate them to reflect upon their own culture, to
question some of the customs and practices that they had earlier accepted with equanimity and to move in the direction of reform. It was this impulse that generated the social reform movement and guided its course. The Indians believed that their British rulers would bring about the reforms and changes required to advance Indian society towards the liberal value system.

However, towards the last three decades of the nineteenth century the Indian outlook regarding the British began to change. Even those who had earlier admired the British were growing to be disillusioned with British rule and sceptical of British intentions after experiencing the timidity for reform of these rulers. The scepticism combined with the growing impact of liberal political ideology generated a desire for political freedom and self-rule. The flame of the ideology for freedom and self-rule perpetually becomes answerable to the rise of feminist movement in India.

The emergence of Gandhi as the national leader in the political arena, called for the people to arm themselves morally and declared that the eradication of untouchability, the acceptance of equality for women, liberation from crippling superstition and fear, and the cultivation of humanism must be the prioritized ideals. He directly declared that equality
for women would be one of the central objectives of his political programme.

In addition to the above he did much more while explaining the concept of Ahimsa, he likened the moral power in a non-violent struggle to the pure and gentle, but firm and tenacious strength which, he emphasized, women continuously display in life. Finally, at the organizational level, he emphasized that nothing less than the total involvement of the entire population in the non-violent struggle for freedom would be adequate, and in this context, he pointed out that it was imperative to involve women in the mass movement. With all the persuasiveness and charisma at his command, he urged women to step out of their homes and join him.

Tracing of the legends, historical records and scriptural texts unveil us the irresistible presence of women. Since time immemorial we find the indispensable partnership of men with women. According to the Holy Bible of the Christians, God created a woman also as He created a man. This is seen in the Book of Genesis:

And the Lord said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.
And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.
Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He
made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Similarly, the inseparable attachment of man to women is also found
in the Hindu religion. The Hindu religion too, carried a highly positive
concept of the feminine principle. The female principle complements and
completes the male. The polytheistic Hindu pantheon consists of divine
couples such as Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti, Rama and Sita, etc.
Together the male and the female represent the specific power for which
they are venerated.

It is significant that the deities of knowledge (Saraswati) and wealth
(Laxmi) are females. Correspondingly, there is a distinctive place for
women in the practice of the Hindu religion. Women, particularly those
who are virgins or virtuous wives, are believed to have special spiritual
powers. Their prayers, penances or supplications to God are believed to
care for, grace more readily than the prayers of men. Several of the most
important sacrifices conferring to religiosity, ceremonies and rituals can
only be performed by a married couple. They cannot be performed by
either single man or single woman, widows or widowers.

Now having seen the inseparable association of men with women, we
may hence introspect the emergence of feminism in the Indian context. The

7 Ibid. p. 2.
authenticity of feminine sensibility and feminine experiences would demand a brief scrutiny of the changing position of women in India. As Indian women poets belong to the Indian feminine 'poetic tradition', an attempt will have to be made also to trace this tradition in general. Only then will it be possible to work out a tentative history of the development of Indian feminine poetic sensibility as expressed in English.

The study of the Indian feminine psyche evolves a change from the tradition to modernity. Critics have proposed various methods to define these patterns of change. For instance, K.R.S. Iyengar, divides the history of Indian writing in English in three general periods-1875 to 1900: the new flowering of the creative Indian genius; 1900 to 1947: the Gandhian Era, and 1947 onwards: the Post-Independence period. Rameshwar Gupta, meanwhile, designates the three phases of Indian poetry in English in particular as The Toru Dutt period (1830 to 1912), The Tagore Period (1912-1942), and the Aurobindo Period (1942 onwards). V.K. Gokak, on the other hand, divides this poetry into four phases: (i) The last quarter of the 19th century: Romantic and Victorian type, (ii) The first quarter of the 20th century: Continuation of the Romantic and Victorian type and the new trend of Georgianism, (iii) The second quarter of the 20th century: Modernist and Symbolist trends. The post-independence poetry does not receive detailed consideration in any of these classifications, although it
has assumed, by now, the significance of being a major phase. Hence, the
Indian poetry may be divided into four categories to highlight its
significance as: (1) The Romantics, (2) The New Romantics, (3) The
Moderns, and (4) The New Poets. The first of these categories defines the
trend in pre-Independence poetry whereas the remaining categories
describe the broad trends in the post-Independence poetry.

