CHAPTER - II

FEMININE SENSIBILITY

Sensibility can be understood as an ability to feel or perceive. It projects or brings forth the quality or condition of being emotionally and intuitively sensitive. It was felt in the earlier times that sensibility evokes an emotional response or receptiveness, which is aesthetic and moral in who had the capability to feel for others’ problems and beauty. Though sensibility was identified in a sentimental novel, sentimental comedy or graveyard poetry like in the poems of William Cowper, modern criticism gave a different dimension, where it depicts deep feelings while responding mentally and sensitively to an experience or a situation. That means it refers to sensitive conscienteness or attentiveness towards something such as, the emotions of another. Feminine sensibility can be understood as sentiments of a woman, because it is concerned with a woman’s feeling and emotions for her own miseries and circumstances. It also helps everyone to recognize her psychology and her longing desires. We can infer in simple words that it is a kind of reaction towards action.

Feminine Sensibility reflects the tenderness and pure emotions of a woman’s heart. A woman encapsulated with these feelings makes her overwhelm in her surroundings and also it is fathomless and immeasurable. The 18th and 19th centuries have been path breaking periods for women as they took up to writing, inspite of so many obstacles, to express, their sensibility. The examples of Harriet Taylor, Mary Ann Evans stand as testimony as they were not allowed to publish their works with their own names but had to take either their husband’s or pen name Harriet Taylor’s The subjection of Women (1869) published under the name of her husband John Stuart Mill and Mary Ann Evan’s real name was George Eliot because there was no support or encouragement for women writers. Mary Wollstone crafts (1759-1797) A Vindication of the Rights of Woman aimed at reforming women’s manners. She argued that education plays an important role to commensurate with their social status.

As one compares Chitra Divakaruni’s Panchali to Mahasweta Devi’s “Dopdi” which shows the tribal woman Dopdi Mejhan who couldn’t pronounce the Sanskrit name – Draupadi. The contrast drawn between the two is, Dopdi, a victim of multiple rape
accosts her instigator of torment, Senanayak with naked body and says, “What’s the use of clothes? You can stripe me, but how can you clothe me again? (Devi – p.37) On the other hand, Veerappa Moily’s epic poem in his forthcoming work, “Shrimudi Parikramanam” is seen through the eyes of Draupadi where she indulges in soliloquies on every incident of her life. According to him, she is considered as the most exploited and courageous of women and she is represented as a mouthpiece of the modern women.

The status of women all over the world particularly in India has been undergoing a rapid change in the recent decades. So the image of woman in Indo-English novels is based on the traditional ancient literature of India, which showed woman as a devoted wife and a devoted mother. The imaginative and creative responses of the writers are related to the changing world’s view and questioning attitude thereby developed from it. The attitude of women has changed in recent times. These writings are based not only on observations of external behaviour but also on the internal journey in the psychological realm of the feminine sensibilities. A few women novelists make a straight journey into the psyche of their women characters that are torn, on account of the tensions generated, by the discord between the individual and the surroundings. They have started trying to understand Indian women and portray them in their novels. According K.K. Sharma, in Feminism: Some Observations, Feminism and Literature. 201. “If feminism is based on the wrong attitude by hostility towards man, it will fizzle out, for the two genders are not only complementary and supplementary to each other but also absolutely dispensable to each other for full growth and fulfillment.”

Sahgal’s portrayal of an agonized, grief stricken experience of a divorcee Simrit, (The Day in Show) brings out the trauma faced in her post marital life. The marriage fails which coincides with Sahgal’s own experience. The autobiographical element finds an ample space in the novel as she longed for a happy marriage. In the novel, Simrit’s image of Som made an indelible impression on her subconscious mind. It was unpredictable that Simrit could not believe how she could live with Som under such circumstances. Her learned, unworldly and orthodox Brahmin parents could not be instrumental in rebuilding her married life.
Palace of illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depicts the celebrated women characters of ancient India, which comes closest to the modern times. Draupadi epitomizes fire and energy which built in her, the spirit to fight injustice and her indomitable spirit makes her mysterious and a majestic woman of all ages. Draupadi’s personality has a plethora of emotions and the palace is an integral part of her personality. It resembles the classification practiced by many patriarchal communities, which relegate women to the domestic periphery while men move freely outside and earn their livelihood.

Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Palace of Illusions are two such novels, which show women’s predicament and the way how they evolved themselves to be assertive in the society. Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space and women’s perceptions of their experience within it. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with “weighter” themes. Additionally, Indian women writers in English are victims of “Second Prejudice,” vis-à-vis their regional counterparts, since proficiency in English was available only to writers of intellectual, affluent and educated classes. A frequent judgment is made that the writers and their works, belong to a high social strata, and are cut off from the reality of Indian life. The majority of these novels depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated housewife. This subject matter, often being considered superficial, compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women in the middle class or the lower classes, which are found in the works of regional authors and other native languages.

English education was introduced to India in the nineteenth century serving as an ideological force behind social reform and control. There was an imperial mission of educating colonial subjects in literature and the thought of England, is a mission that in the long run, served to strengthen Western Cultural hegemony. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s Minutes upon Indian Education in 1835 is regarded as a crucial document in
this history. His arguments were based on an assumption of the innate superiority of English Culture.

The British style education also had the effect of linking Indian writers to literary traditions of the West, enabling Indian writers writing in English, to reach an audience in Europe as well as in India.

In the 19th Century, both progressive and orthodox reformers supported female education in India, believing that social evils could be eliminated through education. However, the concept of education was limited to producing good homemakers and perpetuating orthodox ideology, as women were believed to support the traditional values of the Indian society. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by patriarchal society. Thus, the theme of growing up from childhood to womanhood that is the ‘Bildungsroman’ is a recurrent strategy. The East West confrontation or the clash between tradition and modernity is the impulse behind the works of acclaimed migrant writers such as UmParameswaram, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Anjan Appachana and Kiran Desai.

The Hindu moral code, known as The Laws of Manu, denies woman, an existence apart from that of her husband or his family and since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Raj Mohan’s Wife in 1864, a significant number of authors have portrayed Indian women as long suffering wives and mothers silenced by patriarchy. The ideal of the traditional oppressed woman persisted in culture, permeated by religious images of virtuous Goddesses devoted to their husbands, the Hindu Goddesses, Sita and Savithri serving as powerful cultural ideals for women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari. When looking at these narratives, silence or speech can be a useful guide to interpret women’s responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation.

Gandhi in particular was very conscious of the power that women could have in a non-violent struggle, arguing that they are by nature non-violent and have great ability to
endure suffering. Despite the objections, the activity of women, in the nationalist movement, radicalized some of them into articulating their own grievances, drawing parallels between imperialist oppression and patriarchal oppression. Sahgal too consistently makes connections between patriarchy and other power structures in all her novels. Toward Equality, a Government Commissioned report on the status of Women in India, which came out in 1974, charged, the women’s status had not improved but had, in fact declined since Independence. According to Garaldine Forbes, the heat and energy generated by Toward Equality:1996, p.243 and the emerging research data provided the intellectual foundation for a new women’s movement. Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Sashi Deshpande are among the urban intelligentsia, and they write fiction rather than feminist analysis as such. These perspectives, however, can offer valuable insights into the dynamics and complexities of human relationships and their feminist concerns can be placed within historical and theoretical frameworks. Their representations of marriage and sexuality, for instance, implicitly critique ideologies of women as property, which can lead to male abuses of power within the family and in the wider, society. Indeed, the problem of violence against women was the initial focus of feminist campaigns in India during the 1970s. Domestic Violence is fictionalized by many novelists like Markandaya, in A Handful of Rice (1966), Sahgal’s, Storm in Chandigarh (1969), Deshpande’s in That Long Silence (1988) and Desaid in Fasting, Feasting (1999).

But according to Geraldine Forbes, Toward Equality. “Hard Questions about the deeper courses of this violence and the ability of the law to remedy this situation were rarely asked. The result has been a decade of extraordinary legislation and subsequent despair because these laws have meant so little in practice. Once passed, this legislation depended for enforcement on men, whose view of women and their place in the world had not changed.” (249)

The idea or the word ‘Feminism’ keeps changing from time to time. Feminism in Literature is concerned with the representation of women in society and their status or position. Woman is considered as a product of cultural norm rather than as a creation of nature. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft articulated the care for women through her evolutionary book A Vindication for the Rights of Women (1792) followed by other well-known deliberations on women and society such as John Stuart Mills The Subjection of
Women (1869) and Margret Fullers, Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845). The early phase of the 20th century indicated clear signs of new and varied approaches in relation to women as subject and women as writers in literature. Consequently the notion of patriarchal society in which the woman was the victim of economic and cultural disadvantages was reviewed by Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf. In fact A Room of one’s own (1929) by Virginia Woolf was considered as a classic document regarding the feminist critical movement. She discussed chiefly the issues as to why there were so few women writers and it was difficult, may be impossible, for a woman to write “Dorothy Richardson’s” twelve volume Stream of Consciousness novel ‘Pilgrimage’ persuaded Virginia Woolf to state that Dorothy Richardson had invented the psychological sentence of the female gender, ‘Simon De Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (in French) in 1949 was indeed a seminal work investigating not only the position and role of women in society but also scrutinizing how male writers have viewed and portrayed women in their writings which was followed by a spurt of writings on feminism making frantic efforts to re-think and re-examine the entire gender issue. Most of these writers inferred that ‘gender’ was a construct of society, designed basically to facilitate the smooth functioning of society for validating the advantage of men. The women writers desired to demolish certain concepts related to women, which were more or less universal in nature as they served vested interests. Secondly, they contrived to restore a female perspective by extending knowledge, about the experiences of women and their contribution to culture. These writers observed that whatever power or status is accorded to women in a given culture, only rates them down as the Second Sex still dominated by their male counterparts. Simon De Beauvoir still emphatically stated, “One is not born but rather becomes a woman – it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature”.

