INTRODUCTION

Condition of Women in Society

"O India, land of light and spiritual knowledge wake up to your true mission in the world. Show the way to union and harmony." - The Mother.

Since its inception, God’s creation has been a beautiful conglomeration. It is a mixture of good and bad, dark and bright, beautiful and ugly, charming and repelling, melancholy and cheerfulness. To create a balance the opposite elements support each other to make possible the evolution of life. And this principle of creative elements also works for the masculine and the feminine. If they are united they give birth to the quality of consciousness which is essential for the well being of the whole humanity. This consciousness goes beyond all the man-made barriers of nationality, religion, ideology and opens up threshold of a new exploration of the mind, of a larger consciousness.

If we move to the ancient Indian philosophy, we confront the wisdom of ‘Satyam Shivam Sundram’ which implies that truth is beautiful and benevolent. God’s creation is beautiful because there is a harmony between the masculine and the feminine. The symphony between the masculine and the feminine consciousness is an essential ingredient of Nature and this is a way to reach the Ultimate Harmony, which is called the Truth. Nature has nothing to do with deeds of an individual. It always plays neutral even if the harmony between the masculine and feminine consciousness of an individual goes out of equanimity or balance. Ultimately it is the individual who has to suffer if he or she lacks this equanimity and has to strive for the perfect tuning of these two cords of his or her life to live in perfect harmony. This process is like a journey that is called the ‘saadhana’ in Indian mythology but it is futile to strive for achieving it if one fails to balance the masculine and feminine consciousness. It simply reveals that the way to the Ultimate Harmony can be achieved only if the masculine consciousness and feminine consciousness are in consonance and so balancing between the two is a must.

No seed can sprout without the earth; one is incomplete without the other. The seeds of inequality, exploitation and injustice sown by man have created ruptures in man-made society. The woman has remained relegated owing to the struggle of supremacy in the male-dominated
world. The first such instance comes soon after the so-called original sin. Even the Satan could induce Eve only and the poor Adam was made to suffer because of the weakness of Eve. Every time only Seeta was made to suffer and prove her innocence.

In psychology Jung, Freud, Adler and others have said that man is really bi-sexual in nature. One's persona is the role of the male or female. According to Jung the masculine and the feminine principles are polarities, opposite but equal. He regards the integration of one's contra sexual qualities as an ideal of self-realization. As an infant, we are neither males nor females but under the influence of society, law, religion, we are moulded into men or women. In society men are expected to be strong and to ignore the emotional aspect of life whereas women are expected to be emotional, submissive and more nurturing. According to Jung these expectations mean that we have developed only half of the potential because anima which is the female aspect present in the collective unconscious of man and animus which is the male aspect present in the collective unconscious of woman are to be united to develop the full potential. Therefore, Jungian psychology explores not only an ideal picture of Self in which the masculine and the feminine are equal but also elaborates the process through which both sexes can integrate characteristics that have titled genders in the striving for the unity and wholeness.

The concept of ‘Ardhnarishwar’ in Indian mythology leads us to reach a simple conclusion that Lord of the universe is incomplete sans the balance between the masculine and feminine consciousness. It is the harmony between the two that enables even the Creator to live in perfect peace and bliss. Since the origin of Indian Sanatan Parampara, different saints and sages have been trying to strike a balance between the two present in one’s personality. Volumes have been contributed on the methods and practices of achieving this mantra known as the art of balancing and all the Indian philosophy and ancient literature is profuse with this ‘darshan’.

If one speculates the nature and status of women in Indian society, the result is quite ambiguous. One finds references of her exalted status like “the gods live where women are worshipped.” She is regarded as Mother Goddess as Durga, Gauri, Kali, Bhawani, or under several other names in different religions. She is a symbol of power and evokes fear as well as reverence. If pleased, she showers the blessings and when annoyed she can unleash destruction. Even male gods dare not intervene when she acts. It is believed that some of her qualities are endowed in every woman. The rosy picture has another side also which again is sanctified by
religious writings. This picture is of a fragile, sensuous temptress and that is the root of all evils and problems. She has to be kept under strict control owing to her dubious character. She is weak and fragile. So she needs protection throughout her life. The contradiction is quite evident and society accepted the ideology of the subordination of women. The role of protecting man has made him the master of woman. Woman is considered to be the epitome of procreation, and is associated with Earth and is fated to be exploited like the very nature whose magical fertility she is endowed with.

Since ages man has tried to suppress woman who is trapped in the brutal institutions such as child marriages, prohibitions on women's education and enforced widowhood. The stone image of Goddess is worshipped in the temple but the same Goddess in flesh and blood is looked at with evil eyes. Whenever there are riots, a woman is the worst sufferer. The seeds of inequality, exploitation and injustice sown by man have never allowed woman respite. A prominent feature of hegemonic ideologies is the projection of the dominant viewpoint as true. Whenever one gives importance to the trivial things and ignores the prominent issues in different walks of life, he or she suffers from great loss of real human energy. To disregard the valuable aspects of personality and take care of only the physical is trouncing. The society has remained engaged in doing this since ages. There is a dire need to reclaim the wisdom of the feminine. If we truly want to see the future peaceful amidst the dark clouds of patriarchal domination, oppression and disaster, an effort should be made to make the time ripe for a new way of thinking and the birth of that quality of consciousness that comes from a union of masculine and feminine. To achieve all this, the place of woman is to be restored so that by unifying with the masculine consciousness, a better understanding of nature and purpose is created.

Nishit Lal writes in this context:

... Individuals tend to ignore that the opposite sex resides within them. It is a part of their personality, and to ignore the part means ignoring the personality. If you ignore the woman inside you, how would you connect with the women outside? Life begins inside and then manifests on the outside.¹

Various theories were cooked up to claim the innocence and supremacy of the male. The innocence and supremacy of the male were also supported by different sections of male-dominated society. Woman was made to believe that she suffered from her weaknesses and it
was the male only who could save her. Examples were given from Nature to establish these theories. She was made to live in the surroundings of the four walls only and if she ever tried to escape the prescribed limits, her steps were restricted and her movements were curtailed. In every age, she is seen as mother, wife mistress or a commodity. Her roles as an achiever, as a strong woman are rare. Her individual self has never been given recognition. She too, has accepted these roles and lived with it for centuries. Barring a few examples in the history, which are quoted to console the female if she ever tries to claim her rights, equality and the honor, she has been made to suffer since the creation began. She is recognized as a feeder of gendered categories of mother, daughter and wife. Religion, law and society are all methods to enhance these theories.

The famous sentence written by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,’ touches upon various questions related to the treatment meted out to the women. This is the argument that has forced the feminist thinking. She has constructed an epic account of gender division. Gyno critics differ from others in their views about sex and gender explaining that sex is biological and gender is social and cultural construct. There are different areas in which society exercises control on women. Some of the prominent areas include the control on her purity, on her social position, on her economic position and above all on her role in the family. As a result society, with its different components, shapes one’s outlook and determines the rules and the roles one has to play as a social being which again supports the theory of Jung that describes the role of society which gradually moulds us into man and woman. Different methods, traditions, norms, religious values have their active participation in presenting the picture of a woman dependent on man. The relationship of historical, economical, political and other social forces have a significant contribution to the shaping and reshaping of gender equations. Gender exploitation comes before us as a result of patriarchal social structure. Gender roles determine the disruptive factors which restrict one’s quest for selfhood.