'The Romantics' from the first category take cue from the British
romantic tradition and they write under the strong influence of the British
tones. They include the pre-Independence poets like Toru Dutt, R.C. Dutt,
Manmohan Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and others. 'The New
Romantics' are inclined to the kind of romantic idealism, combining
mystical belief with the idealistic conception of life, and drawing their
imagery both from the natural universe as well as from the world of science
and technology. Poets like Monika Verma, Mary Erulkar, Indira Devi,
Dhanrajgir, P. Lal, Prithish Nandy, etc. fall in this category. Poets like
Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Roshen Alkazi, Kamala Das, Sujatha
Modayil, Keki Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar etc. belong to the trend of 'The
Moderns' because of their sense of commitment to reality about the self and
the environment. Poets of the younger generation writing at present like
Mamta Kalia, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Despande, Lalitha Venkateshwaran,
Arvind Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar, etc. may be regarded as 'The
New Poets'. They are still in search of viable themes and modes of communication but in the meantime, they accept a sense of commitment to reality like their elders. Of course, it must be noted that the trends of Romanticism, New Romanticism and Modernism from the British poetry stand here for the broad patterns of sensibility and expression modified by the peculiarities of the Indian ethos.

The poetry written by foreign women by virtue of their marriage with the Indians also calls for special focus when it comes to the study of English poetry by Indian women. It is true that a non-Indian woman poet may not necessarily respond to Indian life in a specially Indian way. Yet her transplantation into the Indian cultural pattern generates a unique set of tension which becomes relevant to the Indianness of the Indian context. Her association with the two combined cultures gives rise to an identity of duality so that her poetic milieu is forced to seek resolution of its tension in a more urgent, varied and intense manner than Indian feminine sensibility. Such poets inevitably give access to liking the poetry with Indianness in nature, and their poetic identity offers a useful basis of comparison for the analysis of poetic works of Indian women. Their poetry is studied in an independent category of 'outsider-insiders' as they are 'outsiders' becoming 'insiders' through their introductions into the pattern of Indian life.
The above discussion may be then regarded as a tip to the awareness of the readers that the flame of poetic writing is kept burning in the hands of many a meticulous writer from generation to generation and this has again, vouchsafed a series of genres of study such as psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis and different fields followed by the unprecedented arrival of the Feminist Movement in the sixties.

The assessment or evaluation of feminist criticism has always been being centred with the publication of the book "The Second Sex" by Simon de Beauvoir in view of its providing a seminal critique of the cultural identification of women as the "other", the "Relative", to man as the defining "subject", the "one", the "Absolute", etc. An equally important text is Kate Millet's "Sexual Politics" which centres in the mechanisms that enforce the relation of power in society. She also hurls a scathing disapproval to Freud for the male bias in his psychoanalytic theory besides officially disapproving authors like D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer among others for demonstrating the ways to boost up the aggressive phallic selves and to degrade women as submissive sexual objects. Elaine Showalter feels that feminism displays the urgency and excitement of consciousness to religiosity. Feminism thus has become a study of vast magnitude.
The unprecedented theorizing and the critical innovations in feminist writings on either side of the Atlantic over the last couple of decades witness that it is not a unitary theory or procedure it, rather manifests an amazing variety of critical vantage points including adaptation of psychoanalytic, Marxist and diverse post-structuralist theories. The feminist writers have exhaustively worked to explain the differences between sex and gender, and between masculinity and femininity besides analysing the sexist and patriarchal elements in language. Fully aware of the ideological role of language in doxifying the constructing gender and thereby marginalizing the position of women, they have also tried to develop concentric modes of writing to counter phallocentric strategies of representation. Feminists' concern for a 'woman's language' and a 'canon' of her own is an open attempt to deconstruct the forms of knowledge which according to Jacques Derrida are 'structured around a centre'. While feminist theory seeks to codify some general propositions, strategy is more subjective and varies from situation to situation and is heavily depending on the artist's individual accomplishments and obsessive preferences.

