INTRODUCTION
The present study is an attempt to study the novels of Anita Desai from feministic point of view. The term "Feminism" was first used by the French dramatist Allexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet 'L Homme Femme' to designate the emerging movement of the women for the assertion of their individual rights. Feminism is also called Aphraism after Aphra Behn, a seventeenth century feminist and political activist. Feminism recognises the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial quality of women, sexually colonised and biologically subjugated. An expression of the mute and stifled female voice denied an equal freedom of self expression, feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalisation of women. Sarah Grimke observes:

"Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank. She was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind......"¹

Feminism strives to improve this tilted and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world, a malist culture. Thus, denied the freedom to act and choose on their own, women remained solely inside the field of vision, mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished. A woman is a woman, and a woman she must remain but not a 'man's shadow-self'. A woman is

held to represent the 'otherness' of man, his negative. The development of feminist thought at the outset of this century has brought about a perceptive change in our outlook towards women. Now, women are one with man and not their 'otherness'. Men have taken up the cudgels for women. No longer are they callous to their sexual and gender exploitation. Though the Indian woman did not have to struggle like her American counterpart for universal suffrage, she has to strive to attain recognition of her individuality and acceptance by society even beyond her gender-based roles. Patriarchy had compelled the Indian woman to be totally subservient to the male, in both social and economic spheres. Gandhi Ji gave a new direction and dimension to the feminism movement in India and freed women from passivity and servility. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pt. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar did no less. The ideal of Ardhangini enshrined in Indian culture renders man as the companion woman, her other half. Together they make a whole. Prakriti and Purusha are one. Man and woman are one in concept of Ardhanariswara. Traditionally, India is a male-dominated culture. Indian woman covered with many thick, stack layers of prejudice, convention and ignorance has hardly any autonomous existence. The independence movement brought the Indian woman out of her sheltered protected existence. It propelled her on to the political and social scenario and she too began to experience the prevalent reformist zeal. Moreover, the portals of educational institutions were now thrown upon to her. Freedom for the Indian woman meant freedom not merely from British rule and its concomitant tyranny but simultaneously a release from centuries of male-domination and male-ordained social and cultural norms. She now sought to change all this. The Indian woman did not enter a phase of braburing-libber movement nor did she take the extreme stance of a misogamist, instead she attempted to effect a slow but sure change with her own home. It is
this change in the Indian woman that provides the mainstay for much of the fiction written by women in post-independent India. More than any other genre of literature, it is in fiction that women attempt to portray their introspection realistically. In earlier fiction, especially that written by male novelists, women were represented more as a symbol and less as people. Positively or negatively, they were portrayed in a one-dimensional manner as virgin-heroine or temptress, the dutiful daughter or all-satisfying mother, the Pativarta or the redundant widow. The position and importance of women characters in fiction were determined and restricted by societal roles which no one questioned. As male writers generally presented and idealized concept of womanhood, most of these women characters never approximated to the real woman of the time and did not have a pivotal role in such fiction. The male novelists were governed by the general notion that:

"Woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for work."\(^2\)

These women characters could be epitomes of virtue or beauty or sensuality but never real women. Their obvious passivity doomed them to a secondary position and life of submission and pushed them further into stereo-typed roles which the male writers and the male characters envisaged for them. These woman characters, like women writers themselves belong to:

"A womanhood that has been for centuries the sacred hearth, at once home-tomb-womb, a woman always being stilled in to silence."\(^3\)

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The images of women in various anthropological, historical and cultural male-centered studies essentially project them as non-actors in history. Their activities are invariably confined to private space and they are rarely shown as playing pivotal roles in social and historical development. Such age-old conceptual notions about womanhood are embedded in binary oppositions between male and female attributes: initiative, passivity; reason, emotion; materiality, spirituality. The nature of womanhood is constantly defined in terms of male desire and male imagination. Kate Millett points out in sexual politics:

"Under patriarchy the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture in regard to the female were also of male design. The image of women, as we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the 'otherness' of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is "other" or alien."⁴

Feminist literature in English is certainly not a recent innovation. It has been there ever since perspective on life were recorded in the medium of literature, though it certainly has come to its own of late. Feminist criticism, in its broadest implication, has three distinct subdivisions, each with its own and frequently practised without raising any ideological outrage. These are: The examination and analysis of the portrayal of women characters by themselves or in relationship of female authors. The

third direction is that of so called 'Prescriptive Criticism', that attempt is 'good' from the feminist perspective. The post-independence period, has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. The woman has been the focus of many literary work in this period. The emergence of women novelists, in Indian English Literature, took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was only after independence, that they could make solid contribution to Indian English fiction. Writers like Kamla Markandya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have achieved recognition in recent times. Problems of women which were till now in the periphery have now shifted to the centre. Through, the eyes of these women writers, one gets a glimpse of a different world till now not represented in literature. Women, who were till then treated as second class citizens, were assigned their due place in these novels. These novels present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in the society and her assertion of individuality. The works of these Indian women novelists, like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, can be compared with those of the Canadian novelists like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence. Anita Desai around whose novels the whole of my thesis revolves, is a very distinguished and distinctive female novelist from the rest of the writers of her generation. In her works Indian-English fiction has acquired a depth which was never attained earlier. Mrs. Desai, born in Mussorie on June 24, 1937; is the daughter of Bengali father and a German mother. She imbibed different influences to give shape to her creative imagination and fictional craftsmanship. She received her education in Delhi, and worked for a year in Max Mullar Bhawan, Calcutta. She got married to Ashivn Desai and had to live in Metropolitan cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and in Chandigarh and Pune too. All
these cities have been described in her novels in a very detailed manner. As a novelist, she is an innovator who is more interested in depicting the theme of feminism in her novels. The image of woman is undoubtly integral to the study of literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian English Literature as well. Ever since the dawn of civilization, woman has been a myth, a metaphor, a symbol, a deity or a devil. Altering the context and the special meaning involved, what Shakespeare said of Cleopatra is indeed true of the image of woman in general:

"Age can not wither
Nor Custom state her infinite variety."

But what is the real image of woman? What is her real character? what is her real nature? what is her real entity? Has she any identity of her own? Several such questions have to be faced and answered. As a matter of fact, there are several images of woman painted by Anita Desai in her novels: woman as a wife, mother, a sister, a beloved, a friend, a mistress, a floozy etc. To some extent, she has even surpassed most of her contemporaries. In this connection K.R.S. Iyengar writes thus:

"In Prawer Jhabvala's work the social background is rather more important than the characters who enact the various comedies, tragi-comedies and farces; in Kamala Markandeya's the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds; economic, political, cultural, social, but in Anita Desai's novels, the

inner climate the climate of sensibility that lours or clears of rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather the physical geography or the visible action.\textsuperscript{6}

Anita Desai, in her novels, mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women, tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. She is concerned with the psychological angle of the problem faced by her protagonists. Her serious concern is the "Journey within" her characters, the central character mostly being women. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society that is conservative and tabooridden. She portrays in her novels the inner conflict of her female characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom. Woman has always been the object of male subjectivity. She has been defined in terms of her relation to male need in society. Her social role and position in society is also assigned by patriarchy. Women in male-centered fiction are often portrayed in terms of the popularly available stereotypes of the suffering mother, the restive wife or the shrewish mistress, in all the cases as an easily dispensable appendage to the male counterpart. She is never allowed to be a subject in her own right. She is taken care of, according to the advice of Manu in 'Manusmrti by her father in childhood, the husband in youth, and the sons in her old age. A common characteristic that we see in all major females of Anita Desai, is their longing to be free of all kinds of social and familial bounds. She refuses male as super power and

tries to legitimize female power as if power is produced through paradox and opposition. To say that Anita Desai is a feminist writer is not to deny her artistic achievement. She is not just a propagandist. Socio, psycho, philosophic dimensions in her novels are quite impressive. That woman is the center of her novels is not only natural but quite convincing. All said and done, Desai is an artist of female heart. As Solanki explains:

"As a consummate creative artist, Anita Desai shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings she not only offers an expose of human life in its shocking shallowness or outward show, but also provides, down deep, a philosophical probe or basis to sustain our life. She emerges neither as a downright pessimist nor an incorrigible optimist. All along, her earnest endeavour is to hold a mirror to life, and in the process, to unravel the mystery of human existence."  