If we are unable to balance the masculine and feminine consciousness in society, the ultimate progress will be hindered. J. Krishnamurthy tersely observes:
A mind that can meet a challenge with total energy is not creating a problem. It is only a mind that is responding to a challenge with a background; with its conditioning which is always inadequate that creates a problem.\(^2\)

Socio-cultural conditioning plays an important role in the life of an individual. The role assigned to a woman in society shows society's expectations as well as its views about her. A woman is socially conditioned to accept an artificially constructed inferiority. She is made to play a subservient role in society. She is culturally assigned to play certain roles and to follow set rules of conduct. The traditional upbringing of girls suppresses independence and self-assertion. Any deviation from the ideal image can make her face the adverse treatment imposed by the patriarchal control. She can even be ostracized by the society. The opposition from the orthodoxy and entrenched vested interests result in serious crisis which further leads to destruction and it is a sign of impending danger which is hovering over the society.

One should make an effort to channelize the energy in the right direction that can remake culture which is ever transforming, evolving and never complete in the real sense. Though it is difficult to define culture as it has undergone changes from time to time but it is essentially social in nature. Cultural independence means the independence of the modern mind from the enslavement of rigid ideas but it does not mean the destruction of the cultural heritage. However, the mingling and transfusion of cultures are also responsible for changing the attitude of the people.

English term 'culture' originates from the latin word 'colere' and 'culturare' and German word 'Kulture' which means 'to cultivate'. Henry Clay Lindger writes:

A culture consists of systems of values, beliefs, norms, artifacts, and symbols that have been developed by a society and that are shared by its members. Such systems exert a profound influence on the personality of the individual.\(^3\)

The cultural scene in India is changing rapidly. It is full of diversity. A new generation educated in western ways has developed a critical mentality and everything is scrutinized in the light of reason by comparing different cultures. Without social consciousness and purposive social action, it is difficult to get rid of what is rotten in our culture. It is the culture only that can help man to get rid of dehumanization and to become practical because social movements enable us to
include others rather than to exclude them from our life. And the changing trends demand participation of women in moulding society.

The escalating rate of discontentment in the individual and crime in the society signifies that the world desperately needs proper understanding of feminine consciousness so that the nation’s wealth can be utilized for the welfare of the humanity and not on the weapons and bombs. In order to restore the harmony, one must evolve one’s awareness that we all are bisexual by nature, and Nature contains both the powers: creator and the creation.

*Manava Dharamsstra* throws light on the Hindu life and culture. It describes not only of the position of women in all the stages of her life but also denies her the right of equal status to man. Manu considers woman by nature more emotional and less rational and also declares that she should be kept under the control of man throughout her life. He has put several restrictions on women regarding widow remarriage and her economic and political role in society. In Hindu scriptures too her identity is shown in relationship to man alone. A series of invasions in India by foreigners further jeopardized her security. She was being sold or carried away as commodity. These hazards gave birth to the customs of sati, purdah, jauhar and child-marriage. During Mughal period her situation worsened. Her social status diminished to a sevant. During British rule, the exploitation continued but few acts were also passed to make her status better. Indian social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar and others started new movements to improve the condition of women. During the period of Indian Renaissance, the influence of western feminist movements played an important role in the awareness and position of Indian women. The spread of education inculcated a sense of distinctiveness as well as to make them aware of their rights. A number of women started voicing freely their feelings. The emergence of women writers further facilitated the path of women’s struggle.

The socio-religious codifications prescribed by the law givers of ancient Hindu society or the laws of Manu impose different restrictions on women. They deny the existence of woman apart from her husband and family. But even these rules are never fixed. With the passage of time, the influence of new ideas and circumstances change them from time to time. Ramnika Jalal has made an expansive comment:
The behaviour of the society towards women is the best way to know the attitude of society itself. When we compare the codes of ancient smrities with the present codification, the attitude of smriti karas towards women appears to be very stiff and ungenerous. It is clear that every sphere was male-dominated. But in the smrities of modern period we find drastic changes at many places. Women have been provided freedom to a great extent. 4

Though much has changed, yet the cobwebs are to be removed so that these beliefs do not disregard their original interpretation. Social reality has a great impact on the human mind. Sita, Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari among others serve as powerful cultural ideals for women. To endure in silence has been considered a quality in women whereas it is a weapon of patriarchal hegemony. Gradually women are becoming aware of the ways by which patriarchy limits their possibilities. Though women’s empowerment is still in its nascent stage yet education, economic independence and legal rights have been changing the attitude of women. The participation of women in reshaping the cultural history of India cannot be overlooked.

In human life as well as in literature, one finds how different socio-cultural factors make the character move on their will. One finds oneself in a dilemma where one’s inner regulations are in conflict with the social regulations. At this juncture comes identity crisis when one cannot accept the role assigned by the society and craves for the identity which one wants to attain. This situation is presented well in literature and in particular in novels. O.P. Saxena musing over the condition of the individual in the society says:

...the hiatus between what the individual aspires for and the hard reality of what he achieves, and between what he professes and what he practices, and between what he really is, and what he would like to be taken for, has mercilessly crumpled his life leaving an insidious effect on his inner being. The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche generate a cynical attitude towards the established social norms and values and make him grope for life’s relevance. 5

An artist is the inseparable part of the society and he does not create in vacuum. Every writer creates his work of art keeping in mind the context of his period and responds to it in his own particular way. In the process, he has in his mind its social and cultural mores that characterize particular phase or time. While doing this he has in his mind the questions of humanity and not any intellectual prejudices. This is the reason when the reader reads the works of great artist, he is compelled to dive deep into the human emotions irrespective of his nationality. Balwant Gargi
thus speaks: While the creative process is cathartic, it not only expresses the powers of para-consciousness of the writer, but also impinges on the consciousness of the reader elevating it to a new mental state.⁶

Universality of feelings and emotions is accepted as a criterion for great literature. Writers from diverse and different backgrounds, while dealing with the humanness of mankind, often create situations which are closely related to one another. Literature holds a mirror to man’s creative endeavors, hopes and yearnings. It is capable of showing the myriad shades of life. Novel is a recent evolution as compared to other genres of literature. There are various themes on which Indo-English novels focus. In this regard Prof. Iyenger speaks:

Social life in a country of the size of India is so full of vagaries and varieties that the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be literally inexhaustible.⁷

The clash between tradition and modernity, man-nature struggle, female issues, the role of caste-creed are among the prominent themes of the novels written by Indian authors. There are certain novelists who usually describe in their stories a particular community. For example, Khushwant Singh mainly writes about Sikhs and Anita Desai reflects the Bengal flavor in her works. Similarly the green palm and paddy world of South India can be seen in Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya and there are many other writers who exemplify this.