In so doing Feminism also tries to travel to the innermost recesses of the human mind and situations. It delves deep into the human situations as a cosmonaut explores the limitless universe. Let's look at the following
anecdote in Simone de Beauvoir’s "The Second Sex" depicting the free arbitrary love-relationship wrought by situations and circumstances:

A woman of forty, married twenty years and with grown up children, began to feel that she was unappreciated and that she had wasted her life. She took up new activities and, for one thing, went to the mountains for ski-ing. There she met a man of thirty and became his mistress.\(^8\)

The above lines mirror the kind of love-intrigues which a woman indulges; and there is a tinge of her degraded morality status because she is a married lady. Feminist study crystallizes bare the weak points and the strong points in a woman. It passes through the realm of a woman's world by delineating what she does or the improvement to be done for her in matters of her social and political standing which is also not always sans some disillusioned temperaments.

The study of feminism focuses to the struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. But the struggle for equal rights historically and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. The very argument then rests precisely on the fact that women are already as valuable as men. But in the situation of women's lack of equal rights, this value must be located as difference, not as equality. Women are of equal human value in their own way. When feminism asserts the value of women

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as women, then it truly and efficiently counters the systematic devaluation of women under patriarchy. Equality and difference are not antithetical. But a discourse of female difference, articulated in isolation, runs the risk of echoing the very patriarchal prejudices against which the champions of equality are struggling.

The very essence of equality evolving out of the study of feminism has undergone drastic change in the light of the new French Feminist theories of difference. Through the process of genesis, a female discourse has been evolved by deliberate valorization of repressed femininity. Personalities from France like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze have propounded the post-modernist theory for putting the correct perspective of the study of feminism. Now all the different strands can be divided into two: relational and individualist theories. Currently relational feminism is being widely accepted as it avoids all the negativism associated with extremities of the individualist theories. The present day thought encompasses a moral vision and emerges as a wholistic, anti-militaristic and life affirming philosophy.

Toril Moi has made use of the word "post-feminism" to cover the different configurations of feminism and post-modernism prevailing today. Present day feminist theorists believe that, strictly speaking, feminism is an
impossible position. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. Such an oppositional definition postulates feminism as the necessary resistance to patriarchal power. Logically then the aim of feminism as a theory of emancipation becomes abolition of itself along with its opponent. Clarifying the position of feminism Toril Moi voices the following lines:

In a non sexist, non-patriarchal society feminism will no longer exist.\(^9\)

It is then clear that to defy the study of feminism would obviously mean the defiance of the existence of society in toto as men and women are two inseparable species on the planet earth.

The upsurge ejected out by feminist thought has brought about the materialization of a Utopian quality. Thomas More's Utopia visualized amongst many things a national system of education extended to men and women alike. More's wanton tendency to siphon off a separate place for women is undeniable in this regard. In his coinage of the word "Utopia", he meant 'nowhere land' or 'no place'. A suggested sense of unreality thus becomes an important component of Utopianism. Feminist thinkers have carefully contemplated over and conceptualized societal structures which

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guarantee women their rightful place in the scheming of things. To recapitulate the Seneca Falls Convention of June, 1848 and its aftermaths and, wherein a series of conventions were organised under the able leadership of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the former addresses one of the gatherings thus:

Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens and no state has a right to make any law or to enforce any old law that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, any discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several states is today null and void, as is everyone against negroes.\(^{10}\)

The above speech by Susan Brownwell Anthony is an ironical remark over the indifferent attitudes of the patriarchal set-up towards women. The concrete form of flesh and blood along with the intellect that they possess is made to be unfelt and unrecognized by the powerful institution of patriarchy bringing the sense of utopianism. This, according to the feminists, must be ruled out. Their existence must be deciphered. There must be a suggested sense of reality that must become an important component of anti-utopianism as an integral part strongly embedded in the societal structure and through which their cognizance be sensed.