The female writers that I selected for study i.e Sahgal and Divakaruni are trendsetters in the real sense and comprehensively their fiction reflects the image and status, the plight, the struggle and existential enigma of Indian women of all classes and creeds in the modern and the postmodern aeons. These novelists have taken the feminine issues. They tend to polarize around the evolution of women in India specially after decolonisation and modernization in the post-Independence period. They have the Indian sensibility and insight into the plight and problems of Indian Women. However, care has
been taken to include every possible critique, effort has been made to analyse the most recent of their works which were attempted to scrutinize these novelists effectively and dispassionately without any prejudice.

Feminist consciousness has certainly given a fresh ardous and excitement to literary studies. A reasonably new perception, women in literature and the works by women writers have unveiled some of the prejudice at work in the traditional approaches to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine perspective. A woman’s experiences of life as a member of a gender-biased society formulate her psyche. Moreover, she is bound by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances, society’s expectation related to age, creed, class, race etc. Thus, each woman’s experience of life is different and therefore unique. The female literary tradition comes from the still evolving relationship between women writers and their society.

Sandra Gilbertand Susan Gubar agree with Elaine Show Alter that women authors have a tendency to react in a collective way to a common social reality which explains the recurrence of topics themes, images and metaphors in literature produced by women writers. Feminist critics have attempted to understand how social restrictions influence lives of women and how it has affected their relationship to art and literature. Judith Kegan Gardener says that psychoanalysis is useful in defining gender that is how persons become psychologically feminine or masculine. Lillian Rubin observes interdependency between economic and psychological factors. Since the woman is economically dependent on the man her psyche moves towards subservience. As time changed woman became economically independent but the tendency of subordination in a male dominated society continued without apparent changes. Thus, the psychology of women living under patriarchy tends to be the psychology of oppression. This is what women writers have portrayed in their female characters resulting in two types of characters; women who are docile and women who are wild, sexy and crazy.

Feminist is a person, male or female, who is concerned with the status of women and who advocates or works for the removal of all forms of discrimination and oppression of women so that they move to live in a milieu of freedom, dignity and equality with men. From this point of view, Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow can truly be
identified as a feminist novel and she is a feminist writer. She instills into her heroines
the spirit of self-respecting individualism. Sahgal raised important questions regarding
confinement and lack of freedom, the status, and the role of women in society through
her characterization, themes and images. The important aspect she takes up is the quality
of women’s articulation and their freedom. They are against being treated as individuals
without individuality and they have revolted against the forces, which were throttling
their freedom. They wanted to be treated as equals and they are against being granted a
privileged position in the society. In the novel The Day in Shadow, she shows how a
woman can be criminally exploited ‘without creating a ripple’. Simrit the protagonist is
an independent woman who can make choices. She marries Som, merely attracted by his
‘colour, life and action’ disregarding the opposition from her parents and the dislike of
her friends. Very soon, she realizes her folly when she is forbidden in his house to have a
say even in routine matters like choosing the servants, or a cook, selecting curtains or
sofa covers. Disappointed at Som’s attempts to restrict her personality and at the
humiliating treatment meted out to her, Simrit resolves to dissolve her seventeen-year-old
marriage. Even after her divorce, she asserts her individuality. In opposition of the
outworn traditions, she chooses to start a new life with Raj.