The first novel in Indian fiction in English was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Raj Mohan’s Wife which was published in 1864. After that many of the novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, RK Narayan, Raja Rao, Manohar Malagaonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala among others left indelible imprints on the pages of history.

It is an astonishing fact that the literature written on the female issues is dominated by the section which has been instrumental in her exploitation. Only a few female writers take up feminine issues and present them cohesively and with full conviction. In A Room of One’s Own, Virginia Woolf discusses feminine consciousness from the literary sense and discusses the reasons for the scarcity of the women writers. She emphasizes that the reasons are the social disadvantage, lack of financial independence and personal space as well as their becoming
gender conscious. Before proceeding further it is important to discuss different waves in feminism.

**Feminism—An Overview**

The adjective “feminine” customarily indicates the writer’s concern with the emotional aspect of life and with intimate human relationships. It is important to distinguish between “feminine” and “feminist” as the first term relates with a set of culturally defined characteristics and the second implies a political position. Feminism is a broad-based philosophical perspective that comprises several approaches such as Liberal, Marxists, Radical, Psychoanalytical, Socialist, Existential, Post-modern among others. All these approaches focus on the frustrated and oppressed status of women in society. The history of feminism is divided into waves. The first wave known as suffragette movement dates from 1830 to 1920. It secured for women right to education and right to vote. The second wave dates from 1960 to the present day. The aim of women’s liberation movement is to restore the liberty and dignity of women that is their natural right but has never been given to them. American feminist Betty Frieden, the pioneer of ‘equality feminism’, in her book *The Feminine Mystique* exposes the frustration of the housewives in America. She also founded National Organization of Women (NOW) to fight for women’s civil rights. Friedan’s equality feminism was very popular in traditionally liberal America whereas in Europe with Simone de Beauvoir feminism was closely related with social tradition. Her work is influenced by existentialism which emphasizes the importance of self-governing individual. Man has always treated himself as ‘self’ and woman the ‘other’. A female’s passive maternal role has placed her at a disadvantage. Beauvoir seeks the true liberty for women. Her ‘mind over matter’ philosophy has widely been accepted. Shulasmith Firestone, a follower of Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Dialectic of Sex* advocates de Beauvoir’s anti-essentialism and considers biological motherhood to be the root of all evils. Both Firestone and Simone de Beauvoir are of the view that women were excluded to take part in culture which was man-made. Therefore, they aim to fight for social equality.

Essentialists believe that women are biologically, psychologically, and emotionally different from men. Therefore, they claim for female heritage and their own uniquely female identity. Like de Beauvoir, Mary Daly, a radical feminist in her book *Gyn/Ecology* has argued that religion, law and science are all methods of patriarchal control which do not allow any
freedom to woman. However, Daly believes in the connection of femininity to nature. Essentialists like eco feminists value the concept of synthesis whereas anti-essentialists reject eco feminism’s acceptance of any relation with women and nature. These two stages dominated the second wave feminism. The third wave ‘Post feminism’ emphasizes the deconstruction of gender itself suggesting the feminine discourse to continue. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders* describes her feminist vision as:

... this is a vision of the world that is pro-sex and—woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth form the material basis of people’s well-being. Finally my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision making for people regardless of economic and social location. In strategic terms, this vision entails putting in place antiracist feminist and democratic principles of participation and rationality, and it means working on many fronts, in many different kinds of collectivities in order to organize against repressive systems of rule. It also means being attentive to small as well as large struggles and processes that lead to radical change—not just working (or waiting) for a revolution. Thus everyday feminist, antiracist, anticapitalist practices are as important as larger, organized political movements.8

Social consciousness for an ideal world is essential. Instead of waiting for the revolution to come, individual efforts to bring the small as well as large scale changes are needed. However, in Indian culture, the masculine and the feminine codes prescribed in religious texts are literally respected. Religion is deeply rooted in the minds of Indian society. It is not at all easy to break the chains of the accepted beliefs. In Indian culture there is ‘stridharam’ through which women are conditioned to follow the examples of the ideals of Indian womanhood. The promotion of tragic and violent stories, set in the far remote areas, glorifies the picture of ‘Indian woman’, a silent sufferer, in the global world. At the same time it obliterates the injustices done on her in the name of being specific patriarchal practices in particular cultures. Mohanty not only differentiates between “women” as a discursively constructed group and “women’ as material subjects of their own history but also focuses on six specific ways in which women as a category of analysis has been defined as victims of male violence (Fran Hosken); as universal dependents
(Beverly Lindsay and Maria Cutrufelli); victims of colonial process (Maria Cutrufelli); victims of Arab familial system (Juliette Minces); victims of the Islamic code (Patricia Jeffery); and, victims of economic development process (Beverley Lindsay). Her criticism of the stereotype of the Third World Woman in her ‘Under Western Eyes’ lists expectations fabricated by this chestnut in Western readers. She asserts:

The Third World difference includes a paternalistic attitude toward women in the Third World.... Third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as religious (read: not progressive), family-oriented (read: traditional), legally unsophisticated (read: they are still not conscious of their rights), illiterate (read: ignorant), domestic (read: backward), and sometimes revolutionary (read: their country is in a state of war; they must fight!). This is how the “Third World difference” is produced.9

This picture of the stereotype of the Third World women is prominently seen in the west. Western feminism colonizes the fundamental problems which characterize the lives of Third World women of different classes, religion and castes. However, these problems are universal though in a specific framework. Therefore, Western feminist self-presentation (secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives) and their representation of women in the Third World (chaste, pure, obedient, the veiled woman, etc.) is interdependent. Western feminist self-presentation is not material reality. This is important as it seeks to break the silence about experiences of women in the Third World and also establishes links on international arena between women’s political struggles.

Though women attempt good but feel bad internally as their goodness is not valued at all. They do not achieve their due worth. Their innate strength is hardly given any recognition. Therefore, efforts are now being made to have a society where there is no need to change the inherent virtues but to change the system that takes the undue advantage of the goodness and devalues it. Though women have achieved a lot, much is yet to be gained. T.M.J. Indra Mohan speaks about feminism as:

It (Feminism) is pro-woman but not anti-man. The whole idea of feminism revolves round only value based systems and recognition rather than need based and gender biased. It aims at overcoming male hierarchy in the most profound sense and asks for, in a simple language, a treatment as an individual human being. In consequence, feminist thought emerges as ‘humanist’ thought.10
Women Writers and their Works

The term feminism was first used by French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet ‘L’-Homme- femme,’ to name the movement that emerged for women’s rights. Later on this movement became a world-wide cultural movement. When the new Indian constitution was adopted, women were given social and economic rights. K.S. Ramamurti throwing light on the rise of novel speaks about the emancipation as:

The zealous social reforms effected by William Bentinck and Raja Ram Mohan Roy had brought the Indian Women emancipation from the tyranny of the ages and from cruel customs like sati. The advent of English education with facilities for higher education for women had again its impact on the status of women in society and the Indian women who for ages had to be content with playing only a subordinate role in the social life of the country now had opportunities for playing many new roles.