Male institution is responsible in shaping and determining the social position of women. They are not born as women. It is the social institutions that thrust them to become what they are. Simone de Beauvoir opines that patriarchal oppression imposes certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order to prove that these standards for 'femininity' are natural. To make women believe that there is such a thing as essence of femaleness, called femininity, serves the interest of patriarchy. Therefore, it is also essential to clarify the confusion of female with femininity. Women are females, but this may not necessarily mean that they will be feminine.

To supplement the discursive course of Utopianism, Hester Eisenstein has used it in a different sense, modifying its fictive and dream-like connotations. For her the utopian element is inherent in the intention of creating a picture of an alternative society. It actually aims at changing the current reality by means of creating a model, or pieces of a model of a society organised along different lines. As the place of women is integrally embedded in social life, any change or disruption means potentially changing or disrupting many things – personal identity and sexual mores, family arrangements, childbearing customs, educational patterns, religious

\[11\] The Second Sex, p. 295.
ideology, and political and economic structure. Even if a change is made to this effect in terms of removing all the obstacles to women's full participation in public life and conversely of men's in domestic life, this will simply mean the change of faces retaining the same power structures.

Another view states that the insertion of more women into public spheres will change the world for the better. This view is based on the concept of women's moral superiority to men. But then the idea is opposed by Hester Eisenstein, Nancy Chodorow and Jane Addams because women, like men, are socially produced beings. They can change and they also can be corrupted by power. The feminist utopia presents a totally different picture where structure of power also transforms. Eisenstein interpretes the term "feminist" or "feminism" as:

In my understanding of the term 'feminist', then, I see an element of visionary, futurist thought. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that, as part of the eventual liberation of women, will change all human relationships for the better. Although centrally about women, their experience, condition, or 'estate', in Juliet Mitchell's formulation, feminism is also fundamentally about men, and about social change.12

We have seen from the above treatise that various feminists have interpreted the term feminism in many ways. Indian feminists such as

Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Eunice de Souza, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy have also put forth views on feminism from every possible perspective dwelling within the domain of Indian ethos and tastes.

Kamala Das too launches her feminist struggle against the patriarchy ridden Indian society. She pens the problems and the issues of women without inhibition and thereby, creates an altogether new look to the study of gynocriticism in the Indian context. However, feminism as she sees it and having its deep rootedness to the Indian soil may be different from the kind of feminism that the Westerners see it. In one of her interviews with P.P. Raveendran, she stated her stand unequivocally:

_Feminism as the Westerns see it is different from the feminism I sense within myself. Western feminism is an anti-male stance. I can never hate the male because I have loved my husband and still love my children, who are sons. And I think from masculine company, I have derived a lot of happiness. So I will never be able to hate them._13

It is not that Kamala Das denounces patriarchy totally. It is not that she hates male gender or trying herself to be a misanthrope. She still desires to be with them and finds comforts in their company. But what she wants is an expression of her true selfhood; the yearning for the kind of

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13 "Of Mask and Memories: An Interview with P.P. Raveendran". _Indian Literature_. 155 (May-June), p. 159.
expression to revealing her feminist identity. In so doing, she tries to liberate from the chains offered by the canons of patriarchy. For a long time, she claims that she has been fettered by the rules and regulations of the society, and thus she thirsts for emancipation. But the emancipation she asserts may again be found with a tinge of distinction as is found in her essay "My Instinct, My Guru" stated below:

*I don't want to be "emancipated", because I have seen so many of them [Women] "totally emancipated". They irritate their husbands. I hear complaints from men, their wives have become "so emancipated" that they dictate and they frighten them, all the men turn into mice. I don't think there is much difference between a man and a woman.*