Simrit’s articulation for freedom cannot be mistaken for mere political and
economic independence. It is a way of doing things one believes to be right and thus
asserts one’s individuality. She is deprived of free communication of ideas, friendship
and partnership in the life of Som, dominated by his conceited ambition and money. This
denial of freedom leads her to a state of suffocation. Som’s growing obsession for power
and wealth in his opinion made Simrit merely as an object to give physical pleasure. This
gradually led to an estrangement between them. Women like Simrit need is the essential
congenial environment characterised with freedom and love for their healthy relationship.
Som looks her like a sex object and sex as a means of self-gratification sensual pleasure.
Kate Millet in her book Sexual Politics rightly observes that the relationship between the
sexes is basically political. It is an arrangement “whereby one group of persons is
controlled by another” (74).
The repression, prohibition, exclusion and dominance of Sahgal’s women characters can be analysed in terms of the dynamics of the spirals of power, knowledge and pleasure. As Michael Foucault has remembered, “pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another. They seek out or overlap and reinforce one another.” We see her women characters attempt to assert their feelings and attempts are made from time to time to thwart their voices of protest. But they fail to change their societies. Sahgal deals with sexual repression of her character like Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* (1971). She was a woman of progressive thoughts. “She never accepted a world where men did things and women waited for them” *(The Day.6)*. Her liberated thoughts on women empowerment were all kept to herself. She felt that there was no one to understand her. Hence, she must have written on ‘river’ because she must have felt humans are more complicated than a river.

Raj feels, independence has no meaning unless it is economic. Simrit was annoyed at that moment when he compares her problem with the nation’s problem. The mess she created in her life was due to her foolishness, signing the divorce papers without understanding them. Raj’s apt analogy with that of the nation’s was that, as long as these sort of submissive people like Simrit are present it is inevitable to face defeat in the hands of the stronger one’s.

She felt *consoled and smoothed* in the company of Raj. Som’s behaviour always pained her because he was either busy with his business or friends. This turns her into an emotionally starved and hungry person. She compares metaphorically to a ‘freeze’ in the company of Som but the uncarvings of Raj are always better, retaining the core in her. This is what she longed for throughout her marriage with Som and she felt like a ‘frieze’ in his company *(The Day 1)*.

In the company of Raj the perception towards life has changed. Initially she felt that the city of Delhi was a home to raise her children but now she felt “Delhi could become the heart of a crisis” *The Dayina Shadow* *(p.12)* Touchstone for whatever happened in India. *(The Day.12)* This shows Simrit’s awakening spirit which enabled her to perceive things in the right perspective, due to Raj in her life. Her priority in life was children and their welfare. She makes sacrifices by not socializing however tempting it
was. Divorce made her realize the harsh realities of life where she has to move away from Som’s house and stay in a small flat. She felt that she has to reorganize the flat to make it feel like a home and it would take sometime for her due to the financial crisis that divorce has brought. But Raj’s words that life is not a fairy tale and it should be endured, makes her feel her more practical, though her past life which was like a lost battle made her feel at times like a pessimist. But children were the ray of hope in her life who brought some cheerfulness to her. The greenery surrounding her flat was also assuaging her pain. They were alleviating the spirit in her hence she always longed to have.

She feels as if she was trapped in Som’s World. He never consults her in any matter “Her usefulness to him had never extended to areas of the mind”. Unable to withstand his “Spiraling mania for affluence” (The Day. P.87), she longs to isolate herself from his world of commerce. All her attempts to change him go futile. Som becomes furious at her protests and asks her either to be a docile wife or finish off the whole farce of their marital relationship. Hence, she was ready to forsake him and all the material comforts he had given her rather than lead an abject life of a sex-satisfying companion. To live with dignity and self-respect was her prerogative and for that, she even risked to explore the unknown future with courage and confidence. One should understand how difficult it is to walk out of marriage. In this context the writer in an interview says, “They do not struggle in the radical sort of way recognised as struggle in the West. Yet they experience even greater struggle to my mind, because they are coming out of much deeper roots and they endure to the utmost. When at last they can’t take any more then make no bones about leaving, about doing what has to be done. They do not remain slaves at that point. They go”. Minoli Salgado, Wasafiri (1994), P. 20-44. This is what exactly Simrit does showing her indomitable courage and strength of conviction in realizing the goals she has set for herself.

Simrit was perplexed at Som’s attitude and realizes how insensitive he was to talk about the material loss that has incurred upon their family at the time of the partition rather than feeling sorry for the loss of lives and damages that the country had to face. She then realized how difficult it would be for her to lead the rest of her life with a partner like Som. But on the contrary she was clearly able to see the exodus, the trauma
and loss the Partition has brought to the country. When she recollects all these incidents she feels it was right on her part to leave him and the past behind. Sahgal shows the suffering caused to a woman in the glass house of loveless marriage.