Different problems related to women were raised. But many problems remain the same. The implementation of rules and norms depends on a great extent on the strength and weakness of control mechanisms. Social consciousness is essential to achieve the purpose. One must not forget that no agency whether internal or external can help any society to achieve the much-desired and cherished goal of peaceful existence by ignoring the needs of subalterns. No relationship can be restored to the axis of equality through constitution only. Love and mutual understanding play an important role in it. The age-old silently-followed relationship is now challenged in various literary writings. Literature as a mirror reflects the society. The plight of women and the changing conditions of women in society are explored in the works of various writers. From a woman writer one can easily have the glimpse of female psyche to which male finds difficult to have access. So an effort is made to discuss some of the prominent women writers who have sketched in their works the position and the changing conditions of women.

The history of Indian women novelists in English begins with Toru Dutt who died at an early age of 21. Both her novels Bianca and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Ar vers deal with the autobiographical projection of the novelist. Though the characters are Spanish and French but at the core they are imbued with love, sincerity and purity characterizing an ideal Indian woman. She is known for the simplicity and clarity of her expression. She successfully gives birth to genuine issues in her novels and has beautifully dealt with the scenarios created by her.
The woman novelist who comes into prominence in the early twentieth century is Swarna Kumari Ghosal, the elder sister of Rabindra Nath Tagore. In her novels *The Fatal Garland*, *The Unfinished Song* and *An Indian Love Story*, she exhibits the strength of women writing. Women's creations are raised to the position of respect after her powerful writing.

Another great figure in the realm of fiction is Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi Christian. Her three important works are *Love and Life Behind the Purdah*, *Sun Babies in the Child Life of India* and *Between the Twilight*. Her realistic and miserable picture of Indian woman is really superb. To her, women are not the playthings but an upholder of the healthy values of life. She cogently brings before the reader her deep pain at the condition of women. And she desperately wishes to improve the impoverished condition of the fair sex.

After the Second World War a new vision touching new heights can be seen in the works of the Indian women writers in English. They explore in their works all the aspects of life. They are nearer to life and present before the reader with sincerity and exactness the interests that move them. Feminine consciousness is one of the prominent issues that caught the interests of many women writers and inspired them to reveal the role, condition and importance of women through their works.

The role played by society in changing the life of the characters can very well be found in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Most women writers tend to portray their female characters as victims of their situations, as women who are awakening to their own needs and realizing the need for emancipation. However, Markandaya's peasant woman is still the traditional, duty-bound creature but at the same time a brave confrontor of circumstances and fits in whatever situation she is placed. In this respect the socio-economic environment together with psychological analysis plays a vital role. About ‘Rukmani’, one of the characters of Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, Arundhati Chatterjee says:

She is the eternal mother bound by love and affection to her hearth and home. Biologically she is the receiver giving birth to human beings. Emotionally, philosophically and spiritually too she is the absorber who imbibes within her everything that comes her way—joy, happiness, hardship, poverty, loss, pain, suffering—nectar as well as poison.12
R.P. Jhabvala’s *The Nature of Passion* deals with a modern young girl, Nimmi, who fights for the cause of woman’s liberation. She has charted in her works the journey of her characters from innocence to experience. She got the prestigious Booker Award for her novel, *Heat and Dust*. Jhabvala and Markandaya stand apart for their remarkable contribution to describe the collision of the oriental and occidental, and they describe the pathetic plights of the women who are fated to suffer. Markandaya, an Indian by birth, married an Englishman and Jhabvala, European in origin, married an Indian. Therefore, their novels describe the search for identity as well as the expatriate experiences and the juxtaposition of two diametrically opposite cultures. Her other important works are *Esmond in India, A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion* among others.

The contribution of Nayantara Sahgal as a novelist of politics cannot be ignored. Her portrayal of the contemporary events with artistic skill and colour are worth noting. With simplicity and boldness, her novels truthfully describe the Indian political theme. She does not profess any political ideology, but only portrays the political realities with artistic colour. Her forte lies in explaining the march of her characters towards self-hood facing not only social pressures but also personal hesitation. The concept of freedom is the soul of her novels. Besides this, her fiction also throws light on Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realisation. Her important works include *A Time to Be Happy, This Time of Morning, Mistaken Identity, Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow and A Situation in New Delhi* among others.

Anita Desai created new waves in the realm of Indian English fiction by giving new dimensions to the themes and techniques of her novels. She dives deep into the psyche of the characters and more especially female protagonists. The inner recesses of the mind and heart are explored in the novels of Anita Desai. She describes the hidden and silent thoughts in the feats of the pen. She has heralded a new era in the realm of psychological portrayal of the character. The socio-psycho consciousness leads the characters to psychic conflicts which further results in alienation which is the flowing current of her novels. Her main works are *Cry, the Peacock, Clear Light of Day, In Custody, Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Baumgartner’s Bombay, Voices in the City*.

S.N. Prasad sums up Desai’s novelistist flavour thus:
Anita Desai's uniqueness consists in concentrating on the psychology of woman's realities, which are to her principally a creation of the mind. It is through total involvement in the consciousness of the woman that she enables her reader to see the Indian woman fully from the inside. Not that she does her main work of investigation like a formal psychologist: she is too much of an artist, a novelist to commit herself or yoke her perceptions to any metaphysics of consciousness.

Shashi Deshpande explores the pathetic and heart-rending conditions of women in a male-dominated society. What is unique about Shashi Deshpande is that her protagonists are not rebels but, with the passage of time, confronting the harsh facts of life, they generate in themselves the power to cope with the male-world. She offers an optimistic attitude towards life. She also puts forth the problems of an educated woman in the contemporary society. In her novels she makes an aesthetic plea to free the female psyche from the conventional male control. Deshpande gives voice to the mute women in her novels, making them understand the mysteries of life and their place in them. The beauty of her writing can be seen in her characters silently fighting to live a full life on the earth. She objects to the notion of a woman as an object to be used and abused. In her novels, the heroines are common Indian women of the middle class society. Her major novels are *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That long Silence*.

Like Anita Desai, Shoba De also has the gift of exploring the inner depths of woman's psyche. Her characters represent a true picture of the modern Indian woman. As a realist she has portrayed the sexual mania of the corrupt business world. In this new urban culture, where material gains are given more importance, the human relations are not taken care of. The path chosen by her heroines is full of dangers, frustrations and disasters. Her bold modern woman is capable of surviving. She has minced no words while presenting the moral chaos of the urban Indian woman in the world around them which is full of chaos and disorder. She burst upon the literary scene with *Socialite Evenings* in 1988. Her other important works are *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, *Strange Obsession* and *Sultry Days*.