This view on feminism with a slight difference is also the reason why Kamala Das has been exhaustively worked upon as a votary of Feminism by critics belonging to either sexes. In their endeavour to excel and compete one another, some of them have consciously or unconsciously overlooked her creative personality which tantamounts their enthusiasm. However, her autobiography, *My Story* becomes the centre of focus as a text to critics when it comes to the assessment of her worthiness as a poet and writer. K.R. Ramachandran Nair, on the other hand, defies this and makes the following remark:

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Since My Story is not a totally factual autobiography, I believe that the critic has to make a judicious use of the information given in it. He should not in a blind of [SIC] enthusiasm, pounce upon each juicy bit, as if catching the criminal red-handed and pretend to know everything.  

Kamala Das' flirtation with other men also becomes answerable to prove her feminist credentials and her flirtitious relations with different men have been frequently cited by critics. In doing so the otherwise perceptive scholars forget that it was a sheer expression of personal vengeance - "My love was like alms looking for a begging bowl" - and to look for a dogmatic ideological stance in it is to miss its import. She could never think of serving relations with her husband and all she did was to be unfaithful to him at least physically. On mental and emotional plane she had complete compatibility with her spouse and all that was possible in a situation like hers was to register her protest that way only. Iqbal Kaur looks at her feminist struggle with 'a new kind of morality' in it when he says:

... Kamala Das did display tremendous courage in revolting against the sexual colonialism and providing hope and confidence to young women that they can refuse and reject the victim positions, that they can frustrate the

sexist culture’s efforts to exploit, passivise and marginalize women.16

The type of revolt shown by Kamala Das against the so called sexual colonialism cannot be termed feminist because it was just toying with love outside the wedlock. One feels surprised to think of the hope and confidence the young women can derive from the example exhibited by Kamala Das where rejection of ‘the victim position’ means clinging on to the colonizer, the patriarchal power. The employment of the modifier 'tremendous' by Kaur in the context is rather ironic as it spells doom for domestic peace and harmony inevitably for nothing and such a conduct can be regarded as worse than a conformist's attitude. Rama Rani observes her in the following way:

With exemplary courage and conviction she has explored the innermost depths of her consciousness in this work [My Story]. The unifying principle of her re-collections is her overriding feminist concern. She has accepted her womanhood with all its weaknesses and strengths and has thus become a symbol of the liberated new women for her generation.

Besides replacing the modifier ‘tremendous’ by a more laudable adjective ‘exemplary’, P. Lall talks of conviction and one fails to trace even

a remotest approximation to this serious word homonymous with commitment in the return of this 'prodigal wife' who holds her husband and sons so dearly.

The femininity of Kamala Das is also found expressed in the role of motherhood. She identified herself with her children's well-being; she suffered with them during their illness. She shared their joys, their aspirations and became their playmate. She valued the part she played in her family and the domestic life. The liberal feminists consider woman's role in the social construction, through her contribution to family and domestic life, as important and valuable.

No doubt, Kamala Das felt betrayed, disappointed, sad and lonely at her situation but she rose like a phoenix from the ashes of her emotional ruins, and embarked on a quest for self-fulfilment.

From Mary Wollstonecraft to Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir, an argument has also been made that education for women will free them from constraints and coercion. This was believed to encourage thought and choice and this was not an argument for formal education. The purpose of education may be said to be broadly the creation of self-awareness and the capacity to foreground one's self against constraints imposed by crises and situations. In this sense, too, Kamala Das conforms to the demands of
feminism because she constantly educated herself by vast reading. And this exposure to the world of books helped her in understanding her needs, her aspirations and in helping her to exercise her option to achieve happiness and harmony in her otherwise empty life.

Kamala Das presents a fine and relevant example, by delineating her own trials and tribulations, of the possibility of confronting and overcoming the constraints in the way of a woman seeking self-awareness and self-fulfilment; which, in turn, is an offshoot of feminist upsurge.

At best, she can be described as a sensitive poet, transparent and honest in articulating her personal anguish but very much within the ambit of Indian womanhood.