CHAPTER – III

SURVIVORS

The survivors are the pioneers of ‘new women’ who are on the threshold of women’s emancipation. They are assertive and strong women who instil courage and inspiration to the weak. Survival’s importance lies: it created a sense of ‘being’. The importance of Survival is that it created a sense of being in oneself.

Survival is taken up as the competence to adjust to situation of internal distress and external danger. By protecting one’s own self, the self turns inwards and just when it seems to have perfected the art of survival the honor of it looms through the mask. Survival is a first step towards awareness, the basic realization that there is a victor / victim patterning inherent in life, that it may be traced in the relationship of character in a novel, in external action, in psychological movement in image pattern, in symbolism.

Feminists like Simon de Beauvoir, Betty Frieden and Kate Millet with their feminist theories have influenced most of the women writers who have successfully attempted to break the literary and social norms of the past. Elaine Showalter’s first phase is where women are expected to survive by adhering to dogmas and indiscriminate conventions:
“And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity.” (Beauvoir 13)

The so-called ‘Feminine’ or oppressed women are now survivors by transforming and entertaining social and cultural ambience. Women writers are products of specific cultural pattern, social orientation and realities. In women texts the female protagonists is “the self” and in men’s “the other” and this itself is a significant grand for two separate discourse and gender determined construction. Women’s texts in India are as much accommodable within the feminist literary criticism as are their texts in the west because the oppressive role of patriarchy and the represented character of the dominant phallocentric culture are equally, if not more, identifiable in the Indian Literature.

The concept of feminism that crystallized in literature even before the writers dealt with the women’s predicament in the society. A striking feature of the struggle for survival of the past erst while character has been the assertion which preceded the unified struggle itself. The unifying theme in all these writers and rather their novels is the survival aspects. The attempt
here has been to focus on the survivors, who are aware of their predicament and try to come out of it.

A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women’s life and problems. Feminist consciousness is the experience of a way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. Feminist consciousness terms a “fact” into a “contradiction”, often features of social reality and only apprehends as contradictory from the vantage point of radical project of transformation. Thus women understand what they are and where they are in the light of what they are not yet. Thus they comprehend their world and also what it is not and the world that could be if changed. Simone de Beauvoir states that the myth of feminity is dethroned when the women begin to affirm their independence in concrete ways.

Oppression is terrible, it is far more terrible for women added to all the other burden they undergo. Many women have found that neither the struggle for “social equality” nor the focus on an ideology of women as an autonomous being who get rid of the society of sexism and male domination. Individual freedom and the freedom of all women are linked when women reach the critical consciousness that ‘we are united first of all in our freedom’.
They discern new and imported discoveries about themselves resulting in a sobering effect and finally they find a sense of fulfillment in their relation to the world. In a tradition oriented society or in a male dominated society women character adjust well and were able to felicitously establish their own value-system and the inner potentiality that enables them to resist unjust social presume.

A woman is no longer a mere sign in the writing of men, nor is she merely the muse, the idealized inspiration of the masculine artist and thinker, who may be the all-pervasive aesthetic procreation and the father of the text and whose pen is his instrument of generative power. Instead a woman is a creator herself and an imaginative being whose discourse is a subversion of her silence and whose speech is a challenge to her peripheral status. The female writers (of India) have thus come of age and have also began to question and assess their situations in the social frame work.

Women are seen as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and grandmothers and not as rebels and comrades, privileged and underprivileged or strong and vulnerable members of the society. The women rise above all pressures and disparities and cross the barriers of discrimination only for the larger concepts of universal love and concord and their vitality is both physical and emotional. Betty Freidan’s view was that
women are a weaker social group that led her to argue for a massive self-help programme to enable women to re-enter the labour market through educational opportunities.

A feminist is a woman who recognizes herself, and is recognized by others, as a feminist. That awareness depends on a woman having experienced consciousness-raising, knowledge of women’s oppression, and recognition of women’s differences and communalities. Feminists are concerned about cultural definition of femininity in the media which respects stereotyping sex roles. Feminists interpret femininity more positively.

This chapter focuses on the theme of survival in the select works of Anita Desai’s *Fasting Feasting*, Margaret Atwood’s, *The Edible Woman* and Alice Walker’s, *The Color Purple*. The survivors who have over come the hurdles and have turned out to withstand the situation are Uma and Aruna in *Fasting Feasting*, Ainsley in *The Edible Woman* and Nettie, Sofia and Mary Agnes from Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

Rising out from stereotype, the protagonists search for freedom from the social values, structures which put the characters in a conflict with their immediate human context. The protagonists unlike the stereotypes arise from the lack of understanding or rather ignorance. The curiosity to know
and to overcome the suppression gives rise to anguish over whelming them all over. They compete to adjust to situation both internal and external danger. They realize that survival is possible only by accepting life by overcoming the hurdles. The survivors fight and prove the power of women. But under this hard shell of a warrior is the soul of a brooding spirit with the desire of living like a perfect individual.

In Anita Desai’s *Fasting Feasting* Uma is the older plainer daughter and the main protagonist who is considered to be a highly passive character throughout but all the bitter experiences she gains in her life makes her to swim against the tide. Uma appears a depressed girl, a victim of her circumstances, a victim of her fate and as such she accepts her destiny quiet ungrudgingly. She is not an insensible or an unthinkable person, but is a girl full of tender feelings; she has her wishes and desires, imagination and expectations, which she is unable to express. But there is a sense of agony, a sense of irreparable loss and permanent shock in her which she deliberately hides in order to remain true to her nature.

As an ordinary girl she lives in the society accepting all the humiliations, injustices, sufferings and miseries without raising any voice or making resistance. She suffers quietly only to prove her great sense of endurance and stoic acceptance.
Uma’s father, a relic of patriarchal domination is given special treatment; for he is the only one in the family who is given a finger bowl and a napkin:

“ ‘Where is Papa’s finger bowl?’ she asks loudly.

The finger bowl is placed before Papa. He dips his fingertips in and wipes them on the napkin. He is the only one in the family who is given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status.”

(FF 24)

Daughters in this society are denied autonomy. Uma and her sister Aruna are not given any privacy. They were seen as possessions - to be used in a manner which suits the parents:

“Uma and Aruna, in the portico, looking in, drew together, awe-struck. Uma never overcame her awe of that extraordinary event, really far more memorable than the birth itself. As for Aruna, it could be said to have started a lifetime of bridling, of determined self-assertion.” (FF 17)

Failing to get her married, Uma’s parents use her to make life more comfortable for themselves. She is continually at the beck and call of her parents, who orders to do one task after another. Every moment of her life is controlled and all her decisions are made for her by her parents. They squash
all the opportunities that are present before her. Her only pleasure is looking though her collection of old dishes, cards and bangles.

Uma happens to be the most subdued or rather crushed member of the Indian family. She is like a catalyst whose presence is never noticed, never appreciated and yet whose absence may make all the difference. Uma is a woman lost in the jungle of duties – sometimes to her Mama, Papa, at other times to her brother Arun and at still other times to her sister Aruna. She is expected to be an obedient daughter, an affectionate and motherly sister and everything but an individual. She is pulled out of school even though she desperately needed a world removed from the trivialities of her home which seemed a denial and a negation of life.

As a young girl, Uma has her dreams and her desires, but when dreams come in conflict with the comforts of her parents it is she who has to sacrifice and she does. To Uma’s mother, her status in the family raised only after the birth of her brother. Even Uma’s father feels that his self-esteem is raised only after he fathered a son. It was the idea of having a son that was important to him:

“He was their son, surely an object of pride. Surely? Then, seeing this puny creature who appeared to take forever to raise his head, or get to his knees, finally to stand upon his legs, a kind of secret
doubt would enter their eyes, even a panic — quickly suppressed, quickly brushed away.” (FF 31-32)

Right from the birth Arun, the son, is given more importance and care than the girls. As an outlet Uma is offered a job by her Papa’s friend, but her father prevents her by saying that as long as they are there, there is no need for her to go for a job.

When Uma comes to know about the sufferings of Anamika she was very upset as she was not even able to confide the news to anybody:

“Then the news came that Anamika had had to go to the hospital. She had had a miscarriage at home, it was said, after a beating. It was said she could not bear any more children. Now Anamika was flawed, she was damaged goods. She was no longer perfect. Would she be sent back to her family? Everyone waited to hear.

Uma said, ‘I hope they will send her back. Then she will be home with Lila Aunty again, and happy.’

‘You are so silly, Uma,’ Mama snapped as she whacked at a mosquito on her foot with the small palm-leaf fan she was waving.” (FF 71)

Each time Uma’s marriage proposal was talked about, something or other took place and her parents attempts to get her married became a
failure. Uma became even more upset when she heard that Anamika was facing a lot of torture in her husband’s place.

Uma who is portrayed as a victim in the beginning emerges stronger towards the end. Her real potential is seen only when Anamika’s ashes are thrown into the river, that is when her Mama turns to her for comfort. Uma who was till then a very passive person turns out to be very strong. She is not only able to control and overcome her feelings but is also able to convince her mother in such a situation:

“Uma suddenly finds a hand clasping hers tightly. It is Mama’s. When Uma turns to look she sees Mama’s eyes are closed and there are tears on her cheeks. ‘Mama,’ she whispers, and squeezes the hand back, thinking, they are together still, they have the comfort of each other. Consolingly, she whispers, ‘I told cook to make puri-alu for breakfast and have it ready.’ Mama gives a sob and tightens her hold on Uma’s hand as though she too finds the puri-alu comforting; it is a bond.” (FF 155-156)

Right from the beginning Uma is trained to sacrifice her private pleasures at the altar of familial responsibilities. Uma is forced to nurse her kid brother, even when she is herself a child:
“When Mama came home, weak, exhausted and short tempered, she tried to teach Uma the correct ways of folding nappies, of preparing watered milk, of rocking the screaming infant to sleep when he was covered with prickly heat as with a burn. Uma, unfortunately, was her clumsy, undependable self, chopping and breaking things, frightenedly pulling away from her much too small, too precious and too fragile brother.” (FF 17-18)

Uma becomes a victim of the society, the condition a girl – child to submit to the norms of the patriarchal set-up. Uma is reduced to the status of a domestic help, as her mother has to fulfill the role of Papa’s helpmate. She is denied the pleasure of ordinary living. Her sister Aruna is married off into a respectable family in Bombay and Arun, her brother goes to Massachusetts to pursue higher studies, but Uma alone is left behind to take care of her parents untiringly and to accept a life of desolation. Dreaming a lot about her life right from her childhood she escaped into her fanciful world of gifts and presents. At the outset itself the novelist presents the contrast that exist between the colourful, happy life of her parents and her own dull and dreary existence.

Her parents are busy outing, enjoying parties, dinner etc., but at the same time when she gets a chance to go out, her parents get very much
irritated. She becomes a silent sufferer, like a typical Indian woman, an embodiment of sacrifice, faith and humility. The dreams of a free existence are not unknown or unimagined for Uma. All her wishes and dreams turn out be to like a wingless butterfly. She can only flutter about but not fly:

“All morning Mama, Papa has found things for Uma to do. Papa’s retirement is to be spent in this manner-sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking and finding ways to keep Uma occupied.” (FF 13)

Uma’s sister Aruna is a typical feminine woman. Aruna is a smart and pretty younger sister who makes a discreet choice and marries the most exciting of the suitors who presented themselves. Yet to live that dream – life fully she transforms herself and desperately seeks to introduce change in the lives of others. She calls her sister and mother as ‘villagers’ when they refuse to accept her sophisticated and flashy style of life. She avoids visiting her parents home and the rare occasions of her short visits are spent in blaming the untidiness of the surrounding and the inhabitants. She goes to the extent of scolding her husband when he spills tea in his saucer, or wears a shirt which does not match with his trousers.

When as Uma fails to get through her examination for a second time probably due to her poor intellect and as her parents discontinue the studies,
she goes in to depression and gets fits. She seems to be victimized more by herself than anyone else. Intellectually she seems weak, and more over her physical presence is not very pleasing for men to accept her offer for her marriage:

“So now Mama was able to say, ‘You know you failed your exams again. You’re not being moved up. What’s the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother.’ Then, seeing Uma’s hands shake as she tried to continue with folding the nappies, she seemed to feel a little pity. ‘What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma?’ she asked in a reasonable tone. ‘You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you.” (FF 21-22)

She lacks maturity, she is considered as an “idiot” and a “hysteric” (102) who falls unconscious often. Her life is full of despair, glooms and she is considered to be pathetic. According to her brother Arun, Uma is “beginning to stoop and shrink” (122) He feels very strongly for her, sympathizes and is struck by her premature “stoop”.

The eldest daughter turns out to be dullest of all with a good deal of follies and foibles that make her a failure in every walk of life. She fails in
the school to be withdrawn by her parents. Her parents try their best to get a
good groom of their standard only to be duped. Then she is married off to a
man who is already married and has children but this is neither known to her
nor to her parents. Finally she lives in her house like a dumb and mute
animal unable to give vent to her feelings:

“These troubling, secret possibilities now entered Uma’s mind, as
Mama would have pointed out had she known—whenever Uma was
idle. They were like seeds dropped on the strong, arid land that
Uma inhabited sometimes miraculously, they sprouted forth the
idea: run away, escape. But Uma could not visualize escape in the
form of a career. What was a career? she had no idea”. (FF 131).

Uma’s father, a retired lawyer determined to keep his authority intact.
Every movement of Uma is controlled and all her decisions are made for her
by her parents. She sees her parents as one entity—Papa Mama—for the
personality of Mama has become fused with that of Papa and that she echoes
everything he says. Her Mama fused with Papa, reveals she had to curb
some of her natural tendencies, she has internalized patriarchal values. There
are not many moments in the novel when Mama and Uma share each other
feelings.
After her marriage failed, Uma’s fits recurs once again during Arun’s marriage and she also develops eye problem. When she is suggested to consult a specialist in Bombay, her parents obstruct that offer also. She remains an inevitable liability to the family, starved of parental love and affection which she dearly needs. She longs for a career – “A career – leaving home, living alone”. (FF 131)

“But she is too domestic a bird to fly away. When she plunges in the dark holy water for a dip, she feels the thrill of being carried away, the longing to be free, but she shudders and cries as she was saved.” (FF 111)

As the climax of Uma’s journey is approaching it becomes more and more clear that the worst patriarchal imposition on women is the enclosure in the sense of ignorance of “what is on the other side” – a kind of purdah. In Uma’s case it is symbolic that she is, for one thing, suffering from an eye disease, and for another, prevented to go and see an ophthalmologist. For the eyes are a primary means of getting to know, reading, studying, getting out of the bonds of ignorance:

“Uma flounces off, her grey hair frazzled, her myopic eyes glaring behind her spectacles, muttering under her breath. The parents, momentarily agitated upon their swing by the sudden invasion of
ideas — sweets, parcel, letter, sweets — settle back to their slow, rhythmic swinging.” (FF 5)

She dreams of a free and liberated life of liberated self which is not unimagined for her. The romantic poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox opens up “Magic” casement for Uma. She cradles the book in her lap and riffles through the thick soft pages:

‘You are wasting your life in that dull, dark room
(As he fondled her silken folds);
O’er the casement lean but a little, my queen,
And see what the freat world holds.
Here the wonderful blue of your matchless hue
Cheapen both sky and sea –
You are far too bright to be hidden from sight
Come fly with me, darling – fly.’ (FF 135)

As a child Aruna has been a mute witness to her fathers hilarity at the birth of a male child. She arrested herself by a strong superiority complex, as she enters into marriage with Aravind and moves on to a better, richer and more fashionable a world of Bombay. The hurt left on her heart since childhood, pushes her towards the quest for a flawless world:
“The wedding was a splendid one – not like Uma’s drab, cutrate affair. At Aruna’s insistence, the reception was held in the lobby of the Carlton Hotel. Instead of a brass band from the bazaar, she had Tiny Lopez’s band play dance music. What was more, she persuaded Papa to throw what she called a cocktail party to welcome Arvind and his family the day before the wedding. This was to be an event so chic – and untraditional – as had never been witnessed before in the town, at least by their relatives.” (FF 101)

Aruna is beautiful and lucky to attract a number of suitors and brings in the marriage that Uma failed to. She was lucky enough to get “the handsomest, the richest and the most exciting of the suitors”. (101) She has a splendid marriage ceremony and leads a happy life with Aravind in Bombay. She gives birth to a daughter Aisha and son Dinesh. Everything goes on smoothly in her life as if a dream comes true.

“Aruna was whisked away to a life that she had said would be ‘fantastic’ ans was. Arvind had a job in Bombay and bought a flat in a housing block in Juhu, facing the beach, and Aruna said it was ‘like a dream’.” (FF 103)

In this way, Aruna accommodates herself to the new surrounding. She has set herself free by overcoming the domination. Yet, in negating those
codes, she ensnares herself in her mad pursuit towards the vision of perfection. Certainly, it brought her no pleasure. Aruna who is beautiful and mentally sharp enjoys the dazzling pleasures of life:

“Mama was astonished at the way Aruna scolded him continuously. ‘Oh, you have again spilt tea in your saucer. Now it will drip all over you,’ she would cry, or pull at his shirt and say, ‘But this shirt does not go with those trousers.’” (FF 109)

Aruna who had gone from a very ordinary family to a rich family through marriage does not like to come home to her sister and parents. Even for her first delivery she came home to leave soon:

“She even returned there to have her first child as custom dictated, but the second child was born in a modern nursing home in Bombay because Aruna could not bear to repeat that experience. Mama begged Pappa to write and ask her to bring the children on visits… so that every time they saw the children, they had turned into strangers again and were unrecognisable.” (FF 103)

She has set herself free from the customs and dominating home rules that bind the rest. According to Sarah Gamble:

“The material existence of women is seen to be borne through different, often competing discursive strategies which in naming,
classifying or speaking the truth of women, also bring her into being. Power is conceptualised as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places or groups.” (109)

The characters of Atwood arose out of the experience of suffering, endurance and survival in the wilderness. *The Edible Women* explores two themes — victimization and survival. In *The Edible Woman* Atwood’s first published novel in 1969, the title itself is a metaphor that reinforces woman as a food, as object and the there is the women’s endeavour to attain humanity and human identity.

Ainsley was a friend of Marian, the woman protagonist in *The Edible Woman* is working in an electric tooth brush company. She was not only her roommate but also an old friend of Marian. Ainsley being introduced to Clara becomes very close to her. On seeing Clara with too many children Ainsley to longs to have a child but without getting married. This very idea of Ainsley brings out a shock in Marian. She represents an intellectualized approach to maternity as she embarks on it as a social project with an aim of becoming a single parent. She even blames Clara for not being a good mother that is she says to Marian that Clara does not breast-feed her baby. “Have you noticed she isn’t even breast-feeding the baby.” (TEW 42)
As an undergraduate student Ainsley was very fond of reading Margaret Mead, which talks about primitive cultures on the breast-feeding habits in South America. Her quest is to fulfill an anthropological concept of female ‘wholeness’ who displays all the contradictions between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, which is actually put into practice by the University-educated North American women, identified by Frieden in her critique of Mead’s theories:

“She gave me a disgusted look. “Every woman should have at least one baby.” She sounded like a voice on the radio saying that every woman should have at least one electric hair-dryer. “It’s even more important than sex. It fulfills your deepest feminity.”” (TEW 43)

She chose to seek an alternative to the institution of marriage when she resolves to become a mother without encumbering herself with a husband and rejects the way of the women who chooses to marry. She has in her mind a woman’s role as a mother rather than one as a wife. She did not have any man in particular to have an illegitimate child but decided to choose the right man with whom she would mother a child.