Mahasweta Devi, the winner of the prestigious Jnanpith and Magsaysay Awards for the novel *Mother of 1084*, emphasizes the need of realizing the inner strength of women. She is a prolific Bengali writer. She is a journalist as well as a social activist. She is gifted with artistic ability to speak for the downtrodden and the subaltern. She, by exposing the hypocrisy and corruption prevalent in administration, in the police and in the intellectual society, presents a
heart-rending picture of psychological and emotional crisis of a mother in *Mother of 1084* and subtly forces the people around them to rethink about societal norms. In her works one finds her constant concern for the oppressed. Her creative energy gives artistic impression to the ruthless realities of life. Her characters show the invincibility of the human spirit. Besides *Mother of 1084*, her other noteworthy works are *Agnigarva*, *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Chotti Mundar Teer*.

Manju Kapoor, the author of *Difficult Daughters*, succeeded in winning the famous Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the Eurasia region. The budding of new woman can be seen in Manju Kapoor’s heroine, who does not want to be a puppet for others to move as they will. Caught in the web of tradition versus modernity, her heroine struggles to have her identity. She affirms her individuality and aspires for independence through education. She is bold, outspoken, determined and action-oriented. In her works, one can see the woman’s new role that is creating her own pathways and her struggles to wriggle out of the trappings.

Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for literature by her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. It has been translated into more than 40 languages in the world. The thought-provoking observation, the use of language peeping into the life of the society of Kerala, their customs and patriarchal domination has made her permanent mark in the field of Indian English fiction. She has heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking. She is born, educated and brought up in India. *The God of Small Things* is autobiographical in nature to some extent. Her other work *The End of Imagination* is short but revolutionary in spirit. Here she has opposed the idea of war and killing.

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian born, is one of the most widely-known immigrant writers of America. She has depicted a different dimension of the problems faced by Indians and other third-world immigrants who attempt to assimilate into other cross cultures. The contemporary woman’s struggle to attain self-hood in cross-cultural crisis is the subject of her novels. Her creative output consists of three novels *Wife, The Tiger’s Daughter, Jasmine* and other non-fiction and short stories. She has focused upon sensitive protagonists who are victimized by racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression. She came into limelight when the prestigious National Critics Award in America was bestowed upon her for her second book *The Middleman and Other Stories*. 
Jhumpa Lahiri is born in London to Indian parents. With a vast transcontinental cultural consciousness, she is encountered with the baffling question of belongingness. Her precious work *Interpreter of Maladies* focuses to explore the theme of selfhood in the women protagonists in various stories. The pain of alienation in a different culture can be realized in her characters that move constantly between two worlds facing courageously the cultural displacement. Most of the characters of her stories belong to the poor and middle class society. Presenting the life in its intensity, she voices the trauma of identity crisis of her women protagonists.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian woman novelist whose major literary works have highlighted the themes related to expatriate experiences. Her forte lies in the use of magic realism. Her women characters are mostly migrated from Calcutta to California as she herself is. In her works she shares the cultural conflict with her readers. She also unveils the real conditions of Indian women in a male-dominated society. Her important works are *The Mistress of Spices, Sister of My Heart, Vine of Desire, The Conch Bearer, Queen of Dreams* and *The Palace of Illusions*. Gita Mehta, Vimla Raina, Rama Mehta are the names worth mentioning for their contribution in the literature for highlighting the female issues.

This brief survey of Indian women novelists in English throws light on the remarkable contribution they have made in Indian English fiction. They have pictured well in their novels their consciousness of the woman’s alienation from society and self. In the novels of the earlier novelists, women are portrayed in Indian fiction as ideal creatures having various virtues and who remain silent sufferers. It seems as if they were portraying the same picture of woman under the influence of patriarchy but the later novels portray women as educated and conscious of their rights and demanding proper place in society. Shalini Gupta in this regard says:

Most of the recent Indian women novelists have shown that in the changing socio-economic scenario educated Indian women are no longer ready to bear any kind of exploitation. They have become aware of the demands of their self and are committed to struggle for the fulfillment of these demands. The position of Indian women can also be summarized like this. There was a steep decline in their positions since Vedic time till the beginning of the twentieth century. Afterwards there is a slow incline in their position. Earlier society conferred respect, status and honour to them (during Vedic time), now they are winning it for themselves by refusing to be exploited any more.

Women are neither depicted as mere dumb followers of men nor submitting before another fallible being. They are active participants and role players in life. They are creating a parallel
economic identity in the male-dominated world. Women writers are now presenting the life-like picture of the women. They bare the different methods of patriarchal dominance and gender differentiation operating within the institution of family and the phallocentric Indian society at large. The most important thing sought is to develop a warm and friendly relation between both the sexes.

It is noticeable that all the writers hailing from different backgrounds may be depicting different pictures but have the same pains and pangs in their hearts and portray the same picture of human feelings and emotions with the same brush. Their works depict human relationships from myriad angles and help the reader to fathom the conflicts of women. They also present different images of women in their works. Analyzing feminist trends Dr. Yashoda Bhat says:

Feminist trends appeared on the horizon and they came into conflict with the conventional moral code. In fact a set of new paradigms related to a woman’s life came into existence: tradition and modernity, self-assertion and self-effacement, economic dependence and independence and so on. These new attitudes stimulated a dialogue in the life of our country. Hiatus of this kind persists in our society even today. Post independence literature in India portrays all these trends and voices the clamourings of women for a new and just way of life. Over years, the age-old image of the woman seems to be slowly blurring and gradually shading off into a new image. At present the image seems to be Janus-faced - the old, conventional image belonging to the past, still lingering on and the emerging image of the New Woman looking forward to the future. Githa Hariharan comes before readers as an example of a novelist who has sensitive awareness of delicate human relations. She has portrayed the multi-dimensional narrative structures, alternative possibilities with cultural as well as cross-cultural settings.

Githa Hariharan—the Writer

All the fiction writers listed above present the myriad shades of political, cultural, social and psychological awareness and herald a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking. Githa Hariharan is among the major Indian novelists in English in whose works the female psyche is faithfully reflected in its variegated aspects. She has made a constructive input and is attracting an extremely wide circulation and worldwide praise for her works. She lives with her husband in JNU campus, New Delhi but she has lived in the United States and in Manila as well. She is a social activist. She has the spirit to fight for the woman. Reserve Bank of India’s refusal to let Hariharan make an investment in the name of her minor son led her to knock the doors of
justice. Bank officials denied accepting her signature giving the plea that her husband is the child’s only legal guardian. Her husband and Githa Hariharan challenged the system and recorded victory to have the mother declared as the legal and financial guardian of her children. This is a landmark judgement that legally rehabilitates the position of the women. Strengthening the role of women in society, it also shows the position of women when these traditional laws were formulated. In this regard, she says:

I did not fight the case for brownie points. I felt it was really unjust to deny the mother the same rights as the father even though she brings them into the world and nurtures them. If we are good enough to give birth to our child, we are good enough to be their legal guardians too.16

Githa Hariharan by and large deals with all the issues related to women in the world in her works. One may find individualistic, social, economic, cultural, political, religious, spiritual, historical and psychological patterns co-existing in her works which make them remarkable. In her own words: “My books are mosaics and they do not move in a linear fashion”17

Hariharan portrays women as struggling to maintain the ideal picture of womanhood. Her women try to maintain a balance between their personal desires and social expectations. She generates literature that is committed to analyze the social and political problems faced by women. She tries to find the modus operandi in which these forces work. Hariharan’s focus is to scrutinize the pedagogic discourses that promote certain ideas about the behavior of woman in society. To achieve this purpose, she creates alternatives and allows the characters to unfold themselves. Tejaro thus speaks about Hariharan and Arundhati Roy as:

These authors… are not merely concerned in documenting reality, but… have used their novels as a medium for… a subtle projection of values, by suggesting re-assessment and re-definition.18

A vast landscape is spread out before the reader to chalk out the possibilities. She decisively transforms her female characters from the state of torture into the state of raised feminine consciousness so that they realize that they are independent rational beings and not dumb followers of men. By deconstructing the established roles and plots in story-telling, she provides the readers different areas to imagine beyond the popular discourse.
Hariharan is a woman with a mind of her own. Heraldng the dawn of female emancipation, she depicts woman in myriad roles—wife, mother, daughter, sister, beloved and an individual. Her characters exist in a particular social set up and she judges them in the light of the impact of their interaction in the immediate environment. She sensitively touches upon issues which revolve around women. She makes a clear and bold feministic point of view as regard to the prevailing position of women in the family as well as in the society. She has been hailed as one of the women writers producing Indian literature that is committed to feminist and social issues. She, in her fiction, presents alternative women characters and persuades the reader to respond intellectually. In this context her writing comes before us as a search for women’s solutions and priorities. Her works help to fathom deep into the psyche of women. She sharply throws light on the difference between the modern liberated woman and the domestic version created by patriarchy. She opens up different panoramas of society before the reader to read between the lines by analyzing these versions. As Mohanty has made a convincing remark in her analysis of Githa Hariharan:

Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into “objects-who-defend-themselves,” men into “subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,” and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people. Male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies in order both to understand it better and to organize effectively to change it. Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender: it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis.19

The works of Githa Hariharan depict diversity of women and also the diversity within each woman. Her works present a contradiction of different environments in which her women characters are living but behind their faces are hidden the basic tendencies of human nature. They work hard for socio-economic adjustments, positions, growth and progress at the psychological level. She presents different cultures and times and her delineations are linked with one another by the eternal chain of life which compels every woman to live a life against her dreams and aspirations. The situation is almost the same everywhere—irrespective of the developed country or the developing country—caste, color or creed. She shows a keen awareness of human tendencies, their individualities their problems that have a universal significance. The social vision reflected in her works can be recorded as telling in her works that women are not merely objects of sexual desire but are intellectual creatures too and her vision of liberated
womanhood needs to be recognized. As she lets her female characters unfold in a number of ways, so her characters can be categorized according to their aspirations and social status.

The Gita, which is considered to be the mother of all scriptures, states that every individual is a complete identity and an adequate self. The ignorance is the root cause of not understanding the real self. Only the ultimate knowledge, which is also called the knowledge of the ‘self’, can eliminate this sense of inadequacy. One becomes a whole only when there is a balance between the consciousness and the unconsciousness. All kinds of mental conflicts and sorrows vanish when the individual discovers one’s real ‘Self’. With this the veil of ignorance lifts away and natural happiness and effortlessness prevail which is the core of Indian living and for which all our saints have been striving. When the race for efforts ends and the individual starts living effortlessly, one knows the secret of life and death and thus achieves the ultimate happiness. Though Hariharan does not bring this philosophy consciously in her writings yet they are deeply ingrained in her psyche. They can be seen coming up time and again in her works. Her works define the true meaning of consciousness which goes through the feminine consciousness. It seems that every soul has the inherent potential to work in its own way to the divine nature, but the evolution of self from ignorance to bliss is a steady process and one has to progress towards awareness step by step. It is an act of survival for Indian woman which forms the basis for present study. The material happiness only leads to dissatisfaction and further quest. Indra Nath Choudhary widely deals with this aspect with regard to Indian Literature:

It is said that in Indian literature the search for aesthetic experience means an experience of beauty and pleasure. Beauty, in the Indian context, lies in the experience of a particular kind of harmony. It is the harmony of the form and the content giving us a certain unique transcendental feeling. It is transcendental because the object of art, as among the Greeks, is not the idealization of forms of human beauty, but is to communicate a spiritual message as conceived by the artist. It is intuition, the meditative impulse of the artist, which is the most important thing in art creation. The term ‘beautiful’ is applied to the external transmutation of the internal state, but it is not the product of a moment’s direct intuition. It is, as said, a cumulative product of the creative activity of the various moments and their intuitional responses connected together and in harmony with one another, orchestrated by the creative flows.20

Githa Hariharan ponders over the realities of life. Without imposing the solutions, she makes the reader think about the contemporary issues and the direction to which these issues are taking the
society and mankind. She has not only written about the feminist subjects but also created her peculiar position by writing on the non-feminist subjects like the purpose of education, the effects of riots, and the question of writer’s freedom among others. All the works compel the reader to ponder over the existing socio-cultural conditions. There are some common threads in all her works. The titles of all her novels are plural. The fathers are physically absent in the novels but make a powerful presence felt in the mind of the protagonists. The central theme of all her novels is the rewriting of the narratives. The myths, history and other narratives are re-written for the purpose of re-vision. In the words of Adrienne Rich, Re-vision is, “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” Re-vision is a tool in the hands of writers that can help them to see critically the social, political, cultural and religious institutions existing in a society. This re-thinking contributes in the re-invention of new ideas that can bring changes in the subsisting traditions. The old myths are now being analyzed from the feminist perspectives and thus resulting in shaking the grounds of the age old cultural stereotypes propagated by the patriarchal society.

Hariharan doesn’t like to be branded as a woman writer as she feels that this results only in limiting the writer’s freedom. She calls herself a feminist, along with several other things. In an interview with Arnab Chakladar, she says:

Am I a writer particularly concerned with “women’s issues”? And am I a feminist? The answer to both questions is yes. I want to make it quite clear that in my life my choices have been dictated by what I perceive as the feminist choice. ... And anyway, however you define yourself, all our work is informed in some way or the other by feminism, along with the ideas of Freud and Marx. And this goes for both men and women, of course. So ... I am a writer (as opposed to a woman writer) who is a feminist, along with several other things!”

Hariharan concentrates on the issues of gender, history, religion, education, political and cultural terrorism and relationships in her works. She uses past to describe the present. It is mostly dreams in almost all her works that connect the past with the present. The fathers are dead in all her novels yet they make a strong presence and are a source of strength even in their absence. Even after death the fathers in every novel pave the way with their experience. Husbands and lovers are passive figures as far as the question of supporting the wives or the beloved comes.

With her forceful writings Hariharan throws light on the burning issues with conviction. Her genius is displayed in her very first novel *The Thousand Faces of the Night* (1992). It proved...

Before analyzing the works in detail it is better to have a quick view of her works selected for study. Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a story that clearly evokes the questions in our mind with regard to the characteristics of a good wife, good daughter, good mother or good Indian woman. A woman's quest for identity and redefining her self finds reflection in the novel and constitutes a significant motif of the female characters. Here Githa Hariharan delineates three women who belong to three generations. The novel also throws light on the changing roles of women in Indian society.

The western educated female protagonist's quest for her cultural roots is the theme of *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Devi, who belongs to the third generation in the novel, returns from America after getting a degree to Madras to live with her widowed mother Sita who belongs to the second generation. Mayamma and grandmother belong to the first generation. The stories of these three are well knit in the novel to explore the thousand faces of Indian women who are also facing the same situation and fate in their lives. After facing the odds of life, different women in the novel justify the idea that a woman meets her fate alone.

Devi presents an existential struggle of a woman. After her returning from America, she behaves like a puppet in order to fulfil the dreams of her mother. She marries Mahesh and tries to adjust in the Indian culture with her arranged marriage. She learns to be a good Indian woman in the very childhood when different stories and myths glorifying the Indian women and their sacrifices are told to her by her grandmother and in later life by the family retainer, Mayamma, who advises Devi that the key to marriage is the ability to be patient. The story telling can be seen as the established teaching methods of society that can contribute to promote dominant patriarchal ideologies. Even as a child Devi questions the myths provoking: Is there no way out to change the situation? She remains curious to know the facts and also keen to change the
established order. Revisioning and rethinking of myths is another method of emancipation. All this indicates that she is fully aware of what to do in life. She denies to flow along the current and refuses to submit her individual self. She looks up to men in her life for filling the void within her but finds herself unable to do so. Her coming out of senseless relations and returning to her home in Madras shows her self-realization.

Devi drifts away from her husband because he is more of a business man than a husband and is always busy in making contacts with the outer world than filling her void. Later on she is fascinated by an Indian singer Gopal for his sincerity and devotion to work. With Gopal, she again gradually develops the same sense of void just as when she is with Mahesh. Once again she protests and craves for survival on her own. Later on she emerges as assertive as Sita, her mother, and decides to give a new meaning to her life.

Hariharan presents certain popular discourses promoting some notions of how to behave as a woman and which dreams to nurture. Instead of victimizing, she offers the alternatives. Sita, mother of Devi, transforms her need for music into aspirations to achieve idealhood. In the end of the novel the music of playing veena can be heard once again from the same house in Madras which depicts an act of survival. Now she is free from the worldly duties and is aware of the need for individual freedom.

Hariharan explores the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of female characters in the novel. She focuses on the psychological torments of Parvatiamma, the mother-in-law of Devi, who is God-fearing and religious. The atrocities faced by the family retainer, Mayamma, are described brilliantly by the writer. Her protest is silent but her assertion is subtle. Female characters in this novel are fully aware of what they do and what to achieve in their life. The novel is a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization. In the journey of affirming their self-identity, one can see them facing internal and external conflicts and thus rising above them. In this novel through female characters Hariharan makes a plea for a better way of life for women. And the conviction in the female issues remains high in this fictional work.

Her second published work The Art of Dying is a collection of highly acclaimed short stories. The twenty stories in this short story collection are based on the contemporary Indian life. These stories together demonstrate writer's great literary skill. These stories, as the title
suggests, have the common theme: death. The title story is one of the most moving stories. The serious note in the stories is beautifully coated with the comic way in which they are narrated. The presence of female characters with their sores is another feature of most of the stories. Different socio-psychological problems are dealt with in the stories. The writer seeks to voice the cause of the females with her stress on their mental state. Pradeep Trikha convincingly writes: "Her stories are characterized by economy and directness. She enjoys her freedom to present her point of view and compresses maximum of life in a given space. Her characters are fewer in number but striking in their existence."

The entire fabric in the writings of Hariharan weaves the feminine sensibility. Each woman responds to her socio-cultural milieu in her own peculiar way and moulds the system to alleviate it of its evils. "Untitled Poem" tells the story of a poet who is unable to complete a poem. He who fails to kill a rat sings a song of pure destruction every night in his garden. His wife accomplishes the task and records victory. The story narrates the incident in a lively way. Stories like "The Remains of the Feast" and "Gajar Halwa" explore the suppressed revolt against the system in which they live. "The Remains of the Feast" presents the Brahmin widow lusting for cakes containing eggs and focuses on the repressed desire for food. "The Rainmaker" is a ghost story that adds charm and variety to her skill as a story writer. "Revati" presents the picture of a widow who is quite different from her counterparts and whose inner struggle leads her on the edge of neurosis.

The Ghosts of Vasu Master is a charming and thoughtful novel written in short chapters. The whole work moves between events in the present, stories and recollections along with a bit of philosophizing on Vasu Master's part. Vasu Master and his pupil grow and learn and come to terms with the world around them and their places in it. Human emotions are precisely expressed through the life of Vasu Master. In the process of teaching Mani about the value of life, he actually relives his own memories. He acts as a teacher, psychologist and a mother, who tries his best to help Mani to get himself free from all the problems he carries within. Githa Hariharan explores another aspect of woman who makes a powerful presence in the novel even in her absence. The reader comes to know about the female protagonists in the novel only through the memories of Vasu Master.
Vasu's wife, Mangala, died many years ago and she only gradually becomes a strong presence in the book. The past is used in the story to understand the present. He recalls his dead wife and her ghost stories. She does not know how to swim or cycle but is an expert in telling story and when she starts telling she knows what she is talking about. He remembers her as calm, pale and insubstantial. Vasu is not able to remember Mangala ever going to doctor. She always takes care of the family but remains unnoticeable like his mother. His mother is the sixth daughter in the family, the unwanted one as the family needed a son. She, therefore, remained unnamed for a year until the sweeper did it and also felt that her life could become easier if she be a boy. Even after marriage she is expected to attend all the daily chores and also to lower her voice so that the others may not hear it. She presents the clear picture of a woman, who, from her very birth, undergoes the social conditioning to be bound to the confines of home. For Vasu, Mangala is a woman who remained as obscure as his forgotten mother. Mangala and Jameela are childhood friends. They find their voices in sewing and stories. Hariharan weaves the fables of gender through the stories narrated by Mangala and Jameela.

*When Dreams Travel* narrates different aspects of feminine psychology. Hariharan blends past and present while skillfully reworking the historical tradition. The novel is a magical tour de force which shows the height of the writer's literary powers. It is a vibrant and inventive story about the quest for love and power. Shahrzad, the heroine, presents the picture of a witty woman who faces the impending danger boldly. She manages the situation with a powerful vision of her authentic selfhood. She succeeds in transforming her state of torture to the state of raised consciousness and thus saves the lives of many maidens. The writer is beset with feminine consciousness in the saga of events. While describing the Syzygy, C.G. Jung says: "No matter how friendly and obliging a woman's Eros may be, no logic on earth can shake her if she is ridden by the animus."24

The animus gives woman's consciousness a capacity for reflection and self-knowledge. Shahrzad's father feels that she has exiled herself from the unreliable sea of feminine consciousness as she declares her decision to save others with the words that nothing can change her decision as she knows. She is quite conscious of what decisions she is taking. She no longer presents a picture of archetypal victim fighting for survival but a brave woman who gets her stimulus from the danger implicit in the situation.
Dunyazad, who is only a secondary character in part one, becomes a central character in part two. She is witness of every cruelty of Shahryar and wants to take revenge. The disappearance of Shahrzad is like the suppression of the feminist voice and whenever it is suppressed it causes great havoc in everyone’s life. The tales described in the novel are allegories of modern issues.

_In Times of Siege_ deals with various aspects related to social issues. The central issues of the novel are the role of History, academic independence and free speech. The writer narrates the story of a professor in history at Kasturba Gandhi Central University, Delhi and is an in charge of B.A. History. In quiet and peaceful life of the mild-mannered professor comes a chaos when a lecture written by him on Basava gets challenged by a group of fundamentalists. Meena, who is his friend’s daughter and also a young political activist, summons the strength in him. She presents the picture of a woman, who survives in a hostile world and brings solace to others and supports her male counterpart. Acting as a catalyst she enables Shiv to take up the challenge. She is vibrant, confident and naturally assertive. She symbolizes a modern girl who is quite conscious. For her, marriage is not as important as her career. She proves that a woman is man’s pride in prosperity and his support in affliction.

At the end of the novel Shiv is free of all self-doubts and has a resolve to face the outer world. He proves the idea that when situation demands even ordinary man can show the spirit of a hero. Hariharan, in this novel, also explores the role of women with political consciousness. Relationships with Meena as well as a half-hearted love affair with Amita are also handled tactfully by the writer. With this introduction she seeks for women a balancing situation.

_In Fugitive Histories_, Hariharan poignantly records the story of Mala and Asad who crave for broad-mindedness and true freedom throughout their life. Mala, a Hindu Brahmin woman, marries Asad, a Muslim despite the strong disapproval of her family. Their children are confused to seek their identity. They represent the same Hindu-Muslim dilemma which is the result of mixed parentage. _Fugitive Histories_ shows a time when only a few people allow themselves to cross the border and terrorize a whole city and they do all this in the name of religion. Their unconscious mind under such conditions is insane for such conditions. Only a strong emotion is enough to reverse the relation between the ego and the consciousness. It leads to the destruction of the communities. It is the story of the people who struggled for food,
clothing and shelter in particular and for survival in general after the Gujrat riots. She has portrayed the terrifying face of catastrophe by recollecting the painful memories of that period. Whenever there are riots, a woman is the worst sufferer. The horrendous atmosphere and conditions that prevail during the riots of Godhra are presented through the life of a Muslim girl, who, as a victim of riots, loses her brother and has to vacate the home like many other women who are the sufferers of the same situation and try to live somehow. But Yasmeen is a girl who has chosen to make her dreams come true instead of brooding over the past. Hariharan here presents the forms of violence women experience in their different cultural and cross-cultural settings.

Hariharan, as the most accomplished writer who has an acute awareness of the gradual changes that have been taking place in the life of the women from one generation to another, displays an excellent warp and woof of lonely and social life in *Fugitive Histories*. Lives of Bala and Sara are quite different in the outer style but they are on the same path of achieving ‘selfhood’. The one experiences the pains and pangs of life through her own stings while the other feels it through the sores and angers of others. Their lives make the reader ponder over the real meaning of existence.

This research is an attempt to analyze how different socio-cultural aspects influence the life of women. All novels namely *The Thousand Faces of the Night, When Dreams Travel, In Times of Siege, Fugitive Histories* and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* along with short stories *The Art of Dying* are taken for the analysis. The four-chapter plan is not only a study of female characters in Hariharan’s novels and their traits and modes, but also an attempt at recording changing modes of the psyche of the author as a woman. Pradeep Trikha writes about Githa Hariharan: “Hariharan writes in a clean and straightforward manner, all her characters are suitably dealt; they talk and communicate effectively which keeps the novel flowing.”

An attempt has been made to explore various aspects of the female psyche. It will be seen how the ‘new woman’ breaks the shackles by not stepping behind but by trying to explore new areas of transcendence. She emerges out of darkness and is trying to establish her own position by peeling off the unwanted. She is assertive and is conscious of the injustices perpetrated. This awakening leads to self-realization. After enough of drifting like a solitary island, she is searching for the main land now. The material happiness results in discontentment and
frustration. The real happiness comes from within. All the characters delineated by Hariharans keep struggling till they learn the Mantra of the psychology of living in peace and realize that true happiness comes from the core of their hearts which is called the seat of ultimate consciousness.

A study will be taken up in the following chapters to bring out the causes which affect the thought and behaviour of the female characters in the novels. It will be seen how all patriarchal cultures exercise violence on women in different ways of moral, religious or ethics grounds. Githa Hariharan depicts beautifully the pains and pangs of a female, which she has gone through in different parts of the world and walks of life. Instead of identifying the mechanics of local patriarchies, Hariharan created alternative ideas and projects for women. She in her ‘Discrete Thoughts’ says:

I was a dissatisfied sort of teenager-full of questions and undefined yearning. I was also a passionate reader, and my reading was wide and eclectic. So, writing came to me as the natural way to express what I felt, whether it was doubt, curiosity or bewilderment. From the very beginning, writing has been a way to make sense of the world around me. And after all these years, asking the right questions continue to be as much of a challenge as finding answers.

Every writer has to be a good reader. It is not necessary that every good reader will surely be a writer but every writer should be a voracious reader as one should be well aware of various thoughts, discussions and movements going on in one’s society and the world around. A writer should be well versed with the happenings around. In the absence of yearning, one cannot brood over the existing issues and thus cannot bring the positive changes in the society. Without this qualification no writer could survive for long as happened in many cases where after one or two good works, a writer passes away from the world of writing. But in the case of Githa Hariharan, we find her to be an avid reader. It is her undefined yearning that makes her suggest her readers the immense possibilities for the world of contemporary Indian fiction.

As Hariharan is a wide and eclectic reader since her early age, she analyzes the different situations from different angles and thus explores the possibilities of change. This can be seen in the treatment of her characters. The image of the woman projected in her novels varies in different socio-cultural conditions. She is a person who believes that “well being does not come piecemeal, for rights co-exist, and repression in one area will not leave other areas unaffected.”
She provides a silver lining of re-visioning the age old traditions in the dark clouds of the subordination of women for peaceful co-existence. One comes across the voice of the flux of tradition and modernity in the over-all portrayal of her female characters. Her characters remain in the search of meaning of their self and also the world around them. The contribution of women writers to literature is of immense importance as it could make a significant difference to the viewpoint of the whole society. The time is to act and create a positive influence on women and Women’s creative efforts. As Mohanty asserts:

… Thus, the existence of Third World women’s narratives in itself is not evidence of decentering hegemonic histories and subjectivities. It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance. After all, the point is not just to record one’s history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant.
NOTES


9. Ibid., 40.


17. Ibid