In the process she does present the plight of the woman, the underdog and that makes her a feminist. She belongs to upper middle class, English-educated society. She depicts women with both their negative and positive attributes. Women in her novels are no longer treated as objects for they become the subject of these novels. We see women in the context of feminism in all her colours.

Though Desai is of mixed German and Indian Parentage, her novels are firmly entrenched in Indian soil. Her novels revolve around the working of the mind of her female protagonists. Her novels revolve around the preponderant desire of the protagonists to realize themselves. Her women characters are an integral part of the Indian society to which

she belongs. She hopes to change the stereotyped image of women that male writers have been presenting to the world. Her world consists of women, who strive to realise themselves only within the accepted institutions of society. She is not a traditional novelist of ideas or purpose, what she said of the Indian woman writer is equally true of her own fiction:

".......they live mostly in such confined sphere and therefore their field of observation is at the same time more restricted and more intense. This leads to their placing their emphasis on different sense of values; whereas a man is concerned with action, experience, and achievement, a woman writer is more concentrated with thought, emotion and sensation. At least, so one would think, but this is not by any means always. So-I've always held that Lawrence and Games, for instance, have extraordinary "feminine' sensibilities, and so many of the contemporary women writers have very prosaic styles and 'masculine' concern." ⁸

All her earlier novels from "Cry The Peacock" to "Clear Light of Day" have female central characters. They are drawn from well-to-do sections of contemporary Indian society and represent feminism. Anita Desai's feminine sensibility is revealed in her portrayal of women character. She is not a social realist, and her forte is the exploration of the emotional ecology of her protagonists. But in her portrayal of women characters and analysis of marriage, albeit from feminist angle, Anita Desai mirrors certain aspects of Indian Society which only a woman novelist could have presented. The kind of anatomy of female psyche that one finds in her novels makes her fiction socially relevant.

Anita Desai's treatment of her feminist theme, begins as a simple personal story of an individual woman; gradually developing into a wider conflict for her identity and ends up exploring possibilities of transition in the tradition-bound Indian society, residing in metropolitan surrounding. She brings about a new dimension to the Indian novel by drawing upon a troubled sensibility of a woman, in an absurd world. Her feminism refers to the belief that women should have the same rights, power and opportunity that men have. Her fictional writings mainly depict the interior landscape of the mind of protagonists. Writing for her:

"Is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things."\(^9\)

Desai's novels, according to her, deal with what ortega Y. Gasset called:

"The terror of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence."\(^10\)

M.K. Naik rightly says:

"Desai's protagonists are persons for whom aloneness alone is the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worthtreasuring. They are mostly women, who though they have reached different stages in life (from school girl to grandmother) are all fragile introverts trapped in their own skins."\(^11\)

Since Desai is obviously a feminist novelist, most of her novels are female oriented. She has presented images of woman in her novels. Maya in "Cry The Peacock" has been delineated as a psychic case, murdering

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her own husband for her own fulfillment of a sort. In "Voices in the City" the character of Monisha and Amla stand out. These two women characters boldly rebel against the hackneyed conventions of middle class life and yearn for self-expression and self-fulfillment in their own way and on their own terms, although both come to grief-Monisha commit suicide and Amla gets heart broken when her love is rejected. Sita in "Where Shall We Go This Summer" has been initially painted as a rebellious wife who runs away along with her children even in the state of pregnancy from her husband but ends up as making a compromise with her husband. Desai presents the bold image of two women in "Fire on the Mountain". The image of Nanda Kaul as neglected widow, Ila Das as a social worker definitely stand out. The Image of Bim in her novel "Clear Light of Day" is quite memorable.

Desai once again presents a remarkable image of woman in "In Custody" and "Baumgartner's Bombay". In her different novels Anita Desai portrayed different facets of feminism. Her female characters cover women of almost all age groups and their problems.

Thus, we notice that the various Indian English novelists have painted the image of woman variously in their novels. But the contribution of Anita Desai is unique as she has handled. Feminism in her novels very remarkably, voicing the agonizing plight and predicament of millions of married and unmarried Indian women.
FEMINISM-ORIGIN AND GROWTH
Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. It attempts to analyse the reasons for, and dimensions of, women's oppression and achieve women's liberation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'Feminism' was first used in the later part of 19th century, and it was defined as having the "qualities of females". The meaning of the term has been gradually transformed, and now it means a "theory of the political, economic and social qualities of the sexes." In the introduction to The Remembered Gate : Origins of American Feminism, Barbara Berg defines feminism as a "Broad movement embracing numerous phases of women's emancipation." She states further:

"It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sexdetermined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely to actions. Feminism demands the acceptance of women's rights to individual conscience and judgement. It postulates that women's essential worth stems from common humanity and does not depend on the other relationships of her life."

In general, feminism is the ideology of women's liberation. Feminism is a movement that is devoted to the study of women's status, circumstances, psyche and problems. It also provides solution of problems and struggles for women's cause. Feminism means the sense of personal courage. The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of

victimization. It is a concept of 'raising of consciousness' of an entire culture. To quote John Berger:

"A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself.................She comes to consider the survivor and the surveyed within her as the two continual yet always distinct elements of her identity as women.............Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The Surveyor of women in herself is male; the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object and most particularly on object of vision: a sight."²

As a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep seated causes of women's oppression. Present day feminism is a historically specific movement, rooted in French, English thought and in British liberalism and consequently wedded to deeply critical style to notion of truth, justice, freedom and most important equality. So feminism must be viewed as a rapidly developing major critical ideology or system of ideas in its own right. In ultimate analysis feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society. It opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society, along with men's claim to define what is the best for women without consulting

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them. F.S. Mill is of the opinion that the liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of society as he says:

"That principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other— is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that ought to be replaced by a principle of prefect equality, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other." 3

Because everything effect women, every issue is women's issue here is a feminist perspective on every subject as Teresa Billington Grieg wrote:

"The reorganisation of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations; movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and men as foundation of law and custom." (Feminism Dictionary 158) 4

Feminism is an awakening that one is ignorant, not because one is lazy, not because one is stupid, but just because one is Female. Naturally this awareness or awakening brings an understanding about one's enemies and friends, and compels one to think of strategies that could help in ending such an oppression. Simon de Beauvoir in her pioneering work "The Second Sex" seeks primary inquiries of modern feminism:

"In a critical venture where a woman tries to seek her identity. She tries to define herself by saying 'I am a woman.' The factual analysis suggests the basic symmetry between the terms 'Masculine' and 'Feminine'. In fact both these terms - Feminine and Masculine represent social constructs - patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms."

A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems and feminist consciousness is the experience of certain specific contradictions in the social reality as intolerable as to be rejected if one is to transform the society for a better future. In terms of its fundamental significance and impact on literary studies during the second half of 20th Century the feminist theory matches the major conceptual development like maxism and psychoanalysis. In the very concept of deconstruction feminism is considered as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos and darkness. Thus, there evolves a new concept of a non-being. Julia Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows the repression of the feminine as a position and not the essence. Kristeva in one of the outstanding articles wrote:

"Women's Time" explores a deconstructive approach to sexual difference and argues for feminist struggle to be seen historically and politically as a three - tiered phenomenon (i) Women demand equality (ii) Women extol feminity (iii) Women reject dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.

Toril Moi rejects the third position as it does not consider the political reality of feminism. As a matter of fact:

"Feminism aims at grabbing power—the position to dictate and direct action and thinking of others from men, and it is possible because in modern time strength is all powerful and this can be achieved through intellect rather than through physical strength."\(^7\)

Toril Moi says:

"The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new woman's movement which emerged in the late 1960s."\(^8\)

Because of their intellectual sensibility women can earn a lot but the economic power can not give her bliss and thrill of life. Psychologically women need men's loving and caring company and in that way feminism can not be anti-male and can not be contented with Lesbianism. It is believed that feminism must open and discuss the 'Women question' and problems in all its aspects—all the issues that are related to the growth, development and grandeur of women. The postmodern feminists wary labels or definitions of any kind. And therefore the word "feminism" particularly troubles Alice Jardine:

"Who and what, then do we mean by "Feminist?" that word poses some serious problems. Not that we would want to end up by demanding a definition of what feminism is and therefore, of what one must do, say, and be, if one is to

\(^7\) Sharma, K.K. "Feminism : Some observations in feminism and literature", Pub. Delhi, 1996, P. 201.

acquire that epithet; dictionary meaning are suffocating to say the least."  

Simone de Beauvoir says in "The Second Sex" "The situation of woman is that she - a free and autonomous being like all creatures - Nevertheless kinds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other."  

Any attempt to provide a baseline definition of a common basis of all feminisms may start with the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. Furthermore, one could argue that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. Beyond these general assertion, however it is difficult to come up with any other 'common ground' between the different strands of feminism, and as Delmar argues in "What is feminism":

"One cannot assume that agreement or feminist unity underlies the extreme fragmentation of contemporary feminism. Indeed, such an assumption of underlying unity or coherence of different feminisms may have the unlooked - for effect of marginalizing different groups of women whose concerns fall outside this definition of feminist unity."  

It is difficult and perhaps impossible to define feminism in terms of a set of core concepts Feminism can be defined better or further in terms


11. Quoted by Jane freedman 'feminism' Viva Books P. Limited: New Delhi 2002, P. 1
of its historical origins and development. The term 'feminism' is a relatively modern one - there are much debate over when and where it was first used, but the term 'feminism' seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients, who were perceived as thus suffering from 'feminization' of their bodies. French feminism claims a longer past and identifies Christine de Posan as the first to have held modern feminist views. She was the first feminist thinker to spark off the four - century- long debate on women which came to be known as 'querells des femmes' Joan Kelly says:

"If Petrarch can be called the first modern men, then Christine de Pisan, the poet and author who introduced her countrymen Petrarch and Bocaccio, to Parisian culture in the early 1400, is surely the first modern woman."^{12}

The term was then picked up by Alexandre Dumas, a republican and antifeminist, who used it in a pamphlet published in 1872 entitled 'homme-femme, on the subject of adultery, to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine way Thus, as Fraisse points out:

"Although in medical terminology feminism was used to signify a feminization of men, in political terms it was first used to describe a virilization of women"^{13}

Lindo Kealey, writing about Canadian but also U.S. Feminism, found the term used by 1890s to refer the new woman she also notes that:

"recent women's history has refined the term, distinguishing between the different strands of feminism, all of which

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recognize the right of woman to a public role and also her
right to define herself Autonomously.\textsuperscript{14}

Tisa Tuttle attempts to define feminism in the following manner (1986)

"The term Feminism, taken from the Latin femina (woman),
originally meant "having the qualities of females."\textsuperscript{15}

Feminism began to be used in reference to the theory of sexual
equality and the movement for women's rights, replacing womanism, in
the 1890s. Tracing its first usage in print, Alice Rossi found it in a book
review published in the Athenaeum, 27 April 1895. The period from
1920 to 1960 is known as the period of intermission in the history of the
women's rights movement. The late 19th century is recognised as a period
which thrust women at the forefront of political scenario. Beneath the
facade of democratic ideals, women were subjected to unfair treatment. In
industries they were paid less than men and were denied the right to vote.
These issues assumed the exploric form in their collective movement for
equal rights in the year 1906-1914. This decade was a period of protest
movement - civil rights, peace, the New left, anti poverty. But the revival
of feminism was a startling event. People with traditional views stood
aghast, feeling that these must be sick unbalanced women, or at best, just
bored house wives. They were puzzled as to what these women meant by
"liberation" or "oppression". Describing the reaction to new feminist
movement, Maren Lockwood Carden writes:

"The press and the other mass media had a field day making
fun of the 'women's libbers'. The reactions they reported

\textsuperscript{14} Kealey, Linda, \textit{A Not unreasonable claim}: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1820s

107.
were often highly charged, emotionally negative and frequently contradictory. These women were sexually promiscuous, deprived. They hated men, wanted to take over the world, or wanted to subordinate men to women. They were portrayed variously as rejecting both marriage and motherhood, they were unhappily married or divorced or single, physically unattractive, they were compensating for their 'failure' as women, strident, hostile hysterical, and maladjusted, they lacked human compassion and perspective.\textsuperscript{16}

By now it had become clear that women's liberation was not just a fraud as Stacey and Price comments:

"If women wish to make changes in the societies they live in, they must enter the political arenas since the societies are all male dominated, for men certainly cannot be relied upon to initiate or carry through the necessary changes."\textsuperscript{17}

A realization dawned that behind the bizzare elements played up by the media lay a serious reform movement:

"The New Feminism is not about the elimination or differences between the sense; nor even simply the achievement of equal opportunity: it concerns the individual's right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person."\textsuperscript{18}


Most feminists believe that the pernicious effect of socialization makes women suppress the greater part of their human potential. A member of the NOW's (National Organization for Women) board of directors expresses herself in following words:

"I want to have part in creating a New society............I want woman to have something to say in their own lives...........I have never reached my potential because of social conditions. I'm not going to get the rewards. I've been crippled............I want to see the kind of system that facilitates the use of potential."

Finally all over the world women were granted suffrage by 1928 and after the IIInd World War the women's movement which was a marginal movement up to 1950s came full swing. This feminism movement gave rise to many new branches like 'Liberal Feminism' including all those who campaign for equal rights for women within the framework of the liberal state, arguing that the theoretical basis on which this state is built is sound but that the rights and privileges it confers must be extended to women to give them equal citizenship with men. Jane Lewis indicates the way in which the equality-difference question has structured feminist debates over women's relation to the welfare state arguing that:

"Feminism has also experienced what is in fact an historical tension between an organisation and practice that starts from women's claims as mothers and one that believed the main task to be the problem of defining and obtaining equality for women as individuals in the public sphere."


Liberal feminism refers to the tradition finding classical expression in John Stuart Mill's "The subjugation of women". This tradition has continued in various moderate groups like the National organisation for women, which agitate for legal reform to improve the status of women.

The Classical Marxist Feminist views the oppression of women as historical and currently a direct result of the institution of private property. It can only be ended, therefore, by the abolition of that institution. As Andrea Dworkin argues:

"Male sexual domination is a material system with an ideology and a metaphysics. The sexual colonization of women's bodies is a material reality. Men control the sexual and reproductive uses of women's bodies. The institution of control include law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care, the economy, organized religious and systematized physical aggression against women."\(^{21}\)

For maxists oppression is the chief characteristic of a society where a small class of individuals owns the means of production and hence is able to dominate the lives of the majority who are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive. Marxists, moreover, recognised that women suffer special form of oppression to which men are not subjected. The special oppression of women results primarily from their traditional position in the family. Monique Witting for example says:

"There is no sex. There is but a sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary. The contrary would be to say that sex creates oppression or to say that the cause (Origin) of oppression is to be found in sex itself, in a natural division of the sexes pre-existing (or outside of) society."\(^{22}\)

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The Marxists indicate the direction in which women must move. Engels writes:

"The first condition for the liberation of women is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry."^23

Thus, the Marxists see women's oppression as a function of the larger socioeconomic system. They also believe that the restructuring of the society as envisaged by them will bring freedom to man from its traditional responsibility.

Cultural feminists main concern is with therapy movement cults or matriarchy, women-bonding meditation, goddess worship and the study of women in literature and art, Walby points out that feminist strugglers have led to significant changes in the household and the relationship between men and women in the family:

"Women are no longer necessarily bound to an individual husband who expropriates their labour till death does them part. Instead, increasing number of women change husbands, have children without husband and engage in work for an employer other than their husband. Women spend a smaller proportion of their life-time's labour under patriarchal relations of production, although while they are full-time housewives they spend as many hours on this labour as did women many decades earlier. Women from different ethnic groups vary as to the extent to which they are engaged in these patriarchal production relations."^24

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No doubt, cultural feminists are known for their concentration on spiritual and psychological liberation and perpetuating phailocratic stereotype types of feminity such as focusing on spirituality, maternal instinct and healing nature.

Another major contribution to the contemporary women's movement has been made by Lesbian feminists, i.e. women who identify as lesbians. They have produced the concept of 'women identification'. It again analyses male power and women's community from the point of view of women's liberation. It also includes political lesbianism and compulsory heterosexuality. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (U.K.) and the Furies Collective (Washington D.C.) formulated the ideas of the political Lesbian movement based on the Radical lesbian's paper. 'The Women Identified women'. Political lesbians maintain that women must primarily withdraw from the privileges imposed by men. There should be no commitment to men. No access should be given to the economy of male power and privilege.

Another import and branch of feminism is Socialist Feminism. It aims at discovering the interaction between the dialectic of sex and class. Socialist feminists study the status of domestic labour. They study women's position in the family, class and the labour force. It deals with the question of equal pay for equal work. As Rowbotham explains:

"Woman workers did not simply say homework should be banned. It was a vital means by which women with children should support themselves. Instead they proposed that homework be paid the same note as work in workshops. They also demanded State Child-Care, Laundries, and restaurants, along with training for women worker. They began to form their own cooperative associations to secure
employment, improve conditions, and enable them to run their work places democratically. These cooperative associations extended beyond the work place. They provided housing and welfare services and they imagined communal housing with gardens and schools and health services for workers on a large scale."  

According to socialist feminists, private property and class divided society are the root cause of women's critical condition in the society. They hold that women should organise and struggle against patriarchy simultaneously and capitalism. According to socialists production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children are in the root of women's powerlessness.

Radical feminism becomes an important branch of contemporary feminism which gives priority to the concept of sexual politics and the dialectic sex. Radical feminism is a recent attempt to create a new conceptual model by understanding many different forms of social oppression in terms of the basic concept of sexual oppression. Radical feminists deny the liberal claim that the basis of women's oppression consists in their lack of political or civil rights. Similarly, they reject the classical Marxist belief that basically women are oppressed because they live in a class society. They present critiques of male violence and power such as rape, battery and pornography etc. Liz Kelly describes Radical Feminism in these words:

"Radical Feminism is for me a theoretical position which argues that men, collectively and as individuals, have an interest in maintaining women's oppression. It contains with

in it a call to action to change to world. It is also promised on the pro-women line that our feminist energies are for ourselves and other women. Beyond their basic premises there are considerable differences between radical feminist theory and practice.”

Another interesting point about this movement is that it has dealt with the issues of rape and physical disability in 1980s. Radical feminists do not believe in biological differences. They say that these differences between the sexes stand because "Woman is made no bort." Hence, the radical feminists conclude that women's liberation requires a biological revolution. They believe that only now through technology women can be liberated from the fundamental inequalities of the bearing and rearing of children. They talk of achieving this through the development of techniques of artificial reproduction. They also believe that ultimately technology will liberate both sexes from the necessity to work. Both the biological and economic bases of the family will be removed by technology.

For Simon de Beauvoir, 'The humanity is male' but for the black women the 'humanity is white and male' as they suffer from racial and gender oppression they differ from both the white women and the black men. The black woman has to struggle for equality both as a woman and as an African-American and this part of feminism movement was known as Black Feminist Consciousness Being Black, these women suffered from racism: being females, they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hand of the patriarchs as well as the blacks; and being former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meagre resources and were compelled to remain poor. In short, the black women jeopardize racism,
sexism and classicism. A well known social scientist, Calvin Hernton, has described the position and fate of black women most appropriately. He says:

"From time to time in America various individuals and groups besides Negroes have been victim of prejudice, discrimination murder......But it has been Negro women, more than anyone else, who has borne the constant agonies of racial barbarity in America from the very first day she was brought in chains to this soil - The Negro women through the years have suffered every sexual outrage (with all of the psychological ramification) that a democratic society can possibly inflict upon a human being. The sexual atrocities that the Negro woman has suffered in united states, South and North, and what these atrocities have done to her personality as a female creature, is a tale more bloody and brutal than most of us can imagine."  

Though the Black women's womanhood was denied, Sojourner Truth tried to regain it by asking question such as:

"That man over there says women need to be helped in to carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriage, or over mud-puddle, or give me any best place! and amn't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arms! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered in to barns, and no man could head me! And amn't I a women? I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and bear the lash as well! And amn't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children

and seen them most of all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And am not I a Woman?\textsuperscript{28}

Thus a Black woman like Sojourner Truth exposed the concept of woman as being culturally constructed by using the contradictions between her like as an African-American woman and the qualities ascribed generally to women. Bell Hooks in her book, writes about the history of Black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism.

All these kinds of classifications are undoubtedly useful in providing an intelligible understanding of the position of feminist movement. Contemporary feminists may be ranked as liberal, socialist and Radical. They share some common concepts. Each seems in its own way committed to solve the same problem i.e. the position and status of women in the society.

Feminist literary criticism has developed as a component of the women's movement and its impact has brought about a revolution in literary studies. This new approach profoundly attends several critical assumptions. It offers a new perspective on literature and emphasizes the need for a search of new paradigms. Since antiquity, it has been taken for granted that the reader, writer and critic of literature are male. Feminist criticism has shown that women readers and critics bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experiences. It insists that women have also told important stories of culture. Elaine Showalter draws attention to this critical revolution in the following words:

"While literary criticism and its philosophical branch, literary theory have always been zealously guarded bastions of male intellectual endeavour, the success of feminist criticism has opened a space for the authority of the women critic that extended beyond the study of woman's writing to the reappraisal of whole body of texts that make up our literary heritage."  

Feminist criticism operates in three ways: (i) It unfolds the literary representation of sexual differences; (ii) It brings out the way that literary genres have been shaped by masculine or feminine values; (iii) and it shows the exclusion of the female voice from the institutions of literature, criticism and theory. Thus, feminist criticism established gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis. Toril Moi points towards the work of many women who are turning Freudian psychoanalytic into a source of feminist analysis of sexual difference and the construction of gender in patriarchal society. Similarly Helene Citous and Luce Irigaracy have put the philosophy of Jacques Derrida to brilliant feminist use, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have recreated the literary theory of Harold Bloom. Kristeva in her article "Women's Time", advocates a deconstructive approach to sexual difference and argues for feminist struggle to be seen historically and politically as a three-tiered phenomenon: (i) woman demand equal access to the symbolic order, considered Liberal Feminism equality; (ii) women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference, termed Radical Feminism- femininity extolled; (iii) women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical. The third position, as it challenges the very

notion of identity in deconstructing the opposition between masculinity and femininity, is advocated by Kristeva:

"In the third attitude which I strongly advocate which I imagine, the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics, what can 'identity' even 'sexual identity' mean a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged."  

Kate Millet in her book sexual politics (1969) describes the relation between the sexes as basically political, as one group of persons is controlled by another. She also feels that rudimentary sexual differences are cultural in origin. She wishes for a time when there will be no monogamous family. She is very much like the militant feminists when she discourages nuclear families. She is also against Freud's theory of 'Penisenvy'. Germaine Greer also discourages marriage and nuclear family in "The Female Eunuch (1970), Eva Figes's "Patriarchal Attitudes" (1970), Mitchell's "Women's Estate" (1971) and Oakley's "Sex Gender And Society" (1972), "The Sociology of Housework" (1974) and "Housewife" (1976) are some of them. As far as feminism and literature are concerned, we find that the feminists of today are not satisfied with the question of stereotyped presentation of women by male writers. This dissatisfaction in a way is the genesis of feminist literature. This has been followed by an independent study of women's writing. Elaine Showaller uses the term 'gynocritics' for this. Gynocritics aim at establishing female literary tradition because feminists complain that they have been 'silenced' by their male counterparts. This is a strange change in the face of the plain fact that most of the female literature has been published,
stretched and praised women's experiences become the central concern in feminist literature. Women writers like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Drabble and Doris Lessing took up certain feminist issues in their work.

Virgina Woolf emphasized that the problem of women writers has been that male sentences of nineteenth century are instituted for a woman's use because man's mind is too unlike woman's. She maintained that change in literature would open new possibilities for women. She also felt that there is a world of difference between male and female feelings, experiences and expressions. According to Virgina Woolf "Each sex describes itself"\(^\text{31}\) She searched for feminine identity and feminine style. Virginia Woolf's book 'A Room of One's Own' could be taken as the first forceful modern tract of feminism. Several of her opinions were later formulated by feminists in terms of theories. Virginia Woolf in 'A Room of One's Own' comments on the contradictory position of women in history:

"Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; Practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spiel, and was the property of husband."\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^{31}\) Quoted by Pandey, Miti, Feminism in contemporary British and Indian English Fiction, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi 2003, P. 14.

Woolf believes that man is now a "Virginia truncated animal", Virginia Woolf's conclusion that it is worse perhaps to be locked in than to be locked out, clearly indicates that men have shut up themselves in a prison of tradition from which they can not escape. She had the dream of redemptive women's colleges which is discernible through her entire oeuvre. She uses her pen as a weapon to demolish male authority and hierarchical power structure. She draws a satirical picture of professor Von X, Paradigmatic patriarch in 'A Room of One's Own'. She describes her fictive victory:

"I began to draw cartwheels and circles over the angry professor's face till he looked like a burning bush or a flaming comet any now, an apparition without human semblance or significance. The professor was nothing now but a tag of burning on the top Hampstead Heath."

Feminist thought is humanist thought Virginia. Woolf's. In 'Three Guineas', structured around three causes; First, to prevent war by helping a pacifists society; second, building of a women's college and third, establishing a society dedicated to helping woman to enter the professions. To her the three causes are interrelated and might help to prevent war and eradicated farce. She thought that women have never made war:

"Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not us."


Virginia Woolf proposes an outsider's society that will encourage the development of a women's ethic that is holistic, anti-militaristic and life affirming Virginia Woolf wrote in 1929:

"It is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values of which have been made by the other sex."\(^{35}\)

There is a moral vision inherent in the feminist thought. Susan Sontage strongly feels that:

"Virginia woolf was altogether correct when she declared that the fight to liberate women is the fight against fascism."\(^{36}\)

Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' is a brilliant piece in highlighting exceptional qualities of a woman. Elizabeth stands up to fight a type of mind-set, a kind of mentality which led the majority of men folk along picking and choosing females for their partners as and when they willed, without so much as consulting their mind. Elizabeth displays exceptional qualities of mind, tough mould of intellect and a self-respecting, dignified free-willed personality in coming to terms with the formidable challenges thrown by hostile minds, of both men and women. Jane Austen's projection of Elizabeths' strength of mind is simply superlative:

"I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked as a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal, you could not make me happy, and I am convinced


\(^{36}\) Ibid, P. 41
that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so....."37

Jane Austen's two female characters Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet, are endowed with the finest attributes of a sloganising feminist of later-day European society. Toni Morrison's novels revolve round the theme of isolation and identity of woman. They portray the lacerated self's struggle for freedom of speech and expression in an incarcerating milieu. Her accent is on the diversity of black sensibilities, horrors of slavery, modes of expression and independent thinking. Professor Anniah Gowda maintains:

"Her feminist attitude is fierce but her language is poetic. It has a worldly and sometimes satiric purpose. She acts against the myths of that dignity of black women by taking away their initiative."38

Woman to Morrison is a creative force and not a burden of continuity disgruntled self, a woman is at war with the patriarchal social forces, which implied the growth of her feminine instincts. Most of Afro-American women, like Toni Morrison, gave themselves up to the task of writing because they felt that their presence as a black woman and their perspective as a woman, in general, had been under-represented in American literature. The Black authors depict the Afro-American women's pain of being black and that too a female. Toni Morrison's novels stress the need for self-discovery and self identity leading to self-actualisation. Morrison Portrays the alienated individual's odyssey for

attaining the integration of the self by assimilating or discarding the social values of the community they live in.

The allied themes of racism and gender discrimination echo through the heroines of Morrison. These women are shown desperately searching for their genuine self. Her novel 'The Bluest Eye' (1970) has the ingredients of a black voice railing against the myth of the black monolith and racist supremacy. 'The Bluest Eye' is the story of a young black girl Pecola. It squeezes the great spectrum of black feminine voice into the pseudo mould of stereotype. It probes deeper into the black woman's psychic dilemmas, oppressions and trials symbolised by the tragic life of Pecola. Through Pecola's character, Morrison traces the cautious and careful process of growing up from adolescent sensuality into womanly repression. "To get rid of the funkiness, the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" is what the Morrison's women carve for. Sensuality in Morrison is related to sexuality, which symbolically portrays the image of the liberated woman in Morison's novels. Morrison writes against the erosion and repression of female sexuality as it is channelled by male desire and satisfied by domestic hand-up. Ruth in 'Song of Solomon' (1977) has been defined by her father's overprotection and her husband's rejection. Morrison's character Sula's life is a challenge to male dominated heterosexual roles for women. She is an affront to the way man have traditionally defined women as either mother or wife. Her challenge has been to suggest the possibility of creating a female equivalent to male bonding. Feminism in Morrison's novels is grounded upon "The Structure of a Culture......which defines women, as worthless and invisible victim." Her female characters struggle for their liberation from being manipulated by a corporate society reeling under the throes of

capitalism and thereby save themselves from self-mutilation. They are in
dynamic involvement with, at the same time are critically opposed to the
system of society in which they live in order to assert their feminine self.
In Margaret Atwood's novel 'Edible Woman', Marian and Ainsley are in
search of a destiny that should transient and replace, the domestic round.
They are dissatisfied with man-made values. They are reluctant to be
mere wives to be that is to be losing ones existence. It is to become a
commodity for consumption. Therefore, they are in search of their
freedom and liberty. They are eager to break the balance between their
public and private lives. They are bewitched by the lure of a distinct
identity and worldly fame by a secure and lucrative job. They have
instinctive dislike for their home and hearth. They hardly recognize what
women have to bring into the world of men to make their lives whole and
meaningful. They are eager to achieve their goals by sacrificing their
nature.

Doris Lessing analyses the concept of freedom for women and
discovers its insubstantiality. Regarding freedom she says that every
human being is un-free from the moment of conception since he is a
chance conglomeration of inherited things, his parent's attitudes, the
people who chance to influence him. "The Golden Notebook" with its
'tfree women sections is a tattle debunking of the concept of freedom. In
an interview given in 1969 at Stony Brook, Lessing said:
"I'm impatient with people who emphasize sexual revolution.
I say we should all go to bed, shut up about sexual liberation
and go on with the important matters."41

Doris Lessing has deeply proved the problem of female identity in
relation to sexual relationship with men. She shows that nature or female
instinct itself propels woman towards union with man, though most of the

41. Jonah Ruskin, "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook : An Interview", New American Review
8(1970), P. 175.
unions resulting marriage prove hazardous owing mainly to the situation of being a woman in a male dominated society. "The Summer Before the Dark" is Doris Lessing's best statement of the problem of female integration. She concentrated on a problem, which is common perhaps to women all over the world. The novel depicts Kate Brown's efforts to establish her identity to regain her neglected personality. She takes a job as a translator and builds a maternal identity for herself.

Margaret Drabble has rightly been called a 'Women's novelist'. In her early novels, "A Summer Bird Cage" and "The Millstone", Drabble is concerned with the 'situation of being a woman'. Her first novel is a close enactment of Simone de beauvoir's 'The Second Sex', Sarah Bennett, the heroine of this novel is a fresh graduate faced with a ticklish problem of choosing between marriage and a career. The adolescent girl says Beauvoir:

".......cannot become 'grown up' without accepting her feminity, and she knows already that her sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence."42

Drabble calls 'The Waterfall' the most female of all her books. Here again the question raised is whether it is possible to be a woman and autonomous and transcendent in patriarchy. 'The Waterfall' is most female because the heroine, Jane does not seek to fly in the face of her feminity, sexuality and her first words bear witness to her passivity:

"If I were drawing, I couldn't reach out a hand to save myself, so unwilling am I to set myself up against my fate."43

42. Quoted by Pandey, Miti, "Feminism in Contemporary British and Indian English Fiction", New Delhi, Sarup & Sons, 2003, P. 36.
Margaret Drabble, when asked about the limitation and freedom of woman, pointed that the whole human species is confronted with problems and limitations; not only the women. She believes that women folk are looking for spiritual satisfaction or fulfillment and the gap between what they are seeking and what they find is very great. And this is true of both sexes. No doubt, her female characters seek female self definition but the search for self does not rely much on their gender, as on a life that is absurd and chaotic, contradictory as well as shifting. Margaret Drabble proves that a female writer has not only to highlight a woman and her powers, but she has at the same time to see woman in relation to society, woman in relation to this universe. Drabble comments aptly:

"I'm not at all been on the feminist view that there's a male conspiracy to put women down. I don't think that's true. Society is organised so that these collisions and disasters take place.......... There's no use pretending that marriage is in a good state or that the relations between the sexes are happy at the moment. It's no good blaming patriarchy or men for this. Both sexes are at fault. And the institution of marriage itself is at fault. This is one of the theme that novels can explore without any preconceived ideas as to what the answer should be."\(^{44}\)

Margaret Drabble is conscious of the fate of 20th Century women, who are desperately trying to strike a balance between domesticity and other professional roles.

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\(^{44}\) Quoted by Pandey, Miti, "Feminism in contemporary British and Indian English Fiction", Sarup & Sons, New Delhi 2003, P. 139.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in 'The Woman's Bible', interpreted the Bible as a historical document, rather than as divine revelation. Christian ideas about sexuality and maternity had been to degrade women. She wrote that the canon and Civil law, Church and State, priests and legislators, all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man and for man, an inferior being, subject to men. Creeds, codes, forms, ceremonies and customs of society, Church, ordinances and discipline all grow out this idea, summing up the Bible position of women. She wrote that the Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death in to the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arranged before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for woman was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection. She was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Stanton did not accept this position on historical and rational grounds and argued that originally the scripture depicted man and woman as equal - Later translations and interpretations were, responsible for woman's degraded position in the religious scripture. Demanding the right to vote she wrote:

"We have no objection to discuss the question of equality for we feel that the weight of argument lies wholly with us, but we wish the question of equality kept distinct from the question of rights. All white men in this country have the same rights, however they may differ in mind, body or
estate. The right is ours. The question now is, how shall we get possession of what rightfully belong to us?"\(^{45}\)

The essence of Stanton's feminism was the belief that, ultimately, life placed the same demands on women as on men, required the same resources of them, and therefore, in justice should provide them with the same individual rights.

In the novels of Charlotte Bronte we find a fine touch of feminist thoughts. Her point of view is specifically the point of view of woman. She pictures and highlights the primeval woman in her novels. In the "Preface of Pilgrimage" Dorothy Richards desired to create a feminine equivalent of the prevailing masculine realism. She sought for a feminist prose, free from punctuation or any other formal obstruction. She took up certain feminist issues in her works. All feminist writers admit that the greatest problem for women is the preservation and expression of their identity.

Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, women's place, position, identity are the major issue in India and third world countries. The discourse of feminism can not be complete without telling the Indian side of history and the struggle fought by them for feminism. The belief that feminism originated only in North America and Europe and that any other forms of feminism activity must be copies or limitations of this original feminism was denied by Kumari Jaya Wardena (1986). She argues forcefully that feminism was not a Western creation but has indigenous roots in the third world."\(^{46}\)

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She contests the view of some Third world writers who have argued that feminism is a western ideology not suited to the conditions in the countries and that the fight for national liberation must come before that women's emancipation. Jaya Wardena claims that, struggles for women's emancipation were an essential and integral part of national resistance movements and women rarely organized autonomously but more usually as subsidiaries or wings of male- dominated nationalist groups. Jaya Wardena highlights a fact that some Western feminists seem to have overlooked - namely, that women in third world countries have developed their own indigenous feminist movement with their own specific goals. This point is also made forcefully by Uma Narayan, talking about the Indian feminist movement. Third world feminism, she argues, is a response to particular problems in Third world countries. And although antifeminists in India have attempted to diminish feminism by branding it a western import, the situation is that Indian women have specific problems which the Indian feminist movement has sought to address:

"Issues that feminist groups in India have politically engaged with include problems of dowry - murder and dowry- related harassment of women, police rape of women in custody; issues relating of women's poverty, health and reproduction; and issues of ecology of communalism that affect women's lives. Indian feminist political activities clearly make feminist and feminism part of national political landscape of many Third world countries. I am arguing that third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of 'Western agendas' in one clear and simple sense-that, for instance, Indian feminism is clearly a response to issues specifically confronting many Indian women."\(^47\)

From the sociological cultural and historical point of view, the place of women in Indian society has always been envisioned as being backward. Manu, the great law-giver in the literary tradition of India, laid down a code of conduct for women, which samaks of hypocrisy and establishes the irrefutable superiority of the male figure. He says in 'Manav Dharma Shastra':

"Where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased, but where they are dishonoured, there all religious acts become fruitless."\(^{48}\)

At the same time he ratifies the following code of behaviour for women:

"Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practicing the incomparable rules of virtue, which have been followed by such women, as were devoted to one only husband."\(^{49}\)

Further, he proclaims audaciously:

"Yes, by this course of life it is, that a woman, whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection acquires high renown in this world and the next, the same abode with her husband."\(^{50}\)

Herein, perhaps, Manu has revealed the eternal paradox inherent in the attitude of Indian society towards woman. Enshrined on a pedestal


\(^{49}\) Ibid, P. 168.

\(^{50}\) Ibid, P. 169.
and invested with the equality of manifested divinity, she is at the same
time spurned and rejected as being a sinner and destroyer. She is defined
in the Vedas as being Shakti, the centrifugal source of energy for the
creation of the world. The literary tradition becomes a determining factor
for moulding her rights and duties in Ramayana. She is depicted as Sita,
the quintessence of wifely devotion and the epitome of womanhood. P.
Thomas observes:

"In fact, throughout the long and eventful history of Indian
womanhood, the story of Sita has been the mainstay of many
a Hindu woman, whose lot has been as hard as Sita's, at
times, even harder; and many have borne it as ungrudgingly
as Sita."51

Susan Wadely rightly says about woman:

"The wifely role is of subordination, of devotion in any
circumstances, of dutifulness."52

The traditional concept of feminity in India, crystallizes the
woman's role in relationship to others, especially to man, and defines her
role as wife, mother, sister, daughter etc. depending on her respective
adaptability to all these successive stations in life. As per the norms of
Hindu tradition, the concept of duty is paramount for her. According to
Ananda Coomaraswamy:

"The governing concept of Hindu ethics is vocation
(dharma); the highest merit consists in the fulfillment of
one's own duty, in other words, in dedication of one's
calling."53

All these discourse make one thing clear that the problems of woman in India in many ways differ from the problems of her western counterpart and these problems of Indian women depends on various social, political and cultural factors, Rehana Ghadially says:

"unlike western woman, Indian woman's identity is deeply embedded not in the marital twosome, but in the entire family, caste, class and community. To untangle her true self from this morass of intertwining network is no mean task." 54

Main difference between Western and Indian feminist movement lies in the fact that whereas in the West women came to the forefront for demanding a better deal for them; in India leaders of the Indian Renaissance and English educated gentry took up the cause of women's liberation in their hands. During the colonial period in India Nationalist Movement and Social reform movement took place. Mahatma Gandhi had belief in women's ability and had a deep faith in the inner strength of women. Women participated freely in his 'Satyagrah Movement'. Men in India took up the cause of women so strengthly that many women also organised themselves and fought for their rights. Most of these women worked under Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade and Anandi Bai Joshi. Writers like Bankim and Tagore were the first to observe that Indian women would be a patent vehicle for an author for expressing his talent. Tagore's Streepatra can be regarded as the first feminist work in India. Many heart touching and realistic characters of women are introduced by talented writers like Prem Chand, Khandelkar, Sarad Chandra and Ravindra Nath Tagore. Tagore's Binodini is the most convincing female

character. It is the story of a girl, an unmarried girl, who is a social disgrace to a respectable Hindu family. She is very beautiful and cultured, She is married to an old man because her father could not afford to pay a handsome dowry. Her old husband died and she is subjected to tortures. She rebels against the harshness of orthodoxy and she fights alone the battle for her happiness. After Independence Mulk Raj Anand, in his works reveal the bitter actualities of the lives of Indian women, whom he calls 'The Poorest of the Poor'. In his novel 'Old Woman and the Cow', he has portrayed Gauri as the modern mother India. Raja Rao regards maternity as the most sacred of earthly manifestations. He envies a woman because she can give birth. Balchandra Rajan is such a writer, whose contribution to the study of women in India, is quite significant. In his work the 'Dark Dancer' Cynthia is the symbol of the new spirit from the west and Kamala is the image of doomed Indian womanhood. Bhawani Battacharya, another famous writer, presents the Indian woman as pure. Her purity is combined with vitality and virago ideals. It is unfortunate that she is the object of universal victimization. In his famous novel 'Music for Mohini' charming and vivacious Mohini is made the victim of the taboos of village life by the big house bachelor. His novel like 'He who Rides of Tiger' and 'A Goddess Named Gold' also describe the tyranny performed by society against cultured women. Women, in India, were long unaware of their miserable condition. It was possible with the advent of the Indian Renaissance, the new education, political struggle and ever - increasing western impact, that they began to show some signs of awakening, fortunately for them, enlightened leadership encouraged them in their forward march. The most important Indian Leaders believe in the equality of man and woman and tried to improve the lot of Indian woman. After independence the Indian constitution granted them rights at par with the males. This, however, is only one side
of the picture. In theory and before law, men and women are equal but in practice women are subjected to all sorts of discrimination. Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, woman's place, position and especially the question of her identity are the major issues in India also. The Indian woman is caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. In India, since ages, a woman's role in life was strictly compartmentalized; She was a daughter, a wife or a mother and these issues are raised by a number of female novelists including Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Bharti Mukherji, Jhabvala, and Arundhati Roy. In Indian society, it is the Institution of joint family which demands a lot of flexibility and adjustability from a woman. If the other members of the family are not sympathetic and broad - minded, the newly married girl has to face a lot of troubles and her experience may embitter his life, as happens in the novels of Anita Desai. In India sexual freedom, for example, has not assumed the enormous proportion as it has in West. In India economic freedom for women is more important than sexual one because it often subjects them to male tyranny. The woman novelists alone represent a colourful spectrum of creative consciousness with the added advantage of their feminine sensibility. They have given new dimensions to contemporary Indian English fiction. Women are different from men not only physically but also emotionally. A woman can bitterly understand women's mental agony and other circumstances better than man. The vigorously orperative feminine sensibility in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya is revealed by her novels in a number of ways. The Indian woman can endure almost any injustice to serve her husband or family. The novels of Kamala Markandaya best illustrate this point. Kamala Markandaya's "A silence of Desire" depicts the unconscious desire of housewife, Sarojini, to fight the decay of herself within the marital relationship. Kamala Markandaya
presented degraded condition of the Indian women not only in "A silence of Desire", but in "Nectar in a Sieve" and other novels. She is never satisfied with the stand of the Indian woman that "A woman's place is with her husband."\(^{55}\)

C.T. Indra Considers the achievements of Kamala Markandaya on the basis of human thought so she writes:

"Kamala Markandaya has managed to give full play to a women's self cast in a relatively unadventurous social milieu and that is a remarkable achievement."\(^{56}\)

Kamala Markandaya's feminine sensibility is revealed by her technique and style as well. Her female central protagonists are also the narrators of her stories. Nayantara Sahgal reveals her feminine sensibility in her choice of woman characters. Her experience as a woman have largely influenced her treatment of her women characters: Kusum (A Time To Be Happy), Rahsmi (This Time of Morning), Saroj (Storm In Chandigarh) and Simrit (The Day In Shadow). Not only she advocates the cause of 'New woman' in her novels but she presents a rare insight into the emotional needs of a woman. She has taken up themes and issues which are close to a women's heart in modern India. One of Sahgal's characters makes a very significant remark:

"If Chastily is so important and so well worth preserving ..........it would be easier to safeguard it by keeping men in seclusion, not women."\(^{57}\)

Sahgal pronounces through Saroj that her premarital sexual relationship has nothing to do with her chastity or impurity as after her


\(^{56}\) C.T. Indra, 'The true voice of endurance, A study of Ruman, in Markandaya's 'Nactor in a Sieve' Feminism and Recent Fiction in English, ed. Sushila Singh, New Delhi 1991, P. 71.

marriage. She leads as decent and disciplined life. Quest for female identity and emotional fulfillment are the major motives of Sahgal's novels. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is both an 'out sider' and an 'in sider'. She is a European woman but is having an Indian family. There is a sort of intellectual stain in her exploration of the ridiculous element in Indian life. Nevertheless, she is a woman and this fact is revealed by her focus on women character and her theme. Her experience of having an Indian family helps her explore feminine psychology within largely domestic setting. Jhabvala displays her feminine sensibility in the perception and portrayal of Indian women's family life and the role of mother in the traditional Indian household. In 'To Whom She Will' and 'The Nature of Passion' she takes up the themes of love and marriage. The Novels of shashi Despande catches subtle psychological complexity of her individual mind. What has been upheld in her novels is the view that a woman, even when she is talented and highly educated, has to realize social responsibilities and think also of those who are around her, rather than lead an insular existence. She represents her feministic view in her novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors". When Nalu's students, two girls, came to interview, Saru, the famous lady doctor. She advised them never to surpass their husband if they wished to enjoy a happy married life she tells them: "always walk a few steps behind her husband."\(^\text{58}\)

She tells the girl:

"If he's an M.A. You should be a B.A. If he's 5.4" tall you should not be more than 5.3" tall. If he is earning Rs. 500, you should never earn more than Rs. 499."\(^\text{59}\)


\(^{59}\) Ibid, P. 124.
Shashi Despandeey expresses her view that the mind of conventional woman could never open and broaden; she could never blossom or think; In "That Long Silence" she depicts the life of Jaya, a housewife and a failed writer. The novel depicts the life of Jaya at the level of the silent and unconscious. She revolts but in silence, silence was her natural condition. When her husband Mohan, talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands, which he calls strength, she passionately bursts in to rumination:

"He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in the front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon, silence and surrender."  

These lines show the inner agony of a women's heart. Psychological complexity of women, finds full expression in the novels of Shashi Despandeey. In the light of feminist critical theory Anita Desai's novels can be examined as the manifesto of female predicament. She, moreover, represents the welcome "Creative release of feminine sensibility". She presents women as her central character to portray women's psychology. Maya (Cry The Peacock), Monisha (Voices in the City), Sarah (Bye-Bye Black Bird), Sita (Where Shall We Go This Summer) Nanda Kaul ("Fire on the Mountain) and Bim ("Clear Light of Day") are all sensitive and complex heroines of her fiction and present Anita Desai's talent of understanding the female psyche. In "Cry the Pecock" Maya feels established and depotentiated even after four years of marriage, Maya and Gautama are apposed to each other both represent the extremities of feminine and masculine, father and brother Arjuna

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reflects archetypal feminism. Ann Lowny Weir examines the feminine sensibility of the novelist and argues:

"Anita Desai is the vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness........she gives her readers valuable insights in to the feminine consciousness though her memorable protagonists."62

"Voices in the city" articulates Monisha's plight and physic life and intimately shows the woman like female bird in the cages:

"She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. She wants to be herself and not to compromise."63

In "Where shall we go this summer" there is aching voice in the life of Sita as a woman, a wife and a mother. Sita is badly disturbed by having a bitter experience of insular and unimaginative way of life of her husband and his people. Desai's preoccupation with Indian women is genuine. As a part of the feminine sensibility of a rapidly changing women she has the opportunity to sharing the feeling of the women under various circumstances. Ila Das, can serve the purpose. In "Fire on the Mountain" Ila Das is projected as a character with all her reaction to the changing customs and cultures of the Indian society. Mrs. Desai brings fresh insight into the understanding of the female psyche by depicting their frustrations, their problems and worries which find expression through their reactions. The recurring themes of Anita Desai's novels are woman's struggle for self - realisation and self-definition, woman's quest for her identity, her pursuit of freedom,

equality and transcendence, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level.

Thus, the question of female identity has therefore become a real palpable human problem in our society. Various forces and factors have brought in growing cracks in the traditional roles of Indian women. The feminine consciousness in India is slowly nurturing itself within the cracks in traditional roles. These are some of the important points of divergence in the approach of Indian women novelists. But inspite of all the divergent issues, the basic similarity does not diffuse. The exploitation of women in various ways, male chauvinism, patriarchal injustice, above all the stupefaction of women in marriage and their loss of identity, all these pertinent practices and experiences remain. At the present time we can see a large number of women writers with feminism movement like Arundhti Roy, Kamla Das, Shuba Tiwari, Aroonima Sinha, Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai who give a new dimension to feminism movement. Thus, with certain ideological differences, feminism aims at liberation of women from male domination and at promotion of their rights. The main thing in this movement is the demand for a humanistic attitude towards women. Feminists may use different vocabularies and concepts but their objective is always the same that is the "Quest for female identity."