Simrit had left behind her former role as an intellectual and prolific writer for the sake of the other responsibilities and roles she had to play. After her divorce, she felt uprooted and devastated. She opined that this century had nothing to look forward except for freedom it brought to countries, people, especially for women. Hence, she had broken the chains of her oppressed life that marriage had brought and took a new breath of life in the name of divorce.

Simrit is articulated by her future husband Raj, who is the prime mover in the novel, working to redress such patriarchal wrongs. The extent to which Simrit actually intervenes to change her situation is limited. Sahgal says that Simrit is ahead of her time in leaving the family, home but it is clear that she only does so when the stay became intolerable. Her efforts to employ a Gandhian approach to her legal “war” where she expresses that if non-violence had become a way of thinking, made into a law or given some kind of sanction, it would be passed on, like an inheritance to his son so that he would be another Som. This is what is lacking in our society or in the spirit of the people around. Hence, we see many Simrits coming out suffering in silence or relegating to fate or destiny. She says proudly that she has nothing to pass on to her children except for the Gandhian virtue of “non-violence”. People like Ramakrishna and Raj were her only hope for to bring her out from the turmoil. She was caught in a whirl of problems after divorce in the name of “Consent Terms” document. Raj and Ramakrishna were the only saving grace who would rescue people like her who are oppressed in the name of marriage or divorce under the stone hearted feet of people like Som.

Simrit at times failed to understand people especially Som and believed that he would not be so ruthless to suppress her rights in her life. She was a woman who truly loved Som and felt that his anger and “vanity” made him take a cruel step of drafting the demonic “Consent Terms”. The marital life she shared with him made her think that Som wouldn’t be so cruel but it was only due to her provocation. A man’s ego was hurt and the bubble had burst which made Som to be cruel and demonic, to draft that divorce
document in the name of Consent Terms. With Som those years (17 years) she was living was a life of loneliness, and tried to adjust to be in the harmony of Som’s orbit. This made him fail to understand the trauma of, loneliness and neglect that she was suffering under him. But when she wanted a divorce, unable to bear it anymore he suffocated her life and Som reacted in a different way. May be he felt that she should be taught a lesson. Raj’s suggestion to negotiate with Som to modify the document was totally unacceptable to Simrit. She knew Som was very much like Lalli his friend who was as temperamental as he, because could not tolerate the infidelity of his wife and shot her. In the same way, Som has condemned Simrit to hard labour for a hundred years in the name of the Consent Terms. The existential predicament that haunts Simrit in the form of divorce brought the traumatic implications that made her feel like an “over –loaded donkey-- with its back breaking and no one doing anything not because they can’t see it but because it’s a donkey and loads are for donkeys” (The Day.1) Som built a huge cardon around his ego and if anyone meddles it, he wouldn’t even bother to look back. This was the reason why Som had only a handful of friends. We can understand how a woman looks forward to associate with the mind of a man rather than to his body. May be that would evolve them to be as soul mates.

Divorce made her feel as if she was under a Damocles Sword. The “consent terms” was like an albatross around her neck making her always live in gloom and appeared as if all the avenues were closed and choked her to death. Raj’s arrival into her life had made her feel like a phoenix risen out of her ashes and made her look forward for a new breath of life. She felt the future welcoming her with open arms and felt as if she was going to start a new life on her own terms. The inspiring words of Ramakrishna in the novel The Day in Shadow “That could be non-violence for you – the refusal to bend the knee, bow the head” (181) means not yielding to any pressure and lead an assertive life. She was relieved of the guilt of divorce that was always pricking her. Now when she thought of Som she never felt the hurt of the past, which was there before. Earlier she used to be depressed with the stigma of divorce felt “a disease that left poc marks.” (The Day .1)
The struggle in her life made her a confident woman who was able to deal with her life, pay the bills on her own and breathe a fresh air of life. She evolved as a woman with grit and determination. The new woman emerged out of Simrit who is now carefree and cheerful and was pitying others who couldn’t talk and laugh like her *The Day in Shadow* (207).

Finally, Simrit with this strength has become more articulative and expresses her mind more freely and openly without any apprehensions. “Do you know why I came? It was to tell you I’d got rid of my guilt….In its place, there was a strong positive feelings. If feelings had smells, this one was a clean, carbolic, disinfectant smell” *The Day in Shadow* (208). A woman is not stonehearted. How much ever strong she is, she cannot forget her ex-husband. When she enters Som’s house *The Day in Shadow* (220) “a fresh pain staked in her, but it is a kind of ‘historic nostalgia’. This is the true predicament of a woman where she cannot bury the past and it always resurfaces as destiny plays hide and seek with her. That day’s discussion regarding the final settlement of their divorce and consent terms has brought in a sea change in Simrit. She has become vociferous, able to convey her ideas with clarity but never turned emotional. The novel depicts the theme of survival of a sensitive woman in a society where worldly matters are a prerogative.

She was totally swept off self-pity wherein, it gave a room to be assertive. But to her surprise, she noticed that Som had not changed a bit. Neither there was remorse nor reconciliation Som would have been mistaken, if he had thought her, to be the same person who was a submissive sufferer in silence. She was only hurt when Som made all preparations to send their son Brij, to study abroad without even informing her. Though, she forgave Brij for not sharing it with her, as a mother, she felt he was too young to understand these sort of relations, that one has to maintain. This shows the motherly love of a woman who always tries to protect, defend, or forgive her children. Here Som stands as an example of a flat character according to E.M. Forster "*Aspects of a Novel*", who remains the without an iota of remorse.

The psychoanalytic approach gives the reader a better appreciation of the situations of the characters created by the select women novelists. The creative ability lies in making their characters subtly and artistically undergo the prevailing value system,
urging for radical changes redefining and reshaping the social institutions and the other sources of civilizations, so that life becomes more acceptable for these women to live in a reformed society.

Simrit perceived the changes in her life which had made her strong and she very well understood that “Revolutions don’t begin with an announcement” *The Day in Shadow* (230). They happen whenever there is a need or urgency for it. Life taught her many lessons. Marriage brought the true self, taught her the spirit of life and never give up attitude. She also learnt the dynamics of life. Took decisions on her own of her run free will, in her own good time for which Raj was instrumental in their journey. She exhibited courage and resilience as the greatest qualities one has to endure. A.V. Krishna Rao, ‘Nayantara Sahgal: A ‘Study of her fiction and Non-fiction (Madras: M. Seshachalam, 1976), rightly points out, “Nayantara Sahgal with her reverent attitude towards life and its infinite possibilities exhibits an unprecedented ethical sensibility in resolving the emotional crisis of Simrit in a symbolically significant manner, namely the marriage of Raj.” (58) Simrit’s determination to start a fresh life with Raj, free from her past with no scars left. Divorce taught her to start a new fresh life burying the past. According to her, freedom is not only limited to the political arena but is a true challenge to express oneself being aware of one’s identity.

Sahgal visualizes optimistically that the future of women would be promising as she writes in one of her articles of the *Sunday Standard* (March 21, 1970): “Greater personal freedom for women will come and wishing won’t hold it back….once they are educated and competently holding jobs, can the process stop there.” (*Cyber Literature*, Vol.xxxii, no.II December.2013)

On the other hand Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an Indo American writer, the author *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) who had reinterpreted the story of the Indian epic *The Mahabharath* from Draupadi’s point of view, displays a plethora of human emotions and feelings such as pain, overpowering, anger, revenge, humiliation, pride, despondency among many on the general, convey life, which means philosophically to be “Maya” or “illusions”, according to Hindu mythology. The story is narrated in first person and Draupadi or Panchali is the narrator. Story telling is considered as a part of oral tradition
by many women writers all over the world. It involves the recounting of legends, myths and the tales from one’s own family and also familiar history. The South Asian writers have skilfully used myth and legend in their writings as a practice that would be read by women of all the classes and races. In the essay, *Writing from the Margin and other Essays* Shashi Deshpande writes, “Myths are still important to us… In India especially, myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truth about themselves and about the human condition”. (99) One can assume that, the South Asians are closer to their mythologies than many others and experience their legends and tales, on day to day basis than from any text book.

The narrator of the original epic, Vyasa has a role in the narrative structure, guiding Panchali to build up her narratives through his prophesies. The novel begins with Panchali’s birth from fire, who maturates reflecting on her life and ends with her final departure. The epic’s concept shows how the wives were considered as movable property. In the ancient days men treated women as inferior beings and they were silent sufferers. They could not even rebel against injustice and raise questions for their rights. Some women followed the traditions, considering it as a virtue, some though would know what is good and bad still were unable to come out and some would be independent. This strict division of gender roles was resented by Draupadi in the novel and was eager to gain all the knowledge and education of the world. Chitra who belongs to the postmodern era took the mythological character “Draupadi” to show, how the character could survive and sustain the oddities she faced in her life. The hegemonic descriptive roles of gender that lead to the marginalization of women in Indian Society are clearly challenged by Draupadi’s character in the novel. The novel traces Draupadi’s life, beginning with her magical birth in fire as the daughter of a king, following her spirited balancing act as a woman with the husbands who were cheated out of their father’s Kingdom. She was swept into their quest to reclaim their birthright, remaining at the brother’s side through years of exile and a terrible civil war. We can also see her strategic maneuver to take control of her household from her mother-in-law, her complicated friendship with enigmatic Krishna, or her secret attraction to the mysterious man Karna who is the archrival of her husband. The novel makes us think in a deeper insight why she should
suffer? What was her mistake? And what was the treatment she received in the male world?

According to Simon De Beauvoir *Second Sex* she says that the women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth, ‘feminity’; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways, but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human. Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is for from extinction resting still upon solid economic and social foundations (*Second Sex*).

The childhood of Draupadi is set as the tone of the novel, which talks about the loneliness in her life. She felt her father’s palace “Mausoleum” smothers her to death, hence she loved the company of her governess Dhaima. Draupadi expresses her disapprobation with the name that her father has christened her and her brother, though both their births took place at the same time from the fire after the Yagna. She is being given the name Draupadi that means “an offspring of vengeance or an unexpected one”. (*The Palace.6*) Drupad’s longing desire to have a son to vindicate against Drona, was blessed with a son and hence he named him Dhritishtadyumna a destroyer of enemies’, which clearly signifies the reason of his birth and a mission of life but for ‘Draupadi’ the daughter of Drupad with an identity tied to her father, blocking all her prospects of bringing a change in the course of history. It is only a clear sign of indication proving his ‘egoistic’ nature. Draupadi felt she needed a more heroic name because she always had the qualities of courage, perseverance and unbending will. “I didn’t forget that hesitation, even though in the years that followed King Drupad was careful to fulfill his fatherly duty….” (*The Palace 6*) Draupadi’s instinct made her perceive her father’s hesitation, displaying the initial rejection which she could never forgive him of, may be this was her reluctance to accept the ‘mausolem’ as her home and hence she longed to have a palace of her own, which paved way, for the initiation of her dream house, “I turned the resentment I couldn’t express toward my father onto his palace. (*The Palace 6*). Even her physical attributes especially her dark complexion always created doubts making her skeptical, if she was truly “born to change the course of history”. *The Palace of Illusions* (p.8) this gives her an awareness of the marginality and inequality felt in both ethnicity
and gender. The epic portrays her as a victim of circumstances but Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni alleviates her by creating a Draupadi not as a victim of patriarchy but who wants to make her own history. The cloistered existence in her father’s palace, the building, a house such also tomb or several tombs did not create any interest in her nor the dressing up with any adornments but her only passion was to receive education like Dhri (The Palace 23).

The novelist here condemns the social set up that was prevalent which engenders different norms for men and women. Draupadi’s eagerness to know about the mysterious world, jeopardizes her education where once Dhris tutor snubs her saying that “women were the root cause of all the world’s troubles” (The Palace 24), which prompted her to challenge the tutor himself. Thus, we can observe her quick retort to any sort of submissiveness or oppression. The despising explanation by the tutor about the code of conduct set for women, just to support their warrior men, so that they would die with glory on the battlefield evokes the restless spirit of Draupadi challenging the man who made code of conduct for women. Pat comes the reply “I would never pray for their deaths. I’d teach them instead to be survivors” (The Palace 26). This assertion would throw light on her to rebel on the system framed by the egoistic men, belittling the women on the whole to surrender to the norms of the patriarchal system thus opposing the subservient status of women.

Divakaruni incarnates Draupadi’s education as well as her transformation from an ambitious Princess to a revenge-seeking queen. “In regard to the multi-dimensional presentation of feminity, Chitra’s narrative, appears in many ways faithfully modeled on the original but reverses the perspective by giving the reader an insight into the mind of Draupadi. The prophesy that came with her birth must have disturbed her psyche which often made her eaves drop about her future and her marriage which is quite a normal quality that a young girl would have “Early in my life I learnt to eaves drop.” (The Palace. 34) Even the prophesy of Vyasa shattered Draupadi. She was aghast when she knew about her marriage with five husbands. It must have pricked her core, reminding her to be a socially unacceptable person. What would the world think of her? The prophesy further tells that she would be the cause of the ‘Greatest War’ of her time and
would bring death to her family and brother as well. She couldn’t believe that her ‘pride’, ‘temper’ and ‘vengefulness’ would one day be cause of the doom’s day. She wanted the prophesy to be reversed. She must have had, a thousand volcanoes burst in her heart. For the first time she had the trust on her father Draupad that he would never get her married against the code of Marriage Law. The Indian society marginalized women confining them to home and heart and all kinds of adventures like war, hunting, expeditions, explorations and unlimited freedom are given to man. Polygamy was common among Kshatriya men but polymetry was unheard of. Besides, women were prescribed to be chaste, loyal and dedicated to a single man in their lives. But later Draupadi realized her marriage in the name of ‘Swayamwar’ was only a deception. She realized that it was a sort of political arrangement rather than an alliance. In her words, “I did not fear the faith they imagined for me. They had no intention of committing honourable self immolation.” (The Palace. 118)

The other man in her life whom she adored and admired was Karna who becomes an irresistible person to be signed off. “Karna’s story became a hook in my flesh, binding me to him, making me wish a happier life for him” (The Palace.87) To save her brother’s life (Dhri’s) she rejects Karna on the grounds of his parenthood which paved a way for his animosity towards her. Though she was very much aware of her love and her emotional attachment that she developed towards him, she had to nip off her love in the bud itself. She placed her family’s honour on a highest pedestal, and thus sacrificed her love. Her “unconventional polyandrous marriage (Hoydis, 10) bore the risk of presenting her as an unsatiable, contemptible woman. Directed by the sage Vyasa there she was split among her husband, spending a year with each, her virginity restored each time when entering a new husband’s bed”. She becomes aware that in contrast to her husband’s, she, “had no choice as to whom I slept with and when” (The Palace. 120). This stands as a testimony to gender ideology and patriarchal hegemony prevalent during those times. Another curse that befalls her is not only she lost control of her body and also over her property when Yudhishtira lost the palace too. This shows the social status of women, how they were exploited and taken for granted.
Draupadi must have lost total faith in the system and felt helpless. She befalls on Krishna to rescue her in the court of Kauravas during the ‘Cheeraharan’ episode. The most private space of her womanhood was encroached and the silence of the royal members, as well as her husbands’ ignited her fury. Consumed by anger and a desire to regain her lost dignity she propounded the fatal and dreadful curse of the battle. The loss of her dignity and loss of her dear palace shook her up. The construction of self-identity, through an appropriation of interpretations is commented upon by Louis McNay thus.

“With regard to gender identity, the hermeneutic idea of her pre-interpreted nature of experience provides a way of considering how the ambiguities of the process through which the individual appropriates gender norms are worked through at the level of self-identity (McNay 2000: 77), “In most constructions of Draupadi, in both literary and non-literary texts, she is seen as a victim of patriarchy” (Nair, 153).

Draupadi’s narration of the later marriages of her five husbands with other women were also the political arrangements of some sort or the other. The servile position at the time of exile in the palace of Virata and the subordination forced upon her as a maid servant, to satisfy the desire of the queen’s brother Keechaka which was unprotected by her husbands, her insult at the ‘Sabha of Hasthinapur after the game of dice, where she was placed by her husband Yudhistir as a wager in the game of dice etc., were all instances which Draupadi sees as the oppression of women in the world of men and Divakaruni portrays them from the woman’s point of view.

The other side of the idea of masculinity defined by Connel says the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees the dominant position of some men over others (P.77) is also addressed in the novel where the portrayal stands Karna a good example.

Divakaruni has successfully tried to depict Draupadi as a model of female empowerment and courage trying to break free from the chains of patriarchal hegemony. As Linder Elizabeth states “Divakaruni has taken a male centered story and breathed new life into its female characters, give us a rich tale of passion and love, power and weakness, honour and humiliation. Whether or not readers are familiar with the epic, still
Feminine Sensibility of Woman by the two writers portray how a woman looks out at herself and her problems. The novels taken for study make the readers understand and realize themselves as human beings but not as prolongations or projections of some male creatures. Both the writers showed their protagonists different from the stereotype women in India, who are submissive and take what may come. But their women do not accept that type of nature but they take a stand, showing new morality which projects women in a different dimension. Sahgal’s novels are written in the early post independent era and Chitra the twentieth century women through her novel ‘The Palace of Illusions’ projects Draupadi with a strong character on par with the modern women. But both portrayed women loyally rooted in Indian Culture who struggled for freedom, their rights characterised by reflection and self-awareness, their present is linked to their past. Women’s egocentric nature is painful and a slow process for them, as they had to cross the social obstacles, orthodoxy and also personal hesitation and reluctance. Self-awareness is an outcome of one’s sensitivity and fineness of individual sensibility. Chitra’s most modern feminist touch occurs in the end of her novel where one can see Panchali and the other Pandava women establish a court for such women to help, protect the power and enforce their rulings, they pool their economic sources ‘to set up the destitute in homes of their own and buy merchandise to start business for them. In time, the women’s market become a flourishing centre of trade in the city…. We trained those who showed interest in learning to become tutors for girls and young boys. (The Palace. 251)