She is introduced to Marian’s friend Leonard Slank, a notorious womaniser with a penchant for inexperienced young girls. Len becomes close with Ainsley exposing the dynamics of the sexual game in its
duplicity. Her clever imitation of the youthful innocence and his drunken lecher are equally false when she reveals to him later that she has become pregnant by him. The very news brings about a crisis in him. He tries to get away from this complicated situation:

“Now I’m going to be all mentally tangled in birth. Fecundity, Gestation. Don’t you realize what that will do to me? It’s obscene, that horrible oozy… ‘Don’t be idiotic, ‘Ainsley said’… You’re displaying the classic symptoms of uterus envy.”

(Cited Howells 45)

But Ainsley was very happy about it, she got what she expected. She doesn’t want a husband, just a baby. (TEW 199) Ainsley’s idea was highly intolerable for Marian as she thought of Len’s position. Len was too young and was not interested in marrying Ainsley. He says “I will buy you anything. But I’m not going to marry you.” (TEW 274) He was sick on hearing Ainsley’s pregnancy:

“I mean I can’t marry her,” Len said miserably. “Being a husband would be bad enough, I’m too young to get married, but can you imagine me as a husband and father.” (TEW 198)

Ainsley was not actually for marriage. When she came to know that a child growing up without the father would become a homosexual, she
changed her attitude towards marriage. She convinces Len to marry her as she was scared of bringing up an homosexual child. But Len on the other hand says that he would provide her with anything than marrying her:

“That’s not the point, don’t be ridiculous, the point is of course I’m going to have the baby; but it should have the best circumstances, and it’s your responsibility to provide it with a father. A father-image.” (TEW 274-275)

Earlier she was obsesssed with the thought that a child should have before it only the mother-image and not the father image as she regards the male as the passive agent, and women as the active agent. She meets an other friend of Marian Mr. Fisher Smythes. He is a graduate student, whom Ainsley finally persuades to marry her. She feels there is a necessity of a father image for the proper, upbringing of a child and later subdues. The attitude that she had about marriage in the beginning changed towards the end. Moreover Fisher Smythes who was obsessed with the archetypal womb symbol and who is in turn fasinated of the pregnant Ainsley gives his consent for marriage.

Leonard happens to be a fragile structure as he collapses and is cast aside with a nervous breakdown. Ainsley was fullfulling her biological mission managing to conform neatly to the social conventions of marrying
Fisher Smythes and going out for honey moon to Niagara. For Ainsley it is a real achievement as she is able to satisfy her whole self by getting a child and also a husband for her unborn child.

To be a black and a female was to suffer from many disadvantages. Women suffered from socio-economic, physical, cultural and sexual torments, on one part it was racial discrimination and on the other it was sexual. Women in general were the victim of sexual atrocities. They are the victims of triple jeopardy namely racism, sexism and classicism. Women were oppressed, even lost her self restraint and sense of her own being, women who tried to rebel or over power or rather tried to maintain a measure of dignity were tortured.

Walker’s Nettie, Sofia – Harpo’s wife and Mary Agnes Harpo’s Mistress are survivors who fight valiantly for their survival.

Alice Walker writes about Black men’s victimisation of black women with the belief that they have within them the seeds of redemption. But she wants to show that there are some Black men who are brutes and treat women badly. From being a used and an abused woman, Celie the main protagonist has come out as an independent creative business woman. Patriarchial family rule and patriarchal metaphysics break down
simultaneously as Shug and Celie leave Mr.__’s his house for Shug’s Memphis estate.

In Walker’s “The Color Purple” the royal color robe of purple indicates their rights to receive and accept the right to love themselves and each other, … They are prepared to fight, … eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth and they remain women – cry when they need to, laugh when they want, straighten their hair if they take a notion.

Unlike Celie, Nettie had gone to school, was educated and writes in standard English. Nettie lacks the ability to save her sister Celie. Nettie having run away from their Pa is turned out by Celie’s husband too. She runs away from her sister and seeks shelter with a black missionary couple. She moves off to Africa along with them and she too becomes a missionary. She undergoes a change in her, her language and her ethnic values etc.

Nettie is an educated girl who travels from country to country with a missionary spirit. Her journey to Africa, the place of her origin, her experience there, is not quite pleasant but all this matures in her into a considerate and enlightened woman. She takes care of her sister’s children but finally brings them home to her. In their final meeting they realize that so many years of hardship had nothing to lose except poverty and slavery, and through this solidarity they are able to overcome all the obstacles in their
life and feels that life is not only made comfortably possible but pleasantly enjoyable. Being away from the men, they take on a new meaning in life through their independency.

She is like a black woman who lightened their skin and straightened their hair. Nettie has been imaginatively stunted, her language bleached white and her ethnicity virtually erased. Celie who has been communicating to God through her letters now starts writing to Nettie, wherein she feels that there is no necessity. In one of her letters to Nettie she confines thus:

Dear Nettie,

“I don’t write to God no more, I write to you, I say, if he ever listened to poor coloured women. The world would be a different place, I can tell you Celie asserts here existence”. “I’m poor, I am black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I am here.” (TCP 175)

She is cast in the preposterous role of a black missionary who attempts to impose the ideology of her oppression on a culturally self sufficient people. As Nettie is not able to communicate with her sister, she becomes frustrated and enters into a divided self. She settles down in her life after Mr. Samuel’s wife Corin’s death.
Nettie is compromised with what ever she has, lives courageously and never thinks of revolting. Nettie, Celie’s sister tells her that God is different to her now. After all her years in Africa, she has gained more spirit than ever before and more an inner than outer reality. Nettie flees to Africa to work for a missionary family that adopted her. She travels far and wide to many places teaching and learning along with the missionaries.

These letters form a sort of diary revealing Celie’s life and those close to her. Fourteen years old Celie writes to God as her step father Alphonso has ordered her to “tell nobody but God” that he is raping her repeatedly. In order to save her sister Nettie from him, she submits and thereby becomes the mother of two children. A widower with two children comes to Alphonso seeking Nettie’s hand in marriage but he instead gets Celie married to him. He treats her badly by beating her and by sending her to cotton fields for work:

“Mr.____ finally come right out an ast for Nettie hand in marriage. But He won’t let her go. He say she too young, no experience. Say Mr.____ got too many children already.” (TCP 8)

Nettie trusts Celie’s children to a black missionary couple-Samuel and Corrine and works for them. As years pass the children grow up (Olivia and Adams). After Corrine’s death Nettie marries Samuel and only then reveals
that she is the childrens’ own aunt. She is very much determined in her work for the upliftment of the black people. Like her sister Celie she was determined to be a literate. Running away from the family for freedom, gave a her a lot of confidence. She sought her employment and was able to save herself from the hardships that she had to undergo.

She also chastises the African men for the subjugation of woman. She never forgets her sister in the mean time, and keeps writing to her but in vain. Nettie is ciritical of patriarchy, of the limited choices for women in her village. Walker manages not to miss any bases in the correct-line dependent, that is why Nettie’s letter is seen stiff when compared to Celie’s back-fence gossip with the lord.

The very first letter of Nettie to her own sister Celie states that she should fight back and get away from Albert. Nettie feels happy writing to Celie, to Nettie writing is like praying. Nettie traces back the history of Africa to her sister through her letters stating that it was from Africa that every thing emerged, the richness and the proudness of the black race and that the lord God Jesus himself was black and not white. She is happy to inform her sister Celie that her children Adam and Oliva are safe under her control, which relieves Celie of her guilt of incest. The Amazon like woman Shug represents the plight of the female in rebellion. She is a direct contrast
to Celie as she puts in a lot of effort to overcome the male-dominated world.

Sofía, is the wife of Mr. Harpo, daughter-in-law to Mr. ___ (Albert). Harpo controls his wife by beating her as he feels that, that is how a man must be. His life becomes meaningless when Sofía starts retorting and finally she leaves. Years later they are united, he no more fights but in turn takes care of the household mutually, while she is away for work:

“But I never thought I’d have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I’ll kill him dead before I let him beat me.” (TCP 39)

Sofía unlike Celie had to fight her life right from the childhood, with her daddy, her brother, cousins, uncles as she found that a girl wasn’t safe in the house of men:

“All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men. But I never thought I’d have to fight in my own house.” (TCP 39)

She is finally put in the prison for fighting with the mayor. Circumstances make her another Celie. In spite of the hardships and tortures she struggles for self-respect and dignity. She struggles for meaningful
existence which brings out her strong will power and ability in order to transcend the racist and sexist society.

Sofia’s forthright behaviour is an eye-opener for Celie. In Sofia, she sees a woman who is not dependent on a man for maintaining her existence in the world, “not as a victim of circumstance, but as a controller of circumstance”. She also sees a strength provided by the bonding of women, as when Sofia’s sisters come to stand with her at her wedding and hold her baby, as well as provides her shelter when things go wrong within her marriage. Her strength is not merely physical, it is an extension of her own personality.

Sofia’s experiences with the mayor’s wife results in the black women being jailed and taken away from her children. She is sentenced to work as a maid in the white mayor’s house for “Sassing” the mayor’s wife. In a fit of magnanimity, the mayor’s wife offers to drive Sofia home to see her children, whom she hasn’t laid eyes on in five years. The reunion lasts only fifteen minutes-then the mayors wife insists that Sofia drive her home. Sofia, Harpo’s wife who is a rebel against the authority of her own father is unwilling to behave deferentially to any man. Her rebellion becomes a cause for Celie to reflect. Celie feels that Harpo lacks success in taming Sofia, later her own conscience conspires to make her realize her “sin”. Sofia confronts
Celie with the fact of her betrayal which leads her to consider a new possibility.

Sofia is a spirited lady who promptly retaliates. She struggles for dignity as an individual who happens to be black female. Her struggle was not always successful, it gave her a chance to display her fortitude and ability to transcend her racist and sexist circumstances. For the development of an individual and for the development of black society, it is necessary to stress the need for the development of black women.

Sofia’s presence and activities creates a tremendous impact on Celie. Sofia unknowingly convinces Celie that the black women suffer not because of any inbuilt disabilities in them but because of racial discrimination and the inability or rather lack of courage to fight back. What Nettie experiences in colonial Africa is rather than being a retreat, it unravels the ties between Christianity and black oppression. Sofia and Harpo find peace years after battling one another.

Walker describes a legacy from which the creativity of the contemporary black women of her generation who gather wholeness from bits and pieces of the past, recreate them in their own image. As a feminist she explores the relationship between this traditional and societal change as a crucial search for freedom not only for women, but for man, the child, the
society the culture and the land. Sofia’s strength is not merely physical, it is an extension of her whole personality.

Mary Agnes also known as “squeak” is Harpo’s mistress. Harpo’s wife Sofia hated her and was also once beaten up by Harpo, but it is the same Mary Agnes who later helps Sofia to be free from the prison:

“Harpo little yellowskin girlfriend sulk, hanging over the bar. She a nice girl, friendly and everything, but she like me. She do anything Harpo say. He gave her a little nickname, too, call her Squeak.” (TCP 78)

Shug and Nettie are contrasted with depending syndrome of Mary Agnes – Harpo’s mistress who fights like a man. The women characters are always seen positively as their relationship is described as nurturing and supportive. When Sofia is in prison, Mary Agnes - girl friend to Harpo makes a desperate attempt to get Sofia released from prison. Sofia in turn takes care of Mary Agne’s children in order to help her continue her singing career. Her sister also helps her at the hour of need.

She represents the kind of sacrifice women make in order to lay themselves in the community which resists the male domination. Shug helps her to become a blues singer. Her hidden talent is brought to the lime light in her unimitative voice. Agnes who is hated by Sofia, helps her family by
taking care of his children when she was in the prison. She goes out with Shug’s husband, Grady, Celie and Shug to lead to happy life. Later she escapes with Grady to live on the plantation. Squeak empowers herself to sexual, racial and political abuse and in the name of communal solidarity, finally returns home to live with the rest of her family.

She as a victim emerges from the encounter with a new hope of power by domination over men. She has a good voice to sing and soon emulates Shug’s success using her voice to give her a new freedom from power and also over men. When she sings her first song she gets back her real name Mary Agnes, and later she starts singing in her own composition which kindles her creativity effecting their regeneration. She gains a lot of strength by ending oppression with dignity and finally rises over to denounce it and finally the victim gains moral power over the oppressor.

Women think poorly of themselves, believing themselves to be lesser, smaller, more passive, incapable of taking hold of a responsible job. Trapped within an unwanted biological function, they slowly deteriorate mentally and emotionally. But when they emerge from their biological being they tend to realize their own self and lead fulfilled lives.

Women are no less in intelligence or mental power and is no very less than men. They are now very much aware of their self competency. The
more a woman tries to become a woman, she starts defending herself fighting tooth and nail against her rights, there by she rises up to this position.

Uma, Aruna, Ainsley, Nettie, Sofia and Mary Agnes struggle for individualism through self-definition and by violence explored in transactional social world where ever the individuals are. These women had to fight not just one’s or twice but throughout their lives. As observed by Juliet Mitchell and Rowbotham a feminist critics:

“Woman has to struggle for control over both production and reproduction. What is vital therefore is the emergence of a movement of working-class women, since their experience ‘spans production and reproduction, class exploitation and sex oppression’.” (Cited Gamble 39)

Women are able to survive their ordeal through the strong support provided by women amongst themselves than women who are denied their full humanity. Nettie when she joined as a missionary to Mrs. and Mr. Samuel fought the social oppression. After Mrs. Samuel’s death, Nettie along with Mr. Samuel was able to understand the broader social and historical manifestation of oppression. This understanding of their sufferings
being a part of the larger social system of dominance, liberates them from narrowness of vision.

The love that black woman has for each other make them work together by changing this attitude of the society as well as their own self for survival and to be liberated. They have developed certain peculiar ways of looking at society at large and their own problems and life in relation to other men and women. An awareness of one’s oppression made victims to realize the victimization of the women at large. This awareness and awakenings help them to come together and such oppressions leads them to their struggle and their survival.

Woman is shaped not just by the gender but also by the other categories which intersect their life like religion and cultural traditions that are bound. They get liberation through involvement rather than the severing of social relations, a step towards building connections, however in significant it may appear to behold new hopes. According to Simon de Beauvoir:

“when women are called upon for concrete action, when they recognize their interest in the designed goals, they are as bold and courageous as men.” (614)
Violence against women is both a means of women’s subordinate and part of institutional and ideological domination. The liberation of women is the chief goal of feminist theory. Feminist liberation is inspired by liberation theology which states that liberation must be rooted in the concrete experiences of oppressed groups.

In a patriarchal society, the very thought that the women have right over their bodies is considered as preposterous. According to Simon de Beauvoir:

“The truth is that when a woman is engaged in an enterprise worthy of a human being, she is quite able to show herself as active, efficient, taciturn – and as ascetic – as a man.” (615)

Like the Indian, the Canadian, and the Afro-American writers are preoccupied with external obstacles to survival. Some writers are concerned with “hardships to identify, was more internal” obstacles to “spiritual survival to life as anything more than a minimally human being”.

Power is both the source of oppression in its abuse and the source of emancipation in its use. It is essentially individualistic. Women have now become more powerful by overcoming their victimized role by changing their life styles and their fundamental concepts.
Women live vicariously when they derive their purpose solely through loyalty and dedication. When their identity needs to be expressed in action, they live fully. When women overcome all these obstacles and learn to trust themselves, they identify their inner strength rather than passivity and more further with confidence and fullfilling their lives. She finds the true feminine fulfillment by working out to it. The new women were less fluffily feminine, so independent and determined to find a new life of her own. Her passionate involvement with the world, her own sense of herself as an individual and her self-reliance, give a different flavour to her life. All these characters discussed above are the protagonists who have risen out of the suffering, endurance and Survival.

They are survivors who, through their personal crisis in life have acquired worldly wisdom. They are like Mother Courage a symbol of women’s indomitability. These heroic women represent the life force that will prevail because of their valour, courage and endurance.

The basic thing needed for the survival of women is to know about one’s own self which these protagonists have achieved. They have become very much aware of their responsibilities and hence they are considered as survivors. Standing on the threshold of the women’s emancipation, they are aware of the rumblings within them. They are strong and vital and instil
courage and inspiration to the weak. Through their personal crisis in life they have acquired a worldly wisdom which set them on a high pedestal. These courageous women represent the life force that will prevail because of their valour, courage and endurance. They are the survivors who fight their own battles emerging triumphant.
CHAPTER – IV

THE EMPOWERED

“Be bold and yet be bold,
But be not overbold,
Although the knell is tolled
Of the tyranny of old,
And meet your splendid doom
On heaven – scaling wings,
Woman, from whose bright womb
The radiant future springs !”

(John Davidson, “To the New Women”) 1894

The word “Empowerment” means strengthening of individuals and groups through interaction on all level of social organization. It begins with identity clarification and includes making commitments for action. Empowerment results from women assessing where they are and what they want to do. Women are empowered to choose enlightenment by knowing that this is a personal responsibility. They grow through connections of effort, and their creative community replaces their destructive power.

The new woman refuses to be stifled under oppressive restrictions. Revolt is creative whereas rebellion is destructive. There is a continuous
urge in the women to build up their fragmented life and to express their affirmation to life. The professional woman from one stage (feminine to female) of evolution to the other are ebullient and courageous characters.

They are caught in the midst of their own social movement, propelled by new and different ideas. The Empowerment of modern feminist emphasis the freedom and reasoning of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Feminism takes women out of the dark ages of ignorance and oppression and enables them to recognise the real needs which helps them to see the lives in a broader perspective. Education has empowerd women and those in captive were set free through this. Women empower themselves by acknowledging and accepting their equal worth as human beings. Women become empowered on seeing the purpose of their life for what they are rather than others let them know of it. Women transcend empirical difficulties, and hindrances and came out triumphant. Women enhance life and strengthen constructive life force though their clear thinking, decision – making and behaviour. Simon de Beauvoir observes:

“The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways.” (30)
Women order their lives through empowered action when they accept reality and themselves. As a result restriction become alien and dissolve and they live their life fully. Women also become empowered by being enlightened which is an awakening to the challenge of being a woman. Women’s struggle for life is the struggle of every women, and there can be no rest for women until they have empowered the lot of all women.

A women is identified as mother, wife, daughter etc. in a society that is an epitome of virtue, but when she protests against injustice and exploitation, she is grudgingly termed as an activist or is seen as a rebel. The new woman demands an existence outside the family but not within the social frame work.

The Empowered or the new woman struggle for survival and rise above the situation. The new image of the women became the image of dignity and dynamism. ‘The Empowered’ are heroic individuals who survive the odds and ‘still rise’ above the oppressed situation, flying high the horizon of freedom.

Simone de Beauvoir argued that women have historically been considered deviant, abnormal and that the attitude has limited women’s success by maintaining the perception that they were a deviation from the normal, and were always outsiders attempting to emulate “normality”. She
believed that for feminism to move forward, this assumption must be set aside and also asserted that women are capable of choice as men, and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the “immanence” to which they were previously resigned and reaching “transcendence”, a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses one’s freedom. Beauvoir observes that the male superiority can be destroyed only by decoding the decree that women is inferior according to society.

The suffering of women leads to a stage of self introspective which envinces a fresh perception of life, by fulfilling their desires and career women were found to be creative. Women are now aware of the exploitation, conscious of their rights and come to compromise with the situation but assertively. Women’s liberation is the major version of feminism in western society. It came from women’s pooled experience in conscious-racing groups and expanded into a more specialized theoretical study of the social relations of capitalist patriarchy. Women’s liberation is a unique political movement.

Since Wollstonecraft’s time, feminist believed that the subordinate position of women was neither “natural” nor inevitable, but socially created. In the fifties Simon de Beauvouir who felt her voice was heard was waiting for a new generation of rebellious women to discover themselves in order to
live an independent life. This struggle spread far and wide with women joining hands against their oppressors. They talked more freely and made more discoveries about themselves when men weren’t around. There was a sudden mass explosion of a new movement which brought about a number of painful experiences which led to conflicts and clashes that became inevitable.

Germaine Greer has defined her goal as ‘women’s liberation’ as distinct from ‘equality with men’. She asserts that women’s liberation meant embracing gender differences in a positive fashion, a struggle for the freedom for women to define their own values, order their own priorities and determine their own fates. She argues that when women embrace the stereotypical version of adult femininity, they develop a sense of shame about their own bodies, and lose their natural and political autonomy. The result is powerlessness, isolation, a diminished sexuality, and a lack of joy which reveal that they are oppressive. The ignorance, isolation and the powerlessness should be overcome with awareness, unity and empowerment. Women realise what she has done only when she does things on her own.

The empowered women has become independent, engendered intense hostility and fear, by challenging the male supremacy in our profession and at home. She is an archaic woman who has threatened to turn the world
upsidedown overcoming the hurdles and to be above in the wild carnival of social and sexual misrule. Women’s superiority lies in their effort to overcome the male subjugation by their independence of mind.

The empowered women of her generation derived energy and inspiration from the struggle with her contradictory identities, but more often there were women who could live without men, but men could not live without women. More than that the economic dependency and protection, marriage for a woman was must, but the new women or the empowered women have proved above that.

“Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must rever that woman in her which struggles for expression.”

(www.google.com)

The finest achievement of the new woman or the empowered women is liberty. Women are now in quest for liberity and independence which realize the potential in them. The new women or the empowered women is the best women, the flower of all the womenhood of past ages, who has come to stay-if civilization is to endure. The suffereings of the past have but strengthened her, maternity has deepened her, education is broadening her - and she now knows that she must perfect hereself if she would perfect the
race, and leave her imprint upon immortality through her offering of her works.

There is a united approach of empowering women which causes and requires continued attention and stewardship by all. Women today with their smartness, grace and elegance have conquered the whole world. They are considered to be more honest, meticulous and efficient and therefore women are considered due to their better performance. Empowering women aims to inspire women with the courage to break from chains of limiting belief, patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have traditionally kept women suppressed and were unable to see truth, beauty and power. But now women are encouraged to see and bring forth the beauty and strength within themselves, to be inspired to be the best they can be, and to let their spirit shine through. Maya Angelou says:

“You may encounter many defeats,
but you must not be defeated.
In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats,
so you can know who you are,
what you can rise from,
how you can still come out of it.” (www.google.com)
What binds women together is a sociological notion of the sameness of their oppression. Women were once powerless, unified group. If the struggle for a just society is seen in terms of the move from powerless to powerful for women as a group, and this is the implication in the feminist discourse which structures the sexual difference in terms of the division between the sexes, then the new society would be structurally identical to the existing origination of power relations consisting itself as a simple invention of what exists.

This chapter focuses on the empowered characters – Anita Desai’s Bimla / Bim from *Clear Light of Day*, Margaret Atwood’s Marian Mc Alpin from *The Edible Woman*, The nameless protagonist from *Surfacing*, Alice Walker’s Meridian from *Meridian* and Celie and Shug Avery from *The Color Purple* and – these women arise from the painful experiences they faced and they fought through the conflicts and clashes.

The women protagonists are seen to rise from the condition of nothingness to the position of self-empowerment. It is not a sudden change, but a gradual recognition of their broken self’s survival, women’s quest for identity, empowerment, awareness etc. with an inner desire to construct an organized life that is free from all physical, material, spiritual, emotional social and all other barriers.
Anita Desai’s Bimla of *Clear Light of Day* is a girl of extra-ordinary intellectual calibre. She is introduced as an intelligent, independent-minded protagonist, who is willing to enter the traditional male domain, finds herself, choosing a career to earn her livelihood. She is dynamic and young spirited girl enthroned with a readiness to overcome the hurdles. She reconciles the emotional, social and familial wholeness through her experience.

She faces the challenges of life and tries to and succeeds in rising above the constricting influences of her family, breaking off the shackles of her past and brings order to her life. She accepts the reality around her with courage. She is wise and trains herself to face the realities of existence, unlike her mother who lives in a world of illusions. Bim’s self is wounded by the callous behaviour of her parents and her brother. Her frustration crystallizes itself into tiny spot which gradually develops into a perpetual and unhealed wound:

“She succeeds in bridging the gap between aspiration and reality and towards the end, she realizes that love alone keeps human being same and complete and it is this realization that saves her from disaster. She is finally etched as a character who is aware of
When woman were entering into public life in an unprecedented way, Bim was left to take care of an autistic brother and an alcoholic aunt, after her brother Raja leaves the family to pursue a future of his own. Her effort to expand her identity beyond the pseudo-motherhood has taken her up to care to terms with a family and society that often curbs these efforts. Being the elder sister she fulfills the role expected of unmarried women and maintains domestic and social continuity by accepting the responsibility of the house, and those who depend on her. Bim challenges the limits of her position within the family and society. She perceives her femininity as something that needs to be transformed, distinguished from the one advocated by her family in order to be viable or even adequate. Bim does not choose to change her career plans to domesticity, endurance and self-sacrifice in order to enhance her value as a potential wife.

Bim represents the multiple dimension of characters who is foremost a single woman whose single status needs to be completed with her occupation. She is one of the most unconventional single women to be found in the narratives of Indian women writers. She is a realist, without self pity, and is equally impatient of those who indulge in such weak sentiments.
Bimla takes on the responsibility of the family. As a child she had dressed in her brother’s clothes, she had got the feel of masculine superiority:

“She strutted about the room, feeling the cigarettes and the matches in her pocket, realizing now why Raja Walked with that fine, careless swaggers. If she had pockets, if she had cigarettes, it was only natural to swagger, to feel rich and superior and powerful.”

(CLID 132)

Despite her youth and gender she finds herself the head of the family with its odd body of members. After the death of her parents and Mira Masi’s death, Raja and Tara also having gone away, she takes over the family all by herself. Mira Masi as long as she was there, fulfilled some meanness the requirement of motherhood.

Bim stands for the solidarity of life, Bim turns out to be different when compared to others like the house that she stays Raja, Tara and Baba are all part of her and are inseparable. She lives in the same old house with her brother Baba, studies and teaches in the same college from where she took up her education. She longed to conquer the world but instead conquered her own self and attains self-knowledge:

“A bright, slap-dash, head girl in school, accepts life as a challenge to her intelligence and discards the accepted luck of women to
marry and to be married. She wants to work, to do things and becomes a lecturer in History in her adult life. She clings to that pattern of life that “pluck the dead heads off a rose lush dusted grey with disease”. (CLD 5)

Bim decides to take to teaching so that her intellectual craving may be satisfied. Bim’s noble characters are admirable and make her personality outstanding. She is often unsteady, oscillating between the struggles in her and finally discovers the structure of her own consciousness and active wholeness. The melancholia that shatters her balance for twenty years is a measure of her sense of failure of life to honour her aspiration, but her courage and intellectual strength remain unaffected. At times she appears to be a “failed question” who desires to conquer the world but who does not end up conquering herself. What is remarkable about her is that she develops the awareness and importance of human life, and strives “to be whole” and to be sane in the midst of “decay, destructed and death”.

Bim inherits the position of power within the family and changes from a girl trying to transform her femininity within her intellectual and social powers into an adult hood of the household with the same duties of a married man or woman but without the social status. In the eyes of the community,
Bim the unmarried sister struggles with money and the family responsibility, transforming from a child into a self-sacrificing mother figure:

“When compared to all other characters, it is Bim who feels that education is essential whether one gets married or not. She feels marriage may not be enough to last one a whole lifetime and there are “hundreds of things to do instead”. (CLD 140)

Bim’s resolute decision corroborates her strong will-power, a masculine independence and individuality that features traditionally uncharacteristics of women and are strongly reflected in the grand sweep of her hands signifying the dismissal of the typically feminine. The unusual shine of her eyes suggests the anticipation of a promising future. Plain in looks, almost masculine in bearing, too tall and square-shouldered to be thought pretty. Impatient, often emotionless and cruel, extremely self-confident and a total subversion of the feminine type of heroine.

She is the type of women who has the courage to overcome all the complusions and obstacles in order to emerge out as a independent and self-dependent women. Bim stands for self-hood and is more radical, social construction of womanhood. She feels that husbands are not all that necessary for social and economic security and that a sense of self may be enough to sustain oneself. Bim’s heroic acceptance of the family and
motherhood becomes central to the novel. In a way, she embodies the “vision of the new Indian woman”. Unlike most Indian girls, she opts out of marriage for a life of chosen spinsterhood to pursue a career and a way of life which she accepts gracefully despite its limitations. She refuses to play the conventional role of a sex-object and submissive wife and becomes, in a sense a truly liberated woman. Her life stands in sharp contrast to the ordinary mundane life of Tara. Her childhood dream of becoming a heroine comes true. She faithfully follows her dreams, her ideal and by deciding to forgo the happiness of a married life, she gladly pays a heavy price required for achieving it.

Bim’s personality achieves continuity in time as she develops an ability to integrate the past and the future. She is very proud of her role as a nurse, a supporter and as the head of the family. In the end Bim attains internal freedom and is finally liberated. Like the quintessential mother, she feels one with her siblings and grasps the depth of love binding them:

“They were really all parts of her, inseparable in so many aspects of her as she felt the anger and disappointment. Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. What ever diminished them diminished her. What attacked them attacked her. Nor was there anyone else on earth
whom she was willing to forgive, more readily, or completely, or defend more instinctively and constantly.” (CLD 165)

Love and other relatedness form a new discourse of liberation and synthesis. Bim has a soft corner liking for a doctor, Mr. Biswas. Once she is invited to the house of Dr. Biswas, she sees his mother who is over-decked and at once distanced herself from such a situation:

“Bim had never seen anyone so dressed, so bathed, so powdered. She seemed to be dusted all over with flour. Perhaps she had fallen into a flour bin, like a large bun. But she smelt so powerfully of synthetic flowers, it must be powder after all. And her white saree cracked with starch, like a biscuit. And her hair gleamed with coconut oil, and flecks of gold glinted at the lobes of her ears and the ringed folds of her neck. Altogether a piece of confectionary, thought Bim.” (CLD 90)

The decision making power comes to be vested in Bim who has to attend to everything – household, illness, marriages, bills and death. Though this role was very much new or unfamiliar to her she learns to live that way. She constitutes the centre and in the newly attained role acquires both the strength and the generosity in order to bind the family together. She even
shugs off the doctor Mr. Biswas as a curious object, as she doesn’t have time for love making.

Both Bimla and Tara led their life all alone and bring about a lot of changes which they feel is inevitable. Bim is very conscious that she is always trying to teach her students to be strong to be different from what they we were at their age – to be a new kind of woman from you or me. In *Clear Light of Day* new roles / new images of the characters are born out of a deeply felt need both at the individual and the social level and an integration between the two becomes inevitable.

At one stage Bim shows greater intensity of violent outbursts and aggressive behaviour as she feels neglected and forgotten. At times even aggression cannot resolve tension and conquers despair. Bim’s regression into a world of fantasy indulging in wish fulfillment and weaving strong and charming web of make – beliefs give them temporary respite from inner conflicts and unpleasant demands of their mundane existence. Fantasy actually teaches her about their real wishes, weakness and intentions. As Simon de Beauvoir says:

“The truth is that when a woman is engaged in an enterprise worth of a human being, she is quite able to show herself as active, efficient, tactium – and as ascetic – as a man.” (615)
She shows extraordinary qualities of concern for her family and a capacity to make sacrifice also. The natural energy and vivacity of Bim is fully evident. She is a girl with positive responses to life. She is wise and trains herself to face the realities of existences. Within the confines of her family she plays the role of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc and finally achieves success by realizing her dreams. Unlike Raja, Bim achieves success in reaching her dream. What ever she had dreamt of in her childhood she practices in the adult life:

“Bim, of course, worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of Saints and Goddesses, and Tara did not tell lie that she hoped never to have to do anything in the world, that she wanted only to hide under Aunt Mira’s Quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden and never be asked to come out and do anything, prove herself to be anything” (CLD 126)

She who plays the role of a foster mother is humiliated by the deeds of Raja. She realizes that time has changed the old affection of childhood and that the family relationship have changed. Inspite of her freedom and independence she is caught by the clutches of the ghosts from the past. Her responsibilities and burdens that lie in front of her makes her refuse Dr.Biswa who seeks her hand in marriage as she considers marriage an
alternative for escaping from a responsible life. Bim takes a positive response to life. To Bim life is not linear, it is something that progresses in leaps and jerks:

“There are long still stitches – nothing happens — and then suddenly there is a clash – mighty deeds takes place, momentous events – even if one does not know at the time – and then life subsides again into the back waters till the next push, the next flood? that summer was certainly one of them – the summer of ’47-” (CLD 42-43)

Bim is the most sensitive character and she doesn’t want to think about the past as it is not a source of pleasure. More over she struggles for twenty years sacrificing everything for the sake of her brothers and sister. She tries to free herself from the past to follow the path of progression. For her survival, she adopts the strategy of repression. She is not only sensitive but also highly imaginative. She entertains a very high opinion about herself and hence her dreams are directed towards becoming free and independent. She doesn’t sympathize for being a woman but instead is capable of greater things in life. She becomes very much aware of her dreams and ambitions and strives hard independently for the fulfillment of her wishes.
The men and women are haunted by the desire to attain authenticity within the ordinary routine of duties, family responsibilities and social obligations. The characters search for meaning or purpose in life is not an academic or philosophical task that needs to be pursued in a cloistered setup, but a search for fuller self-realization in the given condition and situation. The basic nature of human is to avoid loneliness, when the characters cannot relate to the reality of their circumstances, they employ indirect methods, compensatory behaviour or survival strategies to achieve a sense of fulfillment, identity and individuality.

Her anger and disappointment melt away and emotional equilibrium descends on her when she tears Raja’s letters and makes a move towards developing social relations by going to the concert at Mishra’s house. She ultimately realizes that meaningful survival is possible only in co-operation and co-existence. She experiences and realizes uniquely in her own way the warmth of love and its significance in human relationships. She is torn between her inner reality and the hard facts of life. But she is not disappointed, nor does she turn neurotic. Instead with her inner strength she is able to understand things more clearly.

She has sacrificed her whole life for her siblings, educating them and getting them married, taking care of mentally retarded brother Baba and
serving Mira Masi since she was the eldest of the family after her father’s
death. There is music and poetry made use of in the novel which bring out
the ultimate vision of the novel but it is the clear light of day that dawns
upon Bim making her way clear there by dispelling all her confusion and
giving her a philosophy of life. She remembers herself growing up as a child
to a responsible woman with the changing of time. At one stage she is
irritated and pleads for higher education for the girls. She feels that one
should do things on their own, live with self-respect and be independent:

“Yes, yes, but I wanted to give them some reading lists so they
don’t waste all their time walking up and down the Mall in Simla or
going to the pictures. Then they reminded me I had missed a tutorial
and had to see some of their papers. You see, it isn’t just I who
make them work – they make me work, too. So I asked them to
come down here – they love to come, I don’t know why. I’ll go and
get ready...” (CLD 9)

Adult Bim is very much different from Bim of youthful days. The title
very much depicts clarity. Bim’s life is the light of emancipation, of
liberation for the whole class of woman to sweep away the darkness of
ignorance of oneself and the family of fallen values and dignity encircling
from generation to generation. Though highly sensitive and away from
others, she moves to a place of her own choice with both past and future in it. It is the passing of time that makes it dark as well as rich affecting the deepest selves within the reach. Her inner feelings and condition are also revealed. She seems to be torn between acceptance and resentment, love and hostility, understanding and misunderstandings of all these who are a part of her. She is lovely and is defeated and carry the consequences of all deeds whether good or bad with her.

During Taras’ visit to Bim and Baba, both the sisters are aware of the tremendous change brought about by time-altering their relations and attitudes. Tara, Bim and Raja also face a crisis of relating their present to the past-their adulthood to childhood, the period that lies in between the gap-consciousness and search for individuality of adolescence-fails to provide continuity from the early period of childhood to the later stage of adulthood, bringing about deep psychological trauma and stress.

Bim’s separation from her brothers and sister heightens in her a sense of incompleteness of being unfulfilled and slowly disintegrating. Her voice is like a “burnt twig, breaking brittle every day” expressing her sense of being entombed in a dead house, a dead past. At one stage she finds herself caught in a contradiction within herself. Her sense of identity depends on her recovering her corrections with her brothers and sister. She makes a brave
effort to come out of the mesh of prejudices, anger and resentments in which she was caught. She tries to break out of the shell of herself to discover her greater being, in relation with the others, so that they may form again, ‘a whole, a perfect pattern’.

Bim is projected as a woman protagonist who chooses to live according to her will. She conceives a egocentric world view where in she is placed centrally. She feels that the freedom of her will is thwarted and she moans in anguish to find her self-gratuitous and derelict in a possible impossible world deprived of reason and the contingency of reality. Bim’s rage in the early part of the novel is almost neurotic, but her vision soon acquires authenticity. She finds her lost self and achieves self realization.

In *Clear Light of Day* the crises in the lives of the protagonists are resolved once they have a clear understanding of its role in human life. The novel ends with forgiveness of treacheries and betrayals and reconciliation with love. A new hope, a new awareness of the continuity of life, a life that marches along with time, destroyed and preserved by it, a life that is sustained by the old bonds of family life, luminous and engulfing like that of a clear bright day that awaits us. The positive ending seems significant in a bright patch in otherwise a gloomy world.
To Bim, life symbolizes the gender which is abandoned and is left to struggle against the odds of life as best as she can. The entire nature, the sun, the river, the boat, the egrets stand still, objectifying Bim’s peace and calm. Like this Bim too does not have any colour in her life but she has at last gained peace and tranquility after suffering an excruciating pain in plumbing the depths of her soul to unravel the mystery of her existence in relation to the house and her brothers and sister.

Bim is now a person who can face problems and suffer barely without flinching with terrors and shouting for help. Her future is portrayed as a queen, a prisoner and as a sacrificial victim. She reigns over the old house like a queen, trapped in that like a prisoner and with no freedom to go out into a wider world to lead her life in her way and is also a victim to the selfishness and cowardice of her brother and sister.

Bim’s struggle with life, her efforts to drive away the darkness and to equip herself with courage and strength are expressed forth highly through the images of sea. She doesn’t retreat in fear the hardship she faces in life but faces it bravely. The realization of her true self with total lack of zest for life and her talents having shrunk to nothing startles her and throws her into a fit of melancholy.
Her sharp mind does not give in easily to romance and romantic feelings. She is thus caught in contradictions within herself. Her sense of identity depends on her connection with her brothers and sisters but lacks the imaginative vision which could once again unite them. She feels:

“torn apart in, loving them and not loving them, accepting them not accepting them, she tries to break out of the shell of herself to discover her greater being, in relation to others, so that they may form again” “a whole a perfect pattern”. (CLD 106)

Intelligent with a distinct personality of her self refuses to be, “a frail bark upon the waters of life”. (167) She wants life to flow smoothly like a river but even when it turns to be a flood she does not retreat in fear and faces it bravely. Though she feels quite capable of handling everything, at times she admits how taxing this running against the stream is.

Bim along with Baba goes to attend the music concert only then her psychic journey towards redefining herself, her reunion with Raja becomes complete. Listening to the Guru’s songs, she discovers the right notes of her life lending beauty and harmony to her existence. Also she rediscovers the lost connection with her dear brother, who is her soul-mate. As the day-break itself it shows a positive aspect of time, Bim seems to be offering the
‘morning hymn’ it paves the way for her regeneration so that she becomes a fulfilled individual who experiences love and peace.

It is in love that Bim sees the meaning and the perfection of life. Bim is commendably capable of judging her potentialities and evaluating the direction towards which she is heading. A life like her cannot be led at all without having maintained one’s sanity and wholeness. Her revolt lies in her strong will to pursue higher studies, to earn and to be independent and not to get married at the time especially when other girls of her age, including her sister Tara and the neighbours Sarala and Jaya were longing to be married. She succeeds in being highly educated and in being independent.

The emotional upheavals leads to emotional complexities that shows how ultimately some characters gain maturity from their experience and survive the crisis while others give in easily because they are not strong enough emotionally. The character of Bim gives a message that women should not be cowed down by the problems of life, but to be stoic and develop the qualities of assertion and self-respect. The title *Clear Light of Day* itself tells that light of emancipation among women is an advent urged to sweep away the darkness of ignorance. Reality is never the same, once it is touched by the fantastic; it emerges as a new realization of
some inner truth bringing about a change of perspective. Finally she is free from the traumas of an incompatible marriage.

To her all involvement is a disillusion, all attachment a pain from which none can escape. There is a way out and it is the realization that the giver and the receiver Bim and Baba together form a perfect whole. *Clear Light of Day* sees the ultimate wisdom of life in an intuitive understanding only when she realizes this, does she forget all the past bitterness and find peace and happiness. Through serious consideration of her whole life she discovers the urgent need to correlate her knowledge with her imagination. Bim is invited for the music programme organized by the Misras, there she sees the aspiration of the individual, the singer’s search for his own right combination of notes and melody, move in harmony with the old traditional form, which moulds and renews itself from age to age. Her response to the programmes, her surrender to the atmosphere of the evening is an indication of the resolution of the Antithesis of reason and emotional imagination in her and thereby perceives the hidden source of her own being. The music concert brings about Bim’s image of reintegration with her family, society and culture and her perception of a unity between divergent elements with herself and in the world. Bim paves through various stages of mental tension, depression and psychological alienation, but in the end she emerges as a very strong personality.
In Margaret Atwood’s works, the question of female empowerment runs like a red thread. Her novels are replete with the theme of victimization and survival. Atwood’s novels have always been about women’s survival in a hostile, male-dominated world and woman’s refusal to be a victim. The part of cultural life of Canada actively is engaged with the problems that are not only of national concern but are also social, political and traditional issues that determine the survival of the country.

Marian Mac Alpin of *The Edible Woman* and the nameless protagonist in *Surfacing* are the two empowered characters of Atwood. They are heroic individuals who survive the odds, rise above their oppressed situation and become empowered.

In *The Edible Woman* Marian Mac Alpin is a young graduate, in her twenties with an independent income, living in Toronto and sharing an apartment with another young woman Ainsley Tewce. She has a boy friend to whom she is engaged – Peter Wollader, an ambitious young lawyer with a passionate interest in guns and cameras. Marian refuses to get involved in either Ainsely’s ‘Fraud’ or in Clara’s domestic chaos. Marian is threatened by childbearing, but she feels alienated from her body. She does not wish to turn into any of the models of the adult women offered by society as behind her conventional femininity lies a horror of the body which relates to her fear
of growing up signaled either by marriage, maternity or the office pension plan.

Marian’s rebellion occurs at a level below consciousness and then manifests itself in hallucination and body language. Though Marian makes every effort to adjust her self to the socially acceptable image of adoring female partner, her eating disorder is clearly a continuation of this pattern of psychic resistance, a metaphorical expression of panic at the idea of marriage. It is Marian’s imagination which is the subversive force, the place where food is metamorphosed into living flesh and blood:

“She looked down at her own half-eaten streak and suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle. Blood red. Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed … and she had been devouring it”.

(TEW 181-2)

Marian’s growing dissatisfaction with the “proper” role and with her work lends her to unpredictable acts bordering on the irrational: like a hunted creature. Marian visualizes herself as the rabbit comparing her to - a roll of toilet paper in the lady’s powder room - both of which are imagined as “helpless and white and furry and working passively for the end”. This thought leads her to her rebellion. This rebellion intensifies and she begins to
dislike various kinds of food. She is unable to understand that her body’s expectation of food is carried by her subconscious rejection of the victim:

“She was becoming more and more irritated by her body’s decision to reject certain foods. She has tried to reason with it, but it was adamant, and if she tried to use force it rebelled” (TEW 102)

Finally she gains self-understanding and integrates the conflicting forces in her. There is a lot of difference in Marian in the beginning and the in the end. She conforms to the social norms though she finds them degrading, at times she is disgusted by the roles she is playing in the society. Marian works in her department with three people who are almost of her own age, and each of them sees herself as an object that has a date of expiry written on her.

Marian struggles to be the mirror reflection of the ideal, that Peter had imagined: “I could see myself small and oval, mirrored in his eyes” (89). Peter tries to possess her, dominate her and exploit her as though she is a malleable product. His gaze becomes sexually specific with Marian’s body as its object. Marian discerns an elated sense of self in Peter which foreshadows the potentially destructive consequence of the marital contract.

Her tactics approval of her own victimization is related to a larger exploitative pattern perpetuated by patriarchy. She starts reasoning within
herself as to why she should end up being a docile and submissive wife of Peter or any one else. She becomes aware of the sense of alienation of the identity into which she is held or rather struck by the real nature of a relationship which meant to reduce her to the role of a victim.

The social system ‘makes her sick’. She makes every effort to adjust herself to the socially acceptable image of adoring female partner, her eating disorder is clearly a continuation of this pattern of psychic resistance, a metaphorical expression, a panic at the idea of marriage. Her unconscious fear of becoming an object of consumptions, and as her marriage gets closer which brings about a rebellion in her. Her eating disorder gets worsened and the list of ‘forbidden foods’ gets longer, until the point where she can eat nothing at all. Neglecting the circumstance Marian leaps into rebellion on the first place. Marian puts out all her effort to adjust herself to the socially acceptable image of adoring female partner.

Marian who looks into her vision of the feminine mystique finds that she is herself absent from her fantasy of further married bliss in the suburbs. She discovers a way to solve an ontological problem that is she bakes cake, ices in the shape of a woman, a transformation of science and domestic ritual. Gazing at the cake lady and thinking of her destiny she says, “you
look delicious … And that’s what will happen to you ; that’s what you get for being food’ (TEW 270).

Marian through her traditionally feminine gesture of making a cake, offers it to two persons in her life. When the cake is offered to Peter, he refuses it and flees for her undisguised hostility and falls at the arms of Lucy who again happens to be a friend of Marian, but Duncan, the graduate student in English, her mentor and guide, helps her to eat it all up.

The cake is an iced cake in the shape of a woman and it is her perception of women’s condition and fete. Eating of the cake is an act of celebration which marks a decisive moment of Marian’s recovery from a hysterical illness and her return to the social order. Once again she becomes a ‘consumer’ for it is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct one’s identity outside the symbolic and social order, and individual survival is likely to mean compromises with society which she attains.

Her indefinable and strange attraction to the eccentric Duncan is intriguing. Their rejection and her finally overcoming that particular stage with a lot of struggle there by renouncing both Duncan and Peter to lead her to an independent life:

“She is able to eat once more, proud of herself for having conquered a piece of steak. And she is able to accept her own inclusion in the
network of power relations whereby each individual protects himself or herself at the expense of the others”. (TEW 303)

She feels that she cannot stick on to a dominant ideology which encourages women to be seen an individual fundamentally unified. She rejects the position of women to the business of matrimony and domesticity by conducting lives within the confines of romantic and material love. The barriers to an enlarged existence for the female have less to do with natural abilities or predilection than with the male proportion of power. Her self-emancipation is not merely an illustration of her victory over patriarchy, but over a social order regulated by consumerism and capitalism.

Also her disorder to eat gets worse and finally she reaches a stage where she can eat nothing at all. She is submissive to the feminine mystique as she throws away her University text book and things about what a well ‘organized marriage’ might mean. At one stage Atwood shows Marian’s loss of an independent sense of self which signals the onset and crisis of her nervous disorder. As a bride to be she has already opted out of the professional world and has nothing to do but wait passively for her wedding.

Marian who is against social conformity becomes increasingly disillusioned with her job and their inner conflict where she finds its outward expression which she depicts through eating disorder. Assistance and
survival subverts social definitions by the way Marian finally wins her independence by rebellion against all the odd situations. Later she looks at Duncan, who reflects her passivity and powerlessness. He ridicules her, surfacing that she does not have any individuality and is vulnerable for exploitations. In fact she looks like the duplicate of Duncan who not only parodies her but enables her to examine herself critically and sees the self-damaging implications and consequence of her passive acceptance of imperialistic power structures and her received gender role.

Marian’s Fiancé Peter emblematizes the archetypal male, imperialistic and subjugating. He forever wants to fix Marian in an image of his, of what she should be, where as Duncan whom she meets at the laundromat is in a way her ‘other’ self. She is able to ‘see’ herself as she is and not as seen by others. What differentiates these two is that Duncan self-consciously plays the role of the victim and uses the pretended posture to exploit the others where as Marian is actually a victim and is exploited by others. Marian is seen finally giving up food which signifies her assessment of herself from the outside. She achieves a symbolic purification of herself by eating the cake. Her final act of baking a cake in the shape of a woman by offering to Peter as a woman substitute that symbolizes her having attained the necessary self-knowledge, which implies she is not any man’s-a consumable commodity.
Marian’s delusive claim to innocence and her lack of reverence prevents her from eating meat and later eating almost anything at all. She recognizes her complicity in her own victimization and later she understands that she has attempted to destroy them. Marian thereby overcomes her antipathy to food, by baking a huge cake which is an effigy of herself and gobbles it down. Marian does not wish to turn into any of the models of adult women offered by society and that behind her conventional femininity lies a horror of the body which relates to her fear of going up signaled either by marriage, maternity or the office pension plan. Her inability to eat may look like anorexia nervosa. Though she suffers from the visual and cognitive distortions which characterizes semi starvation, most of the usual symptoms of anorexia are absent. Her rebellion occurs at a level below consciousness and then manifests itself in hallucination and body language.

Both in The Edible Woman as well as in Surfacing the protagonist have accomplished in finding new subject positions for themselves more in their marriages than with the world they live in. The Nameless Protagonist of Surfacing, dives and goes into the water in search of the missing father and discerns a drowned entangled figure that indeed turns out to be the image of an aborted child.
The journey of the thirty year old, educated, Christian female protagonist and narrator to a remote island situated in a lake in the north of Quebec, Canada, apparently to search for her missing father turns out to be a journey away from civilization into the wilderness of her consciousness highlighting the psychic implication of her own lonely childhood and past experience, particularly marriage, pregnancy, abortion and divorce. Her encounter with object, persons and places associated with her childhood, old memories, experiences and associations come flooding to her consciousness. And she, being made wiser by experience in the Urban ‘Civilized’ World, not only views her own upbringing and life as a woman from the perspective of the marginalized, but understands the line and relationships of her parents in a new light. Even after her relationship with David and then with Joe, she is able to understand them better and determines as a woman who refuse to be a victim.

After her father’s month old drowning, she goes through a crisis. It is more or less like a withdrawal by an animal in hibernation or shedding a skin or chrysalis. All this search comes to an end when she discovers within her most vulnerable self a sustaining resistance and moreover shedding the chrysalis of immaturity which is to shed the chrysalis of childhood and dependence on a social being and accepts the responsibility for her own
destructive powers. She takes up this burden on herself alone that gives her finally the strength of Survival. The search for her drowned father, the lost child of her dreams, all this brings in a self-definition by a process of many negative incidents, which finally relates its concept of survival by endurance. These young women are driven to rebellion against what seems to be their fate.

The name less protagonist in Surfacing is far more fearful, desperate and alienated from her true self. Her encounters with the gods of the place are apparently with the corpse of her drowned father. The repeated imagery of bottled, trapped and murdered animals builds power to the key scene in which the father’s corpse and the aborted fetus are encountered.

In Surfacing there occurs a failure of logic, “for her journey “home” is an exploration of a world beyond logic. Her quest like that of Jane Eyre, Clarissa Dalloway and Martha Quest Hesse, is for an identity, a vision of self. She finds her self-not only through the father whom she searches in the Canadian back woods, but also through the mother for whom she must search in the depth of her own psyche. The protagonist at one stage also speaks about her brother having drowned as an infant, an event which she has vicariously experienced or atleast some how observed from what she
describes as her mother’s transparent womb. Later her brother was saved by her mother’s intervention - a kind of re-birth.

Drowning therefore not only represents death or loss but a procedure for finding the self. Her descent into the lake is search of the Indian cave painting, which is in a way symbolic of her descent into her own psyche. Her search for the father ends in the depths of the lake. But it is through this drowning, that she learns about many truths. The protagonist has experienced a spiritual and psychological transformation that gives her the inner strength to change her social and political relationships and hence she no longer sees herself as inevitably powerless or victimized. *Surfacing* is also an endeavour to create a positive female archetype: a woman who is capable of and is determined to live a self-respective and independent life.

The nameless protagonist displays courage, independence and determination to walk out of a subjugating and destructive marital relationship and after exploring the possibilities of withdrawal and romantic escape from the civilization into the wilderness, attempts to revolt against the dominant cultural practices to assert her independence and female identity. The determination of a woman to refuse to be a victim and not to withdraw from society is a very important first step towards her emancipation. Though she gets what she is searching for, it in her own past.
She is looking for those bits of herself buried in her repressed memories, and it is only in the wilderness that she finds a way to heal the split within her own psyche, thereby restoring her emotional and spiritual health. The narrator has surfaced through patriarchal language with its definitions of ‘women’ and ‘victim’ and she has found an appropriate form of her own story of survival within a quest, that mixes realism and fantasy. She shifts from a position of alienation and victimhood to a new sense of the vital relationship between herself as human and the land she inhabits.

The nameless protagonists feels that it is impossible to be like her mother – the miraculous double women who gives birth to herself as well as well as to a new life. Her mother is aligned with nature, at home with it as with an extension of herself. She is seen feeding birds and is in tune with the seasons which we come to know is being recorder by her, and it is she and not her father who respects life, as she gives birth, saves her drowning son, prohibits cruelty, yet dying herself, she also understands the mysteries of death. Delving deep into the world of reminiscence, the nameless protagonist in *Surfacing* realizes that there are some memories that she wants to preserve for they reflect her mental make up.

The protagonist is unnamed because if done so, she would come under some class or race which actually aims to construct a ‘universal’ woman.
archetype, which cannot be defined on concretized in specific socio-cultural economic or racial terms. She feels terribly marginalized or powerless wherever she is. The protagonist is refusing to be a victim or rather determines not to withdraw from the society which forms her first step towards emancipation.

At first she imagines her missing father to have gone mad and lurks in the wilderness outside their cabin. His madness she imagines would be like stepping through a usual door to be found in a different galaxy, which she feels could lead to revelation. As she recognizes her father’s body, the disintegrated fantasy of the past is revealed to her which makes her to accept reality. But her resurrection is not complete she wanted to be “whole”. To become whole, she must find a “gift” from her dead mother, for which she feels that she must become her mother. Life and death, good and evil, exist within the protagonist, as they exist in nature, as woman is associated to nature.

In *Surfacing* protagonist’s search for her father becomes in a way a symbol of her rebirth. She comes to them with the earlier lover (married) who wanted her to abort her child and with the present lover who wants a child. Thus her cycle of life and death becomes complete, by accepting death, she accepts life. Earlier she identifies herself with the entire victim
including weak men, trees, animals etc. but in the end she says that she refuses to be a victim:

“I can remember him, fake husband, more clearly though, and now I feel nothing for him but sorrow. He was neither of the things I believed, he was only a normal man, middle-aged, second-rate, selfish and kind in the average proportions….“ (Surfacing 203)

She had only partly assimilated her descent into her deeper self which discloses the poverty of conventional religious values, the reality of her father’s death is a terrible shock which forces her guilt to surface. But at the same time she realizes that her father’s legacy was not a negation but an affirmation, in a way his rejection of the religion (Christianity) was actually liberating himself from the dogmas and he has in turn gifted her a map which shows her the path that leads her to a personal truth. She translates the map (pictograph) by diving deep and she feels that they are able to find what they search for. From there it is made clear to her that the death or the dead father revealed to her at the bottom of the lake corresponds to her unconscious half that joins her conscious self to form a whole.

On the psychological level she has relieved her guilt ridden personal past as well as her collective past through all the negatives (like her dead
father, her aborted child, her marriage etc.) which generates in her a creative potentiality through rejoining the several halves of her being.

The nameless protagonist becomes a part of a nature who is able to incorporate its power into herself, she follows her mother by placing her feet in the foot fruits left by the vision and thereby feeling that they are her own.

Her illusion that the wilderness has no power to recover from American violation prevents her from realizing her own power to overcome the sense of violation. In a way her victimization of men is the victimization of the Canadians by the American. Hiding from her complicity in evil feeds a false belief that she can do nothing but witness her victimization. The wilderness or in other words her victimization deflects her vision initially but in the end it provides her the key or rather the revelation that releases her power:

“I haven’t had time to be hungry and even now the hunger is detached from me, it does not insist; I must be getting used to it, soon I will be able to go without food altogether. Later I will search along the other trail; at the end of it is the stone point, it has blueberry bushes. As I approach the tollshed the fear, the power is there…” (Surfacing 200)
In her state of transformation she realizes that the individual human identity has no meaning. The vision of her father is impersonal but it is also strangely comforting as it means that the life power survives a particular identity. With the vision of her parents, her circle becomes complete, the power has been communicated to her. She gains wisdom and consciousness of her own power through her encounter with the memories of her parents.

At first she renounces her fictitious memories and then her groundings of her own past that held together her delusion of innocence and powerlessness. The truth that she had been seeking was within her but it was a non-verbal one. Even when her companions announce to her that the body of her father has been found on the bottom of the lake, she denies the limiting reality of such facts, she exults from the perspective of her newly found inner that nothing has died, everything is alive and that everything is waiting to become alive:

“I’m not frightened, it’s too dangerous for me to be frightened of it; it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf’s eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen at night in the car headlights. Reflectors. It does not approve of me or disapprove of me, it tells me it has nothing to tell me, only the fact of itself. Then its head swings away with an awkward almost crippled motion:
I do not interest it, I am part of the landscape, I could be anything, a tree, a deer skeleton, a rock. I see now that although it isn’t my father it is what my father has become. I knew he wasn’t dead”.

(Surfacing 201)

She then experiences a spiritual and psychological transformation that gives her the inner strength to change her social and political relationships. These protagonist’s fear their womanhood. They rebel, adjust all the hardship that comes across in their lives and refuses to allow anything negatively happening to them and they dominate the world by overcoming all sorts of hurdles.

These protagonists transcend their roles (stereotype) through various other related factors like, getting strength from their mother, they feel that only if they rebel and refuse to be a victim they could survive and hence become one by discovering their inner strength. Thus by setting themselves free, the women escape from the trap and turns out to be a powerful woman.

She has escaped from her forever sense of total closure, there by achieving a liberated self and a basis for action within the world. The nameless protagonist feels that she must pass through the proverbial hell and purgatory before reaching her destination. The hell is the assimilation and
acceptance of her previous suffering which finally lead the path towards wholeness.

By mapping the symbolic journey she discovers herself down and through the darkness of the undivided self to the undifferentiated wholeness of archaic consciousness. She seems to be more fearful, desperate and alienated from her true self than Marian Mc Alpin.

Anna, Joe and David are the narrator’s childhood friends with whom she grew up. They accompany her to the wilderness. She is disillusioned that wilderness has no power to recover from American violation and that prevents her from realizing her own power to overcome her sense of violation; though the wilderness initially deflects her vision, in the end it will provide the key, the revelation that releases her power. This power that is the power of life arises from death. She recognizes her body itself as both revelation and incarnation of the great power of life and death.

She finally understands and has subjective dimension of others. She realizes the effort it must have taken to sustain this illusion of reason and benevolent order. She has escaped her former sense of total closure, thus achieving a liberated self and basis for action with the world. The search for her father, mother, her brother and her child gradually makes her discover and reveal herself. She passes through the proverbial hell and purgatory
before reaching her destination. These are not her new suffering but the acceptance of previous suffering towards wholeness. She has recovered not so much the images of her actual parents as their symbolic reality and significance for her. The spirit of her parents can only provide her the truth. She refuses to be a victim and has learnt from her parents that salvation and redemption are never total and never complete.

The nameless protagonist brings out her courage and independence and she decides and has a determination to walkout of a subjugating and destructive marital relationship by depicting the chances of withdrawal and her romantic escape from the civilization into the wilderness. Hence she rebels against the cultural practices that are dominant and she practices to assert her independence and thereby maintains her female identity.

She attempts a rebellious protest that remains vague, ideal and abstract as it is against culture, civilization or ideology that is not concretized in its social context. The protagonist attempts to withdraw from that civilization and culture, she almost becomes neurotic before choosing the option of asserting her independent identity at least on the abstract ideological level.

Meridian from *Meridian* and Celie and Shug Avery of *The Color Purple* are the two empowered characters of Alice Walker. Walker through her works have championed the right to live freely and fearlessly. Her novels
deal with the human experience of the suffering and the downtrodden, the wounded and the oppressed. Her characters are the victims of racial, sexual and economic oppressions who exist under degrading circumstances. But these characters do not lie down and suffer rather they transcend their desperate and painful circumstance to affirm their life. Love in its various forms offers an avenue for healing and re-generation.

Black women novelists of the twentieth century have openly portrayed in their works those experiences of exploitation. Driven by an overriding impulse towards self-assertion, which can be traced back to the cultural ethos of the 1960s, they have later succeeded in turning their identity into a source of strength. Their works of fiction, published over the last two decades, reflects their version of American experience that was excluded from both black male and white female writings. They strive to present the black woman’s quest for total freedom as a human being and as a result some of the black women has risen from passivity to consciousness, from suppression to liberty and empowerment.

In *Meridian* there is an impassioned account of the spiritual progress of a young woman. She is the most interesting character. She brings out a successful change from victim to a fully responsible person. She has ceased to be a committed person and becomes another. She is a heroine who has not
fully broken the gravitational field of the sixties: if she keeps the faith, as
most do not, she also feels the fetters of the disbanded revolutionary
movement, as most do not.

Meridian Hill is a college educated woman who commits her life to
aiding southern blacks in their struggle for political and social equality. She
joins an organization of black revolutionary, but is forced to leave the group
when she refuses to condone its violent actions. Meridian continues her
activist work and later becomes a legendary heroine resembling historical
figures. As a black women, as a black mother, she struggles to be free within
herself even as she encounters sexism, elitism, violence within the
movement.

Meridian “evolves from a woman trapped by racial and sexual
oppression to revolutionary figure, effecting action and strategy to bring
freedom to herself and other poor disenfranchised Blacks in the south. The
teenaged Meridian is forced into an unfulfilling marriage. She becomes
pregnant; she reluctantly marries Eddie, the father of her child, and makes an
effort at being a “proper” wife and mother. Finding the role confining and
intolerable, she harbors thoughts of killing her child, and then she
contemplates suicide rather than harm her own baby. Finally her marriage
ends and she gives away her child believing she is saving both the lives.
From this point, Her spirit is broken, she begins a sort of physical degeneration. She loses her hair, dons a cap and dungarees, lives alone in a small room in southern town trying to find her own health while she helps the Black people in these towns to find power.

Meridian’s journey from the most ordinary position as a high school drop out to a self-illuminated person, is the journey of a woman of empowerment in order to attain selfhood and longingness to fulfill the mission of one’s own life. To begin as an ordinary black female and to end as a self assured person was not an easy development. Meridian must decide whether she will, for the cause, commit the ultimate violence of killing. She considers this as the ultimate violence to herself as well as to others. She is the enormous energies composed in true, choice inaction, the great question resolved in the endless debate of silence. The fruitfulness of Meridian’s choice of inaction and silence may be revealed in the growing back of her hair in her rejuvenation and re feminization.

Meridian, in order to stand up to her own needs takes first step towards becoming a revolutionary petunia, she stops to live buy other standards and learns to bloom for herself as she must in order to survive, since her rebellious act alienates her from the society. The result of working for Civil Rights Movements makes her guilty as she had abandoned her
child. However she conforms to the tradition only by suppressing her emotion. She has so much of potential in her which is revealed in the later stages. Barbara Christine writes that the main struggle in *Meridian* is the fight between a natural life-driven spirit and society’s deadly structures:

“Though the concept of one life motivates Meridian in her quest toward physical and spiritual health, the societal evils that subordinate one class to another, one race to another, one sex to another, fragment and ultimately threaten life. The novel *Meridian*… is built on the tension between the African concept of animism, “that spirit the inhabits all life”, and the societal forces that inhibit the growth of the living towards their natural state of freedom.” (91)

Meridians troubled feelings about her mother revolve around the conflict between the need to love her mother… and the need to be different from her. In *Meridian*, martyrdom is more psychological. The civil rights movement was deteriorating while American feminism was rising and had strong effect on Afro-American literature. Black woman writers seemed to find their voices and audience, whereas black men seemed to love theirs. Black women’s concern had earlier belonged to what was considered the private rather than public, as if the kitchen range could not adequately
represent the struggle. But it turned out that the concerns of the kitchen were big enough to encompass the love of struggle and survival.

Meridian creates a new androgynous self, she is transformed as symbolized by wasting illness from which she recovers and returns “to the world cleansed of sickness”. She communicates the androgynous quality expressed in her physical features. She appears as a symbol of one who has creatively united the masculine and feminine opposites and achieved a state of unconscious wholeness. As she leaves Truman for the last time, he recognizes the change in her:

“what he felt was that something in her was exactly the same as she had always been and as he had, finally succeeded in knowing her. That was the part he might now sense but could not see. He would never see “his” Meridian again. The new part had grown out of the old, though, and that was reassuring. This part of her, new, sure and ready, even eager, for the world, he knew he must meet again and recognize for its true value at same future time”. (Meridian 51)

Both Meridian and Celie are Black women developing a consciousness, an awareness, which allows them to arrive at a deepened sense of self and to grow stronger by speaking from and for that self. They thus are able to take control of their own destiny. Each woman struggles to
affirm the “self” which she knows exists beneath the false images imposed upon her because she is Black and female. Meridian, however, possesses a deeply social and moral vision. Her story emanates from a broader social and political context than does Celie.

She loves Truman Held, and he follows her but finally she rejects in an effort to get a hold of her own life. Meridian leaves Eddie and Truman, turns inwards and travels back through many generations to free her self. She identifies with her mother’s great-grandmother, a slave but also an artist who became famous and bought her freedom by painting lasting decorations on barns. She remembers her father’s grandmother, the mystical and high-spirited Feather Mae, and admires her experiences on ecstatic communion with the past atop the Sacred Serpent, on Indian burial mound.

At college Meridian learns about the slave woman and story teller Louvinie and Sojourner. She also expresses deep sensitivity for her own mother who, through suffering and sacrifice, fulfilled her dreams of becoming a school teacher. Meridian gets strength and continuity from her ancestral past, a knowledge of herself as a creative human being which helps to fortify and to free her from a need for dependence on another person in her quest.
Meridian relates the attitude of the spiritual / political principles of the Civil Rights movement (a social movement) as opposed to the violence, the destruction of life, even as it had violence inflicted upon its members by ruling classes. At one stage she feels guilty about giving her son to other and aborting her second pregnancy. Having sinned against the biological motherhood, she becomes a mother by ‘expanding her mind with action’ directed towards the preservation of all life.

Meridian affirms and challenges the underlying concepts of the movements of sixties. As a black woman, as a black mother, she struggles to be free within herself even as she encounters sexism, elitism, violence within the movement. Robert Towers observes that:

“though beset by serious structural problems and other lapses of crafts, Meridian remains the most impressive fictional treatment of the movement.” (CLC 450)

She protests the violence against women and racist violence among women, while celebrating the bonding that woman must develop in their struggle to achieve selfhood. The increment is an ever-expanding philosophy of walker’s fiction. Survival or the right to happiness, these goals can be imagined as possible, punished and believed only when the responsibility is taken up for ourselves and undergo the process of struggle historically,
personally and collectively necessary to make ourselves physically, passionately, spiritually healthy.

Meridian’s role as mother comes to an abrupt end when “wile chile” escapes and bolts into the street where she is struck by a speeding car. ‘Wile Chile’ is Meridian social antithesis, Meridian struggles herself in the process of self-affirmation.

Contrary to the wile chile’s self-destruction Meridian, marginally defies a form of oneness with herself that allows her to speak and work with the community and at the same time prevents becoming submerged by it, when asked if she could kill for revolution, she finds herself unable to make any revolutionary affirmation but says that she would go back to the south where the civil rights movement was passed too quietly to transform the embedded racist and sexist issues.

Meridian’s childhood is steeped in Indian lore, the walls of her room has papers with photographs of the great Indian leaders. She achieves a state of ecstasy. The communities’ wholeness and the swoon of ecstasy are her political paradigms. As an intellectual and a political activist she understands that the individual’s inspiration for social change can only be realized through the group’s collective activity. Her greatest radicalization is to overcome social and sexual categories to all women especially black
women. Meridian’s struggle is within and against heterosexual relationship unlike Celie’s lesbian alternatives.

Meridian caressing her child’s body, imagine that her fingers have scratched his flesh to the bone. She beholds her child with loving wonderment and sees him as a spontaneous, unasked-for gift absolutely unique and whole. In the desperate need to redefine herself, she chooses to give her child away. But the giving away of her child is not a sacrifice but a willful neglect. Meridian’s mother considers Meridian’s act of abandoning the child as outrageous but exemplifies the plight to black mother, “buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick”. By refusing the mothering she develops a sense of individual caring for her own community.

Meridian’s lover Truman criticizes Meridian for never having loved him. She says, “I set you free”. She has relinquished personal and sexual relationship, which in this society cannot help but be the means and form of a woman’s oppression, way of advancing her own struggle-and that of her loved ones-towards their liberation. She struggles to regain her vanquished strength, probably forcing herself with each confrontation with male authenticity-be it under the abortionist knife or facing down an army tank. She swoons and faints not proclaiming surrender but absolute commitment to the struggle.
She finds this struggle an ongoing process-renewed on a higher, more exacts level. Finally she has mastered not the whole struggle, but herself in the struggle Truman works for the community in order to collectively bring the dream into being. Meridian’s struggle to liberate her self from sexually prescribed categories has been the means for Truman’s unwilling relinquishment of position from which men have traditionally exerted domination.

Education and academic institution for Meridian offers the means for confronting social and sexual contradiction that, as a black teenage mother would not have been able to articulate-either for herself or anyone else. Meridian’s active role in civil rights movement happens to meet people who are flawed yet willing to suffer for the cause. On the other hand Meridian who is at the centre of the group of revolutionaries is herself flawed yet she seeks for the highest she can reach.

The frustration of the Saxon college students at not being allowed to hold the wild child’s funeral in the college chapel results in the destruction of “The Sojourner” the great magnolia tree that symbolized the voice and nurture of the black people. Though Meridian’s mother was denied her creativity, she forced Meridian to accept motherhood for which she is not prepared and which she did not seek. Meridian gives her child in adoption to
a couple who she feels will be the right person for the child. She is tortured mentally by guilt of not living up to the myth of black motherhood.

Meridian attains the state of motherhood as she believes profoundly in the sacredness of all life that she holds responsible. Her aborted motherhood yields a new perspective on life—that of “expanding her mind with action”. The oppressed of black women experience in their relationship with black woman and the sisterhood they must share with each other in order to liberate themselves or in other words the survival and liberation of black women is gained through the strength and wisdom of others.

From her church congregation, to those at the elite college where she attends to a cadre of world Meridian fails to fit in with a succession of social groups to be a violent, revolutionary, and to avoid reproducing the power structures that they combat. Meridian feels that even if one kills it is a fight against tyranny. Her life is shaped by those moments when she remains silent, although those around her demand that she speak. Her silence short-circuits the response expected by patriarchal discourse. Being separated from her family she lives on her own.

Above all she performs spontaneous and symbolic acts of rebellion. As a result she accomplishes more than the world of revolutionaries. She who struggles with quarter that other character gloss over, completes this
personal transformation. Her confrontation with her personal history, family history and racial history shape the way in which she chooses to live. One of her most difficult struggles is to forgive herself for her perceived failings. If she can learn to love and respect herself, she can see her moments of silence as legitimate acts of rebellion against a system that would deny her individuality.

Meridian is too independent to be the clinging vine as Truman desires. Truman really wants a quiet little helper that would look good while hanging on his arm. He did not want a woman who tried to claim her own life. Truman called True / Man, “True” is quite false as a black would-be revolutionary. He loves to dress well and speak French. He paints a strong black woman, earth mother, yet finds himself attracted to white virgins.

A member of the audience Miss Winter truly understands Meridian’s struggle against the hegemonic discourse. Meridian’s cumulative guilt becomes so great that it prevents her from seeing or moving freely. Meridian slips into a petrified trance and it takes on an act of sisterhood by Miss Winter to bring her out of it. Miss Winter had tried to help Meridian once before when Meridian found she could not utter the mindlessly patriotic speech at her high school graduation. Miss Winter’s first word of kindness goes unnoticed by Meridian as she was disappointed by her mother.
Meridian in order to survive sees through the mystique of martyrdom, learns to value her own life and finds a community to live with. This living community she finds in an unconventional church. This church unlike the others was different as a preacher who urges the congregation that stood up for their rights and the hymns with new lyrics that spoke out to her. The kind of ritual and the form of worship were all leading to the ways of transformation. Hence she finally achieves a spiritual release and transformation.

She had decided that she would not kill or die for revolution or any other abstract ideology. If forced, she would kill to preserve life. Finally Meridian’s personal identity becomes a part of collective identity. She who is born a new into a pluralistic cultural self a “we” tries to be selfless without ordinary prerequisites for a personal identity. She is able to speak out against racist patriarchal hegemony than standing silent and alone in the margin.

Meridian proves failure as the type of revolutionist that her friends demand. She realizes these failures after undergoing sufferings through the roles imposed on her. At first she loses her mother and fails as a daughter, than again when she becomes a mother, by giving away her infant son in order to attend Saxon. At Saxon, she meets Tramun Held and once again conceives but aborts and later ties her tubes in order to go according to the
Saxon’s rules. She performs selfless acts of bravery for the benefit of the revolutionary children.

Meridian is described right from the beginning as a woman in the process of changing her mind. She fights back at all those who deem her incorrect. Truman compares her to Lazarus (Biblical ref.). But she says Lazarus wants help, where as she is strong enough to do things all by herself and moreover she realizes that it is her duty to live her own life, even if it means literally fighting for her life. Meridian’s struggle is against her own race and the society. She rebels against all these odds to be a fighter.

Meridian in her quest for an answer to her question about the relationship between violence and change, undergoes a personal transformation and is able to absolve her feelings of guilt about her inability to be a mother. She continues to practice nonviolent resistance in a world that no longer respects it. Her quest reaches its peak when she understands that “it is the transformation got by the experience of each generation that hold them together and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul”. As a protest of Saxon College, Meridian’s fellow students destroy the tree “Sojourner” which makes them understand and accept their heritage, one of suffering as well as resistance. Though cut and shattered,
years later the tree grows back into tiny sprouts bringing back a message of hope.

The civil rights movement transforms the agony of black existence into a measure of its persistence. Being affected by the movement, she is unable to pursue her quest as she came up from a tradition that saw creation as one inhabited with the spirit. All the characters both major and minor are alternatives to her, join hands in Meridian’s search for wholeness.

Meridian was a sensitive girl child who understood she had shattered her mother’s emerging self and that would break the pattern by giving her own child away not only because she wants to go to college but also because she knows she will do to her own son as her mother had done to her – poison his growth with thorn’s of guilt. Her quest is certainly intensified by the search for her child in the faces of all the young children she encounters. Her guilt about her inability to live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before her shatters her health and propels her on the search for salvation.

She encounters a young girl “The Wile Chile” who manages to live without parents or any other relations at the age of thirteen, Meridian tries to civilize her, but while trying to escape from Meridian she is hit by a speeder and killed. This also happens to be another failure to her. All these failures
precipitates her survival aspects. In her pilgrimage towards wholeness, she becomes a mother not in the biological sense but on her insistence on circumstance a nurturing life rather than destroying it.

Meridian’s boy friend Eddie, appreciates her sprit as well as her body, but Truman though he struggled with Meridian for a social change, was primarily interested in sleeping with her. Truman is unable to love Meridian as she embodies many aspects of his tradition: the suffering, the lack of freedom, the impotency, the promiscuity, the provinciality, the restrictions. To survive, she like others has to struggle to create beauty out of those limits, a beauty that cannot simply be given but must be earned. She guides him to the source of his strength and his pain, as a black man he must unravel his own knots. He must pursue his own quest:

“I meant it when I said it sets you free. You are free to be which ever way you like, to be with whoever, on whatever color or sex you like — and what you risk is being truly yourself, the way, you want to be, is not the loss of me”. (Meridian 47)

Her essential characteristic, her resistance to accepting the easy solution, her refusal to speak the word without living its meaning, remind us of the many who succumbed to group pressure whether or not they believed
what they were saying and the many who simply would not, could not, say yes without fussing, fighting, questioning.

Her life is punctuated with an expression of the people’s collective soul, music – not only music as an individual or extraordinary accomplishment, but as a part of the flow of life at parties, in churches, while working with friends and lovers, in Civil Rights Demonstration, in Social Action. She articulates her most important doubts and revelation in images of music.

Her quest finally reaches its peak when she understands that “it is the song of the people transformed by the experience of each generation that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are soulless. Her realization takes place within the context of social change, as the people come together to honour and remember one of their sons who had struggled for their collective freedom. Like many of her ancestors, Meridian takes responsibility for the injustices in her society. Meridian embraces the past so she might attain grace in the present and help to effect change in the future.

Meridian, as her name on the title of the novel *Meridian* indicates is the Meridian in the median point of the circular pattern in the novel, for she has experienced sexism and racism, major obstacles to societal wholeness.
The black woman, as a result of her history and her experience, must be in struggle against the distortion of life. Until she is free, her people cannot be free, and until her people are free, she cannot be free. The struggle that is there is not the struggle for power, rather it is a struggle to release the spirit that inhabits all life. The greatest value of a person is in the attainment of full humanity and that is possible only with a willingness to struggle towards the end and by preserving the fullness against unnatural restrictions. The wholeness of a person is basically threatened by an assault as the definition of herself, or herself as a female or male.

The idea of female creativity as a means of overcoming the oppression and the transcendence occurs as a theme in walker’s novels. Black women are largely involved in destructive and distressful relationships with men. They are at the mercy of not only men in their lives, but also their own passion, the force of nature and on societal expectations.

Meridian embarks on a search for meaning both in her personal and political life, where as for Celie it is on the personal and social life. The journey towards awareness leads her to instance after instance of society’s rejection and abuse of children, until they arrive at a fierce commitment to remaking the world. They realize that they own it to their self and to the life given to them to continue to live and fight against injustice. Moreover it is a
spark which fuels a true sense of love and responsibility for the well-being of the country.

Meridian awakens from her subordinate status as a black, female, daughter, wife and mother to her own self. She tries to become the material provider of the larger black community, to begin as a ordinary black female and to end as a self-illuminated / self-assured person. And she attains selfhood and understands the mission of her life. To attain the glimpse of her self which is in full bloom she undergoes a number of trials and tests. By being a mother she interprets a look in the eyes of other women. She lost her creativity and she was forced to do what she was never interested. As an individual she wanted to make her life meaningful.

To gain the glimpse of Meridian’s self which is in full bloom she has had to undergo innumerable trials and tests. She evolved from a woman raped by racial and sexual oppression to a revolutionary figure effecting action and strategy to bring freedom to her self and other poor disenfranchised blacks in the south.

She considers herself as adventurer. She is very thrilled when she realizes that she belongs to the people who made Harriet Tubman, the only American woman who led troops in battle. She longed to be away from
Truman whom she thought would not allow her to be free. Finally she wins the trust not only of her people but also of Truman.

Meridian who is full of guilt in the beginning, is seen in spite of the painful experiences, to be born anew and succeeds in evolving a new self. In due course of time she emerges as a leader of black race. She creates herself in her own image and not as a preconceived one. She realizes that she must overcome the idea of “woman’s place” and to fulfill her aim or mission and in order to fulfill this mission she keeps away from family life and for the church and its people, which had guided and comforted her.

Walker means to say a great deal about the liberating possibilities of the bonds between black woman through Celie and Nettie. Her view of the black woman’s history that comes from the same mission pervading in TCP as a legacy of ‘creativity’ finds expression only in chores. Moreover it is highly debatable whether balck women in history were wholly inarticulate or whether their condition was an utter mystery to their role as a champion of the victim of the past places. Her’s is a position of cultural arrogance not unlike that of white missionaries to Black Africa.

In her novels can be seen the search for survival or rather the protagonist reaching the shore by surviving against the odds in their lives. Walker takes seemingly ragged edges and arranges them into works of
functional through terrifying beauty. Her novels continuously stitch a fabric of the everyday violence that is committed against her characters and that they commit upon one another in their search for regeneration and regeneration is what they as black people desire. Elizabeth Bartelme observes:

“Alice Walker is a feminist and she understands well the circumstances that force a woman into an anti-man stance. Her gallery of women are living examples of man’s humanity to women”. (CLC 45)

**TCP** is a struggle between redemption and revenge. The chief agency of redemption is the strength of relationships between women, their friendship, their love and their stored oppression. Celie’s narrative is about breaking silence. She struggles towards linguistic self-definition. The novel begins with misery degradation and isolation but ends with joyful fulfillment and integration.

Celie’s journey is an evolutionary journey moving from victimization to conciousness of her plight, escaping from the restrictive shabby kind of existence to awareness of new relationship, breaking away from the defined sex-role of the oppressive society to the free and fresh niche in a world of her own. Celie a young black girl in TCP overcomes the abuses of sexism
and racism to grow into a strong, independent woman. Her father and husband both illustrate the psychological phenomenon. Her father mistreats her and her sister, raping Celie repeatedly and fathering her two children before selling her to her husband, who also abuses her mentally and physically.

Celie addresses many of her letters in the novel to God, though her conception of God evolves as the novel progresses. She is condemned to a life of drudgery because she is ugly, poor and a black woman. Her letters are written in black dialect and that reflects the rural environment. After so much of torture and struggle, she grows from a submissive but survival oriented girl into a strong independent woman. Her language becomes a badge of honor to her, that is a reminder of her identity and of the hardships she had survived. Even after she has established successful business, she resists efforts by well meaning friends to change the way she speaks. Her independent voice reflects her independent character and ultimately it is this independence that brings her happiness and fulfillment.

Celie writes letters describing her ordeal to God and to her sister Nettie; who escapes a similar fate by working as a missionary in Africa. Celie is the downiest of woman as she must survive against impossible odds, because she has no one to talk to, she writes about her life in the guise of
letters to God. When she discovers that her much loved lost sister is not dead after all but is living in Africa, she writes letters to Nettie, instead as she feels like conveying the truth to someone.

TCP an odd miracle of nature, symbolizes the miracle of human possibilities. Celie believes she is ugly and she centres her belief on her blackness. Celie does have an awareness of right and wrong that comes from outside her self. Plowing a man’s field for twenty years and letting him use her body as a sperm depository leaves Celie so buried away from herself that it is hard to imagine anything stirring her to life and she being so deadened. Celie knows that Mr. ___ (Albert’s) abuse of her is wrong just as she knows her stepfather’s sexual exploitation of her was wrong, as she cannot bear Albert’s children. Celie becomes the ugly duckling who will eventually be redeemed through suffering. The clash between youth and age, between power and powerless-Celie’s predicament is real as she is forced to deal with its terms that are antithetical to the reality of her condition.

In TCP, Walker lifts the Black women off their knees, uses love, as a defense mechanism and raises Black women to a level of royalty and sovereignty. Robed in purple they receive and accept the right to love themselves and each other. Love of self energizes them to the point that they break their chains of enslavement, change their own worlds, time and Black
men. They are prepared to fight – eye for a eye, tooth for a tooth. And they
remain women-cry when they need to, laugh when they want to, and finally
change the economic, political and moral status with their love:

“The Women in Purple” build a wall of camaraderie around
themselves. They share each other’s pain, sorrow, laughter and
dreams. They applaud each other’s achievements. And they come to
each others rescue. They are sisters in body as well as in spirit and
the spirit cannot be broken. They found God in themselves and
“they loved her fiercely”. (TCP 485)

The distinctive feature of women is the tremendous quality with
which they carry their suffering. Some are generous and proud. Some are
forgiving even to the man who mistreats them. Some are trusting and
patient. The new women overcome insurmountable odds to change their
condition. They are all resilient to a point. Celie at a point redeems the male
character by giving courage to the women by releasing the women already in
them. She even writes to God as she isn’t shy before the Lord.

In TCP the letters span thirty years in the life of Celie. The letters are
written to God and to Celie’s sister Nettie who escapes a similar life by
becoming a missionary in Africa. Celie overcomes her oppression to the
intervention of an unlikely ally, her husband’s mistress Shug Avery. Shug helps Celie to find self-esteem and the courage to leave her marriage.

Celie’s letter both expresses her view of herself and her visit of the world even as they show her development from a victimized girl to a woman who becomes strong enough to change her conditions and to love herself. Letters are both a source of subjective information, the world in which she moves, though these letters, (subjective information) reflected about Celie’s thoughts and feelings.

As Celie becomes older, she becomes more articulate and stronger that is her triumph over brutality, wife-beating, incest-through her sister-through Shug who becomes he lover and friend, through Nettie, her blood sister who writes letters to her from Africa, and whose letters she can finally answer, and through Sophie, her sister-in-law who resists her husband as well as white people’s attempts to beat her down.

It is through Celie’s awareness of the right to the passion, creativity and satisfaction in life which she empowers herself. Once she experiences the erotic, the sharing of joy, she fights for her rights to participate on it.

Celie’s transformation is brought about from her journey from the rural backwaters to the big city. If Celie’s transformation must not be just economic but sexual as well. Her ability to question and to break the passive
acceptance of her husband’s domination is possible by her friendship and eventually lesbian relationship with Shug Avery a black blues singer.

Unlike the monstrous inequality between husband and wife, she gives herself to heal the sick, exhausted Shug and Shug’s giving of herself patiently and lovingly teaching Celie to know her self better both physically and mentally. Having undergone liberation both economically and sexually, she is no more perceived as a domestic salve or means towards male sexual gratification but as a whole woman-witty, resourceful, caring, wise, sensitive and sensual.

For all the violence and suffering that Celie experiences from Blackmen, she does not grow to hate them, her eventual rejection of them is no more permanent than her brief flirtation with lesbianism. Thus by helping them to know themselves allows them to find their own identity.

Celie who is wholly alone, develops a community, an extended family that includes Shug-her husbands mistress, Sofía who marries Celie’s stepson. The love that Celie and Shug share, gives Celie the freedom to say what she thinks and to develop as an independent woman both creatively as well as a self. Through the letters that she discovers, she gain’s confidence and comes to know the truth about her family and blames God and there after writes only to Nettie:
“She (Shug) say, Celie! like she shock. He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death”.

“My daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not pa.” (TCP 160)

Thirty years later Celie who was an isolated scared black girl of fourteen years became the centre of a loving family. She has a thriving business with the sister she has missed for all those thirty years. Nettie’s education improves her associations with the educated missionaries and changes her from the backward Georgia girl to a knowledgeable woman with vastly more experience than Celie.

Celie’s path to selfhood involves the evaporation of patriarchal Christianity. He Mr. (Albert) perceives her as live stock and denies her not only love but also humanity. Her response is highly ironic, both in terms of her “never mine” comment and the silence of her respondent. The greatest significance is that Celie must learn to be patient with Nettie’s silence, she must discover that there never was a silence, that the nexus was interrupted. Celie endures the indignities of their life with Nettie’s support and aid. Celie’s familial universe is not to be without female nurturance. Celie learns to cope up seeing Sofia.
Celie’s discovery of Nettie’s letter marks the radical turning point of the novel. Mr. (Albert) hides these letters of Nettie from Celie in order to shape her for herself. It is most powerfully expressed in his attempts to break social bonds through the denial of a textual connection with Nettie. The letters of Nettie are powerful connection which has been disguised and sequestered because of the letter’s liberating power. Celie is in a fit of anger plans to kill Mr. (Albert), but Shug convinces her not to kill him by doing so she might risk severing her tie to Nettie. Celie distances herself not only from the “Christ(ian)” response, but also from the tradition itself. Her appeal to “Christ” is an appeal to old rhetoric which does not have hold on Celie any more.

Finally she leaves Mr. (Albert) by cursing him, her curse brings havoc upon the patriarchal household and makes a claim for her own space within creation. Her curse is affirmative as well as negating. It instigates new order. She observes a lot of change in Mr. (Albert) work, ethics and grooming habits, so also in Harpo, he follows his father. The curse provides the motivation for the lamb to lie down with the lion. The voice that empowers the curse also promotes and defies the tradition.

Her letters, however provide a record of her growth out of this initial femininity into self-affirmation. Her self-definition is seen in the processes
of the epistolary form. But in the first half it is a one way correspondence between the abused and lovely Celie and her inner self which actually makes her fight back. By addressing God part of her personality tends to grow stronger until she acknowledges God with herself. Right from her childhood she has accepted the image of God presented in the white man’s Bible.

Nettie, her sister was everything to her, Nettie flees from her in order to avoid the sexual harassment of their father (step) and then again from Celie in order to escape from her husband Mr. __ (Albert). In revenge for having rejected Mr. __ (Albert), he hides all the letters Nettie had been writing to her sister. When she comes to know of this her anger flames up and she writes God off just like another ordinary person. She stops writing to God and starts writing to Nettie though it never reaches her.

Celie’s anger brings about a great change in Mr. __ (Albert). Both Celie and Albert suffer from a sense of dis-ease that derives from their culturally defined roles. They grow towards wholeness by becoming more like each other, achieving wholeness and finding peace. Towards the end Celie is seen running a business all by her self and Albert being independent by keeping a home for him self. They find enough inner strength to lead their life independently all by themselves.
Celie’s self-confidence and self-awareness are awakened under the guidance of the free spirited singer Shug Avery. In order to get towards wholeness, her invert spirit and her spiritual past is touched upon. Her defining quality is innocence and it is this innocence that subjects her to violation. She struggles hard and does a lot of work, without education proper dress and food. Having undergone a lot of suffering at the hands of her step father who feels she is no longer “fresh”, gets her married to Mr. __ (Albert). Even after her marriage her life does not improve in any way as he seems to be another powerful male figure whose oppression was not merely physical but mental and emotional. He uses his male sexuality to batter her. Unable to fight back she survives passively, she realizes that survival should be without being splintered and degraded.

Through her sister’s letter Celie is able to put her oppression. It is her friend Shug who helps Celie triumphs over the brutality done to her by her husband Mr. __ (Albert) and from Sofia she learns how to resist her husband and to fight her white counterparts. Celie gains a lot of courage from all this and also from other women whose chief oppression is the agency of redemption and at last finds peace within herself.

To Celie, knowledge is power she also learns that there is no need to obey Mr. __ (Albert) which would be a loss of her own self. She liberates her
self from fear, pressure and imposition by her husband Mr.__ (Albert) and when Mr.__ (Alphonse) prevents her from going to Memphis along with Shug she shouts back at him saying that it is time for her to leave and enter into creation.

She, a helpless poor, black, ugly and a sexually abused girl who moves from her helplessness towards complete independence and establishes her own world which is full of black womanists consciousness. She who suffers from self-scorn learns to love herself and other black men and women and worries about the black community as a whole. This new empowerment confers on these black women responsibilities, though they are capable of shouldering with compassion and dignity.

Her letters reflect her internal conflict, her silent suffering, and the impact of oppression on her spirit as well as her growing internal strength and her final victory. Writing in a way helps Celie to explore her consciousness and enables her to create self-awareness or rather gives her an assertion through the process of writing letters.

Celie’s struggle was to break away from all racial, sexual and gender ideologies to which she was subjected. In her attempt to achieve wholeness, her character shows great courage and mental strength. She strongly believes that woman or man’s position will not change until and unless the society’s
attitude changes, as they are the fellow victims who recognize themselves and the people around them with a renewed hope.

Celie finally emerges as an independent creative business woman. She moves from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan. From a being a burdened girl to a state of mental and physical liberation or rather independence. She understands God and accepts that this supernatural power is put in every body, she moves from the role of a maid to a business woman, from a church woman to a refree smoker from her back room to possessing a house, property of her own.

Celie’s liberation is complete when her mind soars free to attain a sense of oneness with the universe and when people as well as stars, trees, the sky become part of the creation of God. When she returns home, she is no longer a slave or the means to male sexual gratification but as a whole woman, wise, resourceful, caring, sensitive and sensual. Towards the end Celie becomes an entrepreneur and her violent and oppressive husband is seen sitting by her side, calm and docile, learning the female art of sewing.

According to Walker, womanism is an empowered form of feminism just as purple is a bold and empowered version of lavender. Purple as a color is considered as a sign of indomitable female spirit and an encoding of the joyous vitality of the female spirit. Her womanist theory is expressed by her
metaphor of the garden where room exists for all flowers to bloom equally and differently, co-existing yet retaining their cultural distinctiveness and integrity. Walker asserts the affirmation of life-forces and physical fulfillment which makes living meaningful. She becomes a professional seamstress and designs pants, which is also symbolic of her accepting and being accepted as the economic power and moving up on the higher step of class hierarchy. Mary Helen Washington, an Alice Walker critic states:

“The author is an apologist for Black Women. She uses ‘apologist’ a defence or as a cause in the liberation of Black Womanhood, but as an apologist she demonstrates the position of acknowledgement.” (Francine CLC 428)

Her negativities turn into positivity of life forces. She acquires total freedom, physical, emotional and also economic. She achieves her liberation, creating all around her a congenial world where men also change for the better and attain total freedom. Her journey is revolutionary as it moves from victimization to consciousness of her plight, escaping from the restrictive life to an existence of new relationship, breaking from the oppressive society to the fresh and free niche in the world of her own.

In TCP liberation begins with the help of three stages of women. Celie from passive emerges to a strong being. Sofia being the back bone of
Celie gives her moral supports and it is basically Shug Avery who brings out the transformation in Celie. Liberation and empowerment slowly start from one stage to another and finally bloom out through these strong characters.

Shug was Celie’s back bone, the courage and confidence that was given to her by Shug has made her come out of the oppressed life. She overcomes all the hurdles in her life by breaking the silence of oppression. Her liberation is complete when her mind soars free to attain a sense of oneness with the universe and the people.

Shug Avery, Mistress of Albert is the exotic blues singer of legendary beauty. She is the symbol of empowerment and self-fulfillment in the novel, Shug Avery is proud, independent and has an appetite for living. Her rebellious spirit leads her not only to desert her becoming husband but also to challenge the social order of the racist community in which she lives.

Shug is fully responsible for the physical and psychological development of Celie. Shug becomes the embodiment of feminist freedom in her career as a blues singer and refuses to settle down for the life of domesticity. By being true to her own experience, she has become strong and independent. Shug had the ability to transform Celie into a new being.

Shug inspires Celie to celebrate her existence. She (Shug) makes Celie aware that she is undivided and has a life to lead on her own. This idea
brings about a transformation which encompasses her sexual awakening. She who hadn’t given any importance for her own self till then, realizes that she is pretty and beautiful and becomes proud of her own self. Shug saves Celie from her husband Mr.__ (Albert) helps her trace back her lost sister and also makes her financially independent by teaching her to stitch and sell pants. Shug invokes the unknown and uncared feminine desires in her.

Shug is the most beautiful woman that Celie has every seen. She is the role model for Celie and the one who changes the suppressed and the oppressed community.

Shug, a blues singer, possesses a strong physical and sensuous presence quite the antithesis of Celie’s timidity. She asserts an empowered femininity, free, strong, generous and full of talent with an assertive demanding voice and personality and is economically independent. Celie asserts her femininity to Mr.__, for which she gets a real boost from Shug for her low self-esteem. Celie triumphs over brutality through Shug who becomes her lover and friend, Celie learns a lot from Shug and thereby moves out of her state of passive dependency into a sense of her own worth. Shug teaches her or rather makes Celie realize her own potentiality. It is through her awareness of her right to the passion, creativity and fulfillment she empowers herself. Earlier she had been weak and submissive, but
through Shug she learns to gain the strength to confront Mr.__. She even goes to the extent of cursing Mr.__ but finally she reaches out to a powerful assertion by identifying herself as a human being.

Shug, a friend of Celie initiates changes in all aspects of her life. Shug successfully corners off the emotionally crippled Celie for sexual purposes. Celie’s homosexuality is a result of being a victim not merely with the male but of women too. She helps change her entire community. It is from Nettie that Celie first learns the resistance is necessary: “You go to fight, you go to fight”.

Shug is a super woman for Celie who transforms her and helps her overcome all inhibition and complexities from her mind. Shug not only frees Celie from the dehumanizing slavery of the domestic life, but also from the victimizing ideas of suppression and submission. Shug helps her get back her name and to earn for her own livelihood. Her mind is filled emotionally and is stressed toward self-recognition and self-respect. Through sewing she not only earns but creates a symbolic force that joins, connects and unites the separated parts. To Celie and Nettie, physical and geographical separation does not bring about much difference. The theme of survival doest not just confine to woman but also to survival and wholeness of the entire community.
Walker pays homage to feminists by portraying women who struggle through adversity to assert themselves against almost all impossible odds. The tragedies of the black woman are very personal, real and extraordinarily bleak and black. Women are reduced to a level lower than themselves, become frustrated and operate on the level consistent with their reduced state. They are trapped due to the circumstance and this entrapment in the result of their sense of powerlessness against the structure of the dominant society as well as the fact that they have little understanding of that structure.

But for survival and existences, she faces life all alone with courage and dignity and becomes a truly liberated woman like Celie. Celie’s journey from a dumb, illiterate, ignorant ugly black girl to the awakened and self-consciousness woman is not something that occurs just like that but by the awakening of every woman (Shug, Nettie and Sofia) who drive the potential in her. The theme of TCP is built on Meridian’s pilgrimage to freedom. Basically Meridian wants to give some meaning to her life as an individual. The civil rights movement awakens the true self is her. A sea of change occur in the life of Meridian after going to the civil rights movement which also gives her the strength to teach the illiterate to read and write. In spite of all the painful private experience she is born a new and succeeds in evolving a new self. She emerges as a leader of the black race. The going
of knowing herself is complete to the extent that she creates herself in her own image. Through the journey to self-discovery she was a lonely one who wanted to undertake the journey with courage and dignity.

Women need to reorganize their lives to develop and promote new system and new attitudes by overcoming and overpowering all the obstacles in their lives that is in the process of initiation into a new womanhood, one has to go through a series of oppressive events and moving experiences. Walker achieves full vision of woman’s assertion of her Self from nothingness to the full-fledged and complete female existence.

They preserve their freedom by severing themselves from almost all aspects of the “normal” feminine experience. They could bolster their self-esteem by reminding them self that they have been doing something what the women had never done (rebel). Too many restrictions on them made their lives miserable. They are able to free themselves by giving up entitlements and by rejecting its ambiguities.

Their yearning for independence and delight in discovering themselves was more forceful than the freedom to be weak and to be strong. It is only the strength of self-obsession and determination that made them construct a self. All these protagonists had to retain their integrity in order to attain a sense of self. All these survivors namely Anita Desai’s Bimla / Bim
from *Clear Light of Day*, Margaret Atwood’s Marian Mc Alpin from *The Edible Woman*, The nameless protagonists from *Surfacing*, Alice Walker’s Celie and Shug from *The Color Purple*, and Meridian from *Meridian* or rather the characters who struggle for independence are women wishing to retain their integrity, to assert themselves in order to resist all other things. They know that freedom comes from giving up entitlement, rejecting its ambiguities as representing too high a cost. Moreover their independence exists only in a small circle of confinement.

Through relationships they discover and defy themselves thereby affirming their womanhood. The implication of freedom is contradicted by reality and the central effort is to overcome all political, social economic, sexual and social struggles. These protagonists long to be a whole human being and this wholeness they get only through freedom or rather by being free overcoming all their hurdles. They survive against all odd and achieve their victory and this becomes finally the emblem of their virtue.

These protagonists achieve independence and become empowered by strengthening themselves enduring the physical and mental hardships. A positive affirmation is achieved either through solitude, celibacy or otherwise also. Also these women respond along with their strategies they
used to resist and challenge the situation due to the oppressive consequences and the contradiction it involves.

Women tend to realize that survival is frequently a monumental achievement. When women’s goal of life reaches beyond narrow restrictions of current experiences, their life becomes more expansive. Being alive generates some tensions of striving, but woman must gain a momentum that defies being alive as more than physical survival.

Women have the power to change the world for which certain concepts also should be changed. She refuses to confine herself to the role of a feminine as she feels she is a complete woman who is equal to male. She resists the demands of the society and turns out to be a rebel. Woman is free to act and speak and use the freedom to defy her own self.

Most women in the world live at level of survival or empowerment. They are socialized to accept restrictions and to consider themselves fortunate. Women are preoccupied with survival needs. Women become more aware of their experience and in fact go beyond survival and thereby seeking increased fulfillment.

Women are now empowered and are able to fulfill their dreams and targets and have setforth themselves in the societies framework. The new woman is an icon of change. She has challenged the conventional gender
roles and meeting challenges and fighting against hostility, she comes out triumphant. The empowered women or the new women represent the tendency of new women to reject the old ways in favour of new modern choices. Being empowered, women can now reach out to the remote corners of the world and help out women from their oppressed or passive state.

All these empowered women finally emerge out of the crisis as strong women willing to compromise with life as it comes. The new women become aware of their rights and responsibilities and start questioning their norms thereby demanding equality and recognition for their individuality. Women in general are encouraged to include a timid diffidence in their behaviour – their revolt intensifies their condemnation as passive and vulanerable beings. The Empowerment confirms the responsibilities on these women capable of shouldering their duty with dignity.

The new woman is a complusive emergence out of the existing ethos and not just a blind imagination. It is a product of revolution going on everywhere. It is nothing short of a revolution, says a sociologist and looks at the ‘New Woman’ as a logical evolution of the growth of the middle class and nuclear family in the last few decades. The emerging ‘New Women’ is a product of the inevitable transformation taking place in the society as the country marches ahead to catch up with the rest of the world.
The day for moving mountains is coming.

You don’t think so?

It is coming: for a while the mountain sleeps,

But in other times

Mountains all moved in fire. If you do not believe that,

Oh man, this at least believe:

All sleeping women

Will awake now and move.

___ Yosano Akiko (1878-1942)
CHAPTER – V

CONCLUSION

Anita Desai, Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker are widely acclaimed novelists to emerge in the literary horizon of twentieth century. Though they hail from different geographical regions – an Indian, a Canadian and Afro American – they are all interested in women and have focused on major female characters in their novels. Sensitive in depicting women, they portray them with such power, compassion and insight that their novels become the work of consummate artists. All of them believe that strength of will and independence triumph. They admire those who have the courage to battle against impossible odds and come out as empowered women. A deep analysis of the women characters in the select novels of Desai, Atwood and Walker are made, dividing them into three categories namely The Feminine, The Survivors and The Empowered.

In the first category the three authors depict women who are passive like Tara, Aunt Mira, Mira Masi, Anamika, Anna, Celie, Mrs. Hill, Louvine. These characters are termed as The Feminine as they silently undergo all the difficulties and the oppressions without any revolt. In the second category The Survivors characters such as Uma, Aruna, Ainsely, Nettie, Sofia and Mary Agnes are considered as survivors as they fight and prove their power
under various circumstances. Finally in the third category *The Empowered* the characters such as Bimla / Bim, Marian Mc Alpin, Meridian, Celie and Shug Avery crack their nutshell and come out as Empowered women fighting successfully through the worst calamities of life. All these three writers probe deep into the human psyche especially feminine psyche. Their novels show their involvment through the deep feelings of their women who are seen as ones who are highly supressed by social tantalization. In their novels they intend to transcend all their earlier limitations in the most simple way.

All the literary artists have some tools, devices and methods in creating a literary work. Technique has wide scope of meaning as far as the literary field is concerned. Some novelists are deliberately conscious of technique and rely on technical innovations while others are satisfied with the mere basics. Style is ‘the life-blood’ of the idea, but the idea remains an abstraction till it is realized through languages, so language is the main element of style. Hence language must be a matter of deep consideration for the novelist. Along with the summing up, the narrative technique of Anita Desai, Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker are also discussed. Anita Desai is a fluent artist, working from one vivid salience to the next. Desai’s thematic concerns and technical innovation occupies a unique position in the world of Indian writing in English. She knows the different lights of India, and she
sees everything under the sun, she knows her own mind about everything she
touches and that brings about a symphonic bent.

The inability of human beings to know each other is communicated by
the novelist through the analysis of love, hate, misunderstanding that colours
the relationship between the various characters. The novelist, in novel, after
novel, goes back and again to the same themes and employs the same
techniques for purpose of narration, evocation and description. Desai’s
writings are uniquely original. Anita Desai’s characters want to make a
choice, exercise their freedom and refuse to conform a compromise. Their
persisent search is for a an authentic existence by bearing the sole
responsibility for their decisions rather than by appealing to the authority of
custom or even their own past patterns of thought. In her novels there is an
intense questioning and the protagonist are torn between their search for
authentic existence and the limitation of the human situation that prevent
them from such realizations. For Desai’s protagonist, it is unauthentic to
accept life as it comes. They believe that they have an individual potentiality
of their own. In an interview she affirms :

“I am interested in character who are not average but have retreated,
or been driven into despair and so turned agaisnt the general
current. It is very easy to flow with the current, it makes no
demands, it costs no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out ‘the great No’, who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what demands are and what it costs to meet them.” (Solanki 3)

Desai, confesses that she has not written the kind of social document that demands the creation of realistic and typical character and the use of typical dialogue. She is more depends more on her uniquely private visions than the subjective rendering of external reality. Ample light is also thrown on the sociological and psychological problem of women writers:

“They live mostly in such confined spheres and therefore their field of observation is at the same time more restricted and more intense. This leads them to placing their emphasis differently from men, on having a very different sense of values. Whereas a man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a women writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation.” (An Interview with Anita Desai 100)

One of her most important aspect of her work is fusing form and content. Technique for Anita Desai is neither an after thought, nor is it mechanically imposed on recalcitrant content. Desai has a gift for evoking a physiognomy with a phrase:
“Aunt Mira’s “bird-boned wrist” at her death, or her “bride-like face” on arrival and she can bring alive an entire way of life in a few lines, as in the case of the surly driver who continues to sit outside the garage door, after the family car has been sold, sometimes smoking, “staring over the caps of his knees,” till finally they permit him to be the gardener’s helper.” (Daniels CLC 146)

She portrays their keen struggle to maintain their individuality while finding some means of relating to the society. In her character portrayal, Desai moves many from the pattern laid by the nineteenth century novelists. She views the struggle of her protagonists in the context of the human struggle for survival from which she excludes no one. Desai depicts the inner longings of women characters through the images of birds as they are considered to the symbol of freedom of will, thought and action:

“It has memorable moments with mynahs, koels, kites, pigeons, egrets, budgerigars, hornbills, horses, crickets, frogs, snails, caterpillars, cats (a cat stalks a butterfly), and dogs and river birds. Never have so many flowers, creepers, bushers, trees raised their heads in fiction: the bougainvillea, the spider lilies, the asparagus ferns, the canna, the jasmine, the chamelis... the mulberry, the
eucalyptus, the castor oil plant… Never since the nineteenth century has a city raised such “jocund” company.” (Cited Daniels CLC 147)

Her themes are original and entirely different from those of Indo-American novelists. Her themes tend to wedge off the tracks of other novelists. Each aspect merges with the other and sometimes one finds a number of themes woven together. Using these themes as a foundation, the writer is able to build up her characters into a significant whole. The theme of Desai’s novels like that of the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf is human in nature and human in relationships.

Her use of images serves a variety of ends such as development of theme, the tone and atmosphere and there by the growth of the characters. Her artistry is seen in the perfect co-relation between the images and themes on the one hand and images and characters on the other. She uses the image according to the need of the situation, nature and scene. She also displays a remarkable capacity for adaptation in her language and style. As a creative artist she show tremendous potential and vitality in her writings. It is in the use of domestic imagery that CLD excels:

“Tara feels that “part of her was sinking languidly down into the passive pleasure of having returned to the familiar—like a pebble she has been picked up and hurled back into the pond, and sunk
down through the layer of green scum, through the secret cool depths to the soft rich mud at the bottom.”… The house image is also used to objectify Tara’s “dullness” and “boredom”. She feels that “the fullness and the boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room… as if this were the storeroom of some dull, uninviting provincial museum.”… (Prasad CLC 71)

The successful work of a art is that in which the theme finds its perfect flowering in the structure, for according to Henry James, perfect execution demands a full intergeneration of the idea with its mode of expression. Desai has turned to present her themes organically with appropriate adjustments and adaptation in spheres of style and point of view, which results in her comparative superiority over other Indian women novelists writing in English. Due to her serious writings she becomes tremendously successful. Desai creates a character in order to tell a tale and embody her vision of life. Her art is not traditional: her personages are engaged in contemplation, not action. Her freshness and spontaneity indicate her rich creative faculty. Her writing is an effort to discover the truth : “the truth that is nine-tenth of the Iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality.” (Cited Desai 348)
The inner world of Desai’s character is seen in her novels. She presents a kaleidoscopic image of the minds of her characters as they are characters who are of prime importance to her. The struggle of an individual for a possible undertaking of self-identity forms a recurrent theme in her novels. The possibilities of the Desai’s characters self-identity, survival have grown from uncertainty and potentiality to an assertive and strident optimism which shows the novelist’s program. Many readers appreciate Anita Desai’s achievement in creating characters, independent of social or political issues.

Desai’s art is not traditional: her personages are engaged in contemplation and not action. Through her narrative skill, she captures and holds the attention of her readers. Her freshness and spontaneity indicates her rich creative faculty. Desai was very much influenced by Virginia Woolf, hence similarities in their narrative techniques and choice of themes can be discerned. Her symbols are powerful and haunting. Like Virginia Woolf, she tries to convey the intense existence of the characters through images and symbols. Images in her work make emotions clear, emotions dictates the images which shape the novel. Images shape the theme and themes controls the images. The unique feature of Anita Desai’s fictional artistry is her use of imagery to carry theme, to unite structure and to create the feeling of wholeness. She sees a novel as a pattern or a design:
“I like to have their pattern and their fit in the characters, the scene – each piece in keeping with the other so as to form a balanced whole”. (Cited Desai 5)

In Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* there is a movement in the novel – a movement in time, from the past to the present and present to the past. The characters are treated with the usual mixture of satire and sympathy, of detachment and insight. Desai talks about the family chronicle and also about her history of modern India through this work:

“If past and present are seen as the notes, themes and patterns that Desai uses, *Clear Light of Day* can be appropriately described as an extended piece of music, subtle, sensitive, sensuous in its line and melody, but also complex and richly integrated in its total effect.”

(Cited Singh CLC 149)

Her *Clear Light of Day* covers a period of time beginning from childhood of the Das’s children to their maturity and historically two periods that of colonial and independent India:

“… history is glimpsed only out of the corner of the eye. In the partition riots Delhi is ablaze, but the fires are on the horizon. The novel takes place in Old Delhi’s Civil Lines, ‘where the gardens and bungalows are quiet and sheltered behind their hedges’, and the
residents only imagine that they ‘hear the sound of shots and of cries and screams’. It is here that the family live, the four children—Raja, his two sisters, Bim and Tara, and Baba,… Bim taking care of Baba, Raja marries daughter of Muslim businessman, Tara marries a diplomat – shifting to country to country…” (Cited Cronin CLC 178)

Her plot pattern cover a small span of time, a few days or months and do not allow space for action to progress or characters to change from one complication to another. As an artist she longs for absolute perfection. In Baba’s (Bimla’s brother) contest memory plays important role because in his mind there are certain impressions that keep recurring due to the limited mental impressions beyond which he cannot go:

“Desai uses music and responses to bring out the protagonist’s sensitivity and maturity. Music brings out a person’s ability and emotions. Music becomes symbolic of the intuitive understanding of oneself, and of the reality that lies submerged under appearences. With her “inner eyes” Bim perceives a continuity in history, her families and in time, “binding them within some dead and airless cell” but giving them the soil in which to hand down their roots…”
reaches out to new lines, but always drawing from the same soil, the secret soil, the same secret darkness.” (Gupta 128)

Time plays an important role in the novel. “Time the destroyer is time the preserver” she talks about two places in the novel she says:

“My novel is set in Old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947. Basically my preoccupation was with recording the passage of time: I was trying to write a four dimensional piece on how a family’s life moves backwards and forwards in a period of time. My novel is about time as a destroyer, as preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have tried to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity.” (Desai 142)

Desai says that though time passes the things remain the same, but for the pattern. She refers to the eternal varities and to the fact that human nature does not change. She uses music in her novel to test the sensitivity and maturity of the protagonist. poetry for eg. is one of the techniques in the context of Raja and Bim. Raja’s quoting of Iqbal shows his intense interest in Urdu poetry, he quotes some very significant lines emphasising the importance of man almost rubbing shoulders with God, which is not possible
for a young boy. Moreover Raja does not understand the full significance of
the lines though they do incorporate individualistic philosophy of Desai:

“This didn’t create night but I made the lamp.
Thou didst create clay but I made the cup.
Thou didst create the deserts, mountains and forests,
I produced the orchards, gardens and groves.
It is I who made the glass out of stone
And it is I who turn a poison into an antidote.” (Cited CLD 50)

Desai’s novels aim at presenting the plight of introspective and
hypersensitive woman doomed to live with an incompatible partner in a
docile surrounding. The characters are burdended by their uniqueness, they
want to exercise their freedom, make a choice and refuse to conform or
compromise. Desai’s protagonists finds it unauthentic to accept life as it
comes. Desai’s character are not static figures, they undergo transformation
that lead them to liberation. Desai deals sensitively, as Shanta Krishnasamy
in Glimpses of Women in India observes :

“The social problems is caused by the tension of modern
womanhood rather than the crisis in mental health as such. The
remedy lies not in individual therapy but rather in social
reconstriction”. (252)
Desai probes deep into the psyche of her protagonists to find out the truth and what they have on the outer world of reality. She is avowedly “an essentially subjective writer” indubitably the most powerful imagist. She regards the use of imagery as an effective technique. She portrays feelings, emotions and thoughts. Memories of the past play an important role in the novel. Bimla in *Clear Light of Day*:

“Her life oscillates between history and memory, between the comfortably distant history of the Moghul empire that she teaches at college, and the memories that she broods over at home: sad memories for the most part, of her aunt’s lapse into alcoholism, and of the rupture that took place between herself and her brother, embittering the love that she still feels for him.”

(Cited Cronin CLC 178)

Anita Desai is more concerned with her form and technique though she has her own thematic concerns. Her protagonists in a pursuit for an authentic existence seek to withdraw from the world of action and involvment. Their awareness of nothingness and futility in life burdens them with a tragic inability to relate to others in a spirit of love and mutual understanding. They feel tormented by a sense of non-belongingness and find isolation that is inherent in all human relationship. This isolation is due
to the awareness of their individuality and freedom. Anita Desai’s woman character Bim is an good example of this type. As Richard Cronin observes:

“Bim still lives in her house as if in a shell, and she can only progress as snails do, slowly. But she is no longer self-enclosed: her horns have emerged and are alert to the world around her.”

(Cited CLC 179)

She may not be a technical innovator but her use of poetry is not something very common. Desai’s titles are always significant. In *Clear Light of Day* she brings about Bim’s revelation that removes clouds of grudge, dissatisfaction, and depression because of the treacherous behaviour of Raja. Raja does not reciprocate Bim’s feelings who sacrifices her life for the sake of the family:

“Bim had stayed on to nurse the sick, cremate the dead, and watch the retarded. Abandoned to this task, she endured – earned a degree, found work, held herself and her work together, she had perceived herself as the centre of that world, but there was no one left in it other than the near-mute brother who could do nothing at all except listen all to “Lili Marlene” and “Don’t Fence Me In” on an old gramaphone. (Daniels CLC 145)
Desai is able to narrate the story, to portray the characters, to convey the mood, to evoke the atmosphere, to probe the psyche of her characters successfully. In many of her works she uses the flashback techniques, stream of consciousness techniques, use of contrasting characters, symbolism, effective use of language to bring out the rhetorical skill of characters. She uses her fictional techniques with success and in accordance with the demands of the novels. A complete blend of her techniques brings out a tapestry in her fictions:

“Das children growing up together, fighting their way apart in order to keep growing, and finally trying as adults to reconnect, all against the backdrop of national partition. Told in flashbacks that tend to blur rather than convey the poignancy of loss, the book first introduces us to the adult sisters: Tara, the younger, now the competent if deferential wife of a diplomat, and unmarried Bim, who at first, with her teaching job and bossy manner, seems by far the more independent of the pair.” (Marsh CLC 140)

Desai has been immensely successful in creating new images in her work *Fasting Feasting*. This novel marks a departure from all her earlier major works. She intends to make it altogether different. In this novel the plot is laid bare, in the most simple and lucid manner without any trace of
complexity. In *Fasting Feasting* there is a fusion of experiment and continuity. The narrative structure is built in concrete words which are mostly monosyllabic with simple diction and precise description. Her art of characterization is made through the same lucid and vivid structure of her language.

Anita Desai presents the pathetic state of Indian women in many of her novels. She brings out the theme of widowhood which is usually much talked about in the Hindu society:

“…Mira Masi was constantly visiting relatives, even the most remotely situated, and brought news of them – births, marriages, deaths, illnesses, scandals, litigation, gossip, rumours, prattle, tittle-tattle. … If only that were all she brought, Mama’s groan seemed to imply…. Ever since her widowhood, she had taken up religion as her vocation. Her day was ruled by ritual, from the moment she woke to make her salutations to the sun, through her ritual bath and morning prayers. …” (FF 39)

Anita Desai brings about the theme of discrimination against the female child. Uma the eldest daughter is denied education where as Arun the youngest is allowed to go to USA for his higher studies. Uma begs and
pleads to her parents to allow her to a convent near by which is not permitted:

“‘But we are not sending you to Mother Anges – or to school – again,’ Mama said. Uma’s face, looking up from the stack of nappies she was trying to fold, seemed to irritate Mama. She twitched her toes and snapped ‘We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun.’ Uma turned around to look for explanation and support. In matters educational, Papa would surely support her. He was educated; it was he who sent her to the convent school in the first place.”

(FF 18)

Anita Desai’s also discusses about the theme of marriage taking into consideration the life of Anamika, a cousin of Uma. Anamika experiences hell in her in-laws house. Her sad saga is a strong statement against a cruel apathetic society which does not care for lives, instead gives importance for rules and regulations, customs and rituals. The unwillingness of Anamika’s parents to act in right time brings about Anamika’s death. It is the irony of this tragic story that even her death fails to cause stir or to shake the souls in slumber. They are resigned to their lot. In this context Desai’s tone becomes satirical:
“What the husband said was that he had been away on a business trip and returned only that afternoon on hearing the news. What the mother-in-law said was that she always had Anamika sleep beside her, in her room, as if she were a daughter, her own child. Only that night Anamika had insisted on sleeping in her own room. She must have planned it, plotted it all. What Anamika’s family said was that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika’s destiny. What Uma said was nothing.” (Choubey 151)

Anita Desai is qualified for a stylistic distinction. She is also considered guilty of her oververbalisation. Her admission and style is expressed implicitly when she says: “I think the purpose of writing is to discover – for myself and then describe and convey the truth”. (FA Inamdar 9) Meenakshi Mukherjee’s states that: “her language is marked by three characteristics: sensuous richness, a high-strung sensitiveness and her love for the sound of words.” (189) A similar observation is made on her style by critics who states that words appear to have sensuous appeal for her, and she exults in the reach and power of her rhetoric.

She emphases on certain other aspects, which some individuals find significant in their social interaction such as interpersonal realtions, the
ultimate reality, general futility life, nothingness, worthlessness. The plot in the novels are also exclusive. Seema Jena writes:

“the plot succeeds in featuring the vision of the author which explains that love, understanding and forgiveness are qualities which triumph over despair and destruction.” (Cited Desai 75)

The title of the novel *Fasting Feasting* brings about a broad sympathetic attitude of forgiveness. Desai uses different fictional techniques according to the demands of the story. From the technical point of view innovation and novelty is not important but how effectively the technique conveys the meaning through the narration.

Her fiction also mirrors her aspiration and dreams, her frustration and disillusionment. She prefers not to draw on established themes, plots and people for her creative world. According to her, the story must develop to its own requirement, at its own pace, right from the humble start to its gradual climax. Desai’s deepest interest in the life of the mind of women, enables the readers to see the Indian women adequately from the ‘inside’. Though she writes with a concern, purpose, her works have unconsciously contributed to the feminine cause. They reflect the experiences of inner pre-occupation and of the modern idea of building a society free from male domination.
Margaret Atwood’s fiction draws attention not only to the ways in which stories may be told but also to the function of language itself: the slipperiness of words and double operation of language as symbolic representation and as agent for changing the moods of perception. As Atwood pointed out in an interview:

“The word woman already has changed because of the different constellation [of meaning] that have been made around it. Language changes within our lifetime. As a writer you’re part of that process – using an old language, but making new patterns with it. Your choices are numerous.” (Conversation 112)

Her novels are characterised by their refusal to invoke any final authority as their open endings resist conclusiveness, offering instead hesitations, absence or silence while hovering on the verge of new possibilities. Atwood is a political writer in the widest sense, for she is interested in an analysis of the dialectics of power and is shifting structures of ideology. Margaret Atwood as a ‘true novelist’ is interested in the dynamic power of language and story.

Atwood’s writings have been widely acclaimed - her male (characters) in particular are stereotypical, representing only negative and distinctive elements. The constant re-use of her themes, images and narrative styles has
tended to make her work predictable. Techniques such as direct address, dramatic monologue and the use of personal and historic events allow Atwood to achieve a unique personal style and voice. She has the ability to present the ordinary in extraordinary ways.

As well, her style is one of direct personal address or dramatic monologue which involves a deft use of colloquialism; even the most ordinary words “this” or “but” carry startling importance, because the theory of art as mirror or map is outlined in her work. ‘Survival’ is basic to her writing, one should just admire the beauty of the mirror, the colour and complexity of the map, without neglecting the social relevance of poem or novel, the connection between art and life.

The basic imagery so characteristic of her verse – water, mirrors, photographs etc. recurs throughout her prose narratives, and always her characteristic sharpness, even asperity of mind is filtered through a flexible but tangy prose style.

Through her reference to history, Atwood is opening up a space beyond calamity, providing new ways that might be found to refigure the narrative of Canadian identity. Canadians need to construct a new discourse of nationhood which represents cultural difference and interaction. ‘Survival’ is the key stone or may be ‘Surfacing’, but not ‘Wilderness’ as any
essentialist definition of Canadianness. By taking wilderness as the key motif, she addresses not only her Canadian readership but also her international readership. Her fictional method is what is recognized as a feminist review of a traditional genre highlighting the artifice of literary convention and the social myths they inscribe.

Atwood’s novels are situated at the interface between language and reality, it highlights nothing so much as the artifice of representation, where the real world is transformed and reinvented within the imaginative spaces of fiction. Atwood’s view of prospects of survival for the human race has grown bleaker even as her position has changed from her early Canadian nationlist stance to her growing transnational engagement with issues of environmental pollution in the 1990’s.

Some critics have labeled her as pessimistic and dismissed her as little more than an ideologue but others have found her a visionary interpreter of feminist thought. Many critics praise her work and admire her spareness of language, emotional restraint and willingness to examine the harsh realities of both society and the natural world. Like Virgina Woolf, Atwood juxtaposes and compares two internal worlds:

“the world of male principle, characterized by rationality and logic but often also by cruelty and destruction. The world of the female
principle Atwood implies in existence beyond reason, a realm of primitive nature where there are connections between life and death, suffering and joy, madness and true sanity, where opposites are resolved into wholes. A failure to recognize these connections is a failure to perceive the “female” part of one’s self which resulted for Atwood in a catastrophic splitting of the self.” (Rigency CLC 49)

Margaret Atwood’s first best novel was *The Edible Woman* (1969) which according to *The Times* critic in London: “it stuck out above the rest like a sugar plum fairy on top of a Christmas cake.” (5) *The Edible Woman* appeared at the beginning of the ‘second wave’ feminism. It belongs to a specific moment in the history of North American postwar feminism which registered the first science of comtemporary women’s movement in its resistance to social myths of feminity. Betty Friedan in ‘The Feminine Mystique’ says that:

“Atwood herself read ‘behind closed doors’ like many other young women at the time and propose to read *The Edible Woman* in that context.” (Howells 39)

Both Margaret Atwood and Betty Friedan highlight the same new area of gendered social concern and the thematic issues in *The Edible Woman*. 
The very title of her novel is significant of the differences with its dimension of fantasy and metaphor.

“The Edible Woman is an imaginative transformation of a social problem into comic satire as one young woman rebels against her feminine destiny. It goes beyond woman’s anger and bewilderment in its exploitation of the power of laughter to reveal the absurdities within social conventions. The novel mourns its attack on social and gender ideology very wittily, though it be a mark of its historical period. The only cure is the journey of self-discovery, down and through the darkness of the divided self to the undifferentiated wholeness of archaic consciousness and back.” (Howells 39)

Atwood’s Surfacing is clearly one of her finest novels, the novel that can be read as a ‘quest within a quest’. Her writing is grounded in strong sense of her own cultural identity as white, English-speaking, Canadian and female. She challenges the questioning stereotypes of nationality and gender by exposing the cultural fiction and the artificial limits being imposed on the understanding of the novel.

Survival and Surfacing, are the products of 1970’s cultural nationalism. In Survival she describes key patterns of plot, theme and imagery which are like the field-markings in bird-books: that will help to
Elizabeth R. Baer a critic in her discussions presents *Surfacing* as a feminist and a nature based, search for self. Atwood uses the theme of victimization and how to avoid it in *Surfacing*. Her works are acute responsiveness to the Canadian landscape. Atwood spent her formative years largely in the sparsely settled “bush” of Northern Ontario and Quebec, rather than in cities. *Surfacing* takes place on an island two miles long in the wilderness of Northern Quebec, on the last rim of marginal civilization. Atwood’s sense of peace, that take various moods, of the animal life retreating before the intruder, is beautifully conveyed. Atwood satirically exposes the psychoanalytical consciousness of human nature.

*Surfacing* begins and ends with forest or rather the wilderness which is significant in Atwood’s vision of literary history, as it is the story of one woman’s quest to find an appropriate language in which the changing perception of her own identity as Candadians and female are discussed. *Surfacing* also ends with a emphasis on *Survival* and the regenerative powers of the wilderness. *Surfacing* must be read not only as a psychological and spiritual quest but also the record of a gendered quest for
a new language which is more responsive to an organic conceptualisation of reality.

“Surfacing is a Canadian fable in which the current obsessions of Canadians become symbols in a drama of personal survival: nationalism, feminism, death, culture, art, nature, pollution.” (Howells 24)

Atwood’s motifs had been meticulously developed through the images which are verbal or issued. Atwood is all things to all people. She is a nationalist, a feminist, a psychologist, a Canadian. She’s a maker and breaker of myth, a gothic writer. She’s all these things, but finally she’s unaccountably other. Her writings has the discipline of a social purpose but it remains elusive, complex and passionate. The pervading theme of Atwood’s novels are old material but freshly and deftly imaged. Atwood diagonoses the problem of self-division in *Surfacing* that resonates on a number of other levels (i.e) the illness is a metaphor of the human condition itself. In *Sufacing* she proves her dependence upon the society.

Drowning or submersion is one of the most persisted images in Atwood’s writing appearing not only as the central metaphor in *Surfacing* but in numerous poems using the symmetry of drowing by water / air and death of the parent or the child in *Surfacing*. Atwood imaginately condenses
the implication of the contemporary schism between flesh and spirit, secular and sacred, conscious and unconscious.

The frequent reference to multilation, amputation, anesthesia and the robot-like, mechanized or wooden reality of the narrator’s own immediate past are seen in the consequences of her abortion. The resolution of *Surfacing* is aesthetically and emotionally satisfying, entailing as it does a genuine metamorphosis, a psychological transformation. The American in *Surfacing* is a metaphor of a modern man in his most unloveable state. For Canadian *Surfacing* is an anatomy of the deluge of values and artifacts “flowing in from outside” which render invisible the values and artifacts that actually exist. Her true gift lies in poetic expression because of her spare, controlled and direct style. She frequently uses dual themes and images. She brings out a natural way of life in order to shed the roles imposed upon people by commercial culture. The critics observe that her constant use of personal and historic events allow Atwood to achieve a uniquely personal style and voice. She presents the ordinary in an extraordinary way by giving the readers a new option for evaluating those things that were taken for granted.

Atwood makes use of the first person narrative in *Surfacing*, a device that in Atwood’s medium has the curious effect of damping intensity while it provides the illusions of creating it. She utilizes Canadian tradition in an
apparently more conscious way than most other writers of her generation. She taps Canadian culture’s most important concerns, and brings to traditional materials her own sensibility, her own ways of saying things: the famous cool, apparently detached tone, the canny disposition of loaded words in short, punchy lines without much heightening of rhythm. It is a style highly distinctive both in its limitations and in its strength.

_The Edible Woman_ like _Surfacing_ is an enlargement upon the themes of her poems. It is delightfully wickedly funny. It is feminist, certainly, but it provides a satirical account of the absurd ways of Canadian men and women. _The Edible Woman_ is a largely successful comic novel, even if the mechanics are sometimes a little clumsy, the satirical accounts of consumerism is a little drawn out. It is skillfully written, shifting easily from first to third person and back again to convey the stages of Marian’s mental travel (i.e.) her journey into self-alienation and out again. As a fiction writer Atwood’s tradition is tenuous. Her novels are best read in the context of twentieth-century fiction where her first person narration, ironic self-reflexive narratives and symbolic or even mythic structures, are common.

There are elements that place her within a broadly defined Canadian tradition: Atwood’s emphasis on the past and the individuals need to be a
part of a social context, as well as her treatment of victimization and struggle for survival are common features in her Canadian novels. Atwood loses her innocence in her writings but becomes self-conscious and responsible. Her writing is not anarchic, even when it treats of madness and alienation. She was always concerned with the question of “what freedom for women really is”? 

The basic metaphor of descent and surfacing is a transformation of Atwood’s inherited romantic image of death by drowning. But it is carefully controlled, artistically simulated descent, of therapeutic purpose and value within the psychoanalytic dimension of the novel. The narrator’s inner self, retains its integrity, expects for a fleeting moment during the peak experience of hallucinatory oneness in nature where Atwood synthesizes a primitive state of mind.

“The narrator has surfaced through patriarchal language with its definitions of ‘woman’ and ‘victim’ and she has found an appropriate form for her own story of survival within a quest narrative that mixes realism and fantasy.” (Howells 32)

She uses the theme of wilderness, sign of distinctive national heritage which she refers in her works. Like the wilderness, the city exists in an emotional vaccum. Atwood, as an observer knows that she has no control
over the northern landscape, she describes as no one else does and admires its proud refusal to submit except to death. There is a pervasive chill in her imagery of Death and Cold. There is no life-giving warmth in her metaphorical water either:

“The wilderness symbolizes something within the authority. It can be the barren side, the gravation towards chaos, the isolation that prevents any type of valuable human relationship. As assimilation is never achieved, never ever a happy alignment: instead there is always actual or potential reputation, the reaction against, a jerky attraction reversed, like magnets…” (Cited Atwood CLC 27)

Atwood’s techniques for the dissection of the human personality – the detached point of view, the clinical precision of language, the scientific imagery – all are reminiscent of the scientific or medical expert… The narrator’s point of view comes from the tension that arises.

Atwood’s novels expose the relation between consumerism and the feminine mystique where a young woman’s resistance to consuming and being consumed hints at a wider condition of social malaise which the feminist movement was just beginning to address. She is always seen as a feminist icon, although a resistant and at times inconvenient one. Atwood brings out the characteristic doubleness of vision, and the balance between
the narrator’s interior vision and sharp observation of the real world outside. In some of her works she has taken an historical view of the North American feminist movement charting some of the waves in which feminism has changed from women’s liberation to the theorised and subtly politicised feminism of the late 1980’s and 90’s. Many critics have commented on Atwood’s revision of traditional fictional genres as she draws attention to the cultural myths they embody and to the multiple inherited scripts through which our perceptions of ourselves and the world are structured. “Atwood’s fictions are criss-crossed with allusions to other texts, signalling her literary inheritance while at the same time marking significant differences from her predecessors.” (Howells 9)

In *Surfacing* the social construction of reality is analysed to be realized as called by Atwood “mythologizing”. It is usually conscious or unconscious enforcement of the sexual “polarities inherent in the myths of romantic love, nuclear marriage, the machismo male and the feminine women”.

Atwood’s treatment of civilization opposite to that of wilderness is that she uses landscape as predominantly and consistently figurative. She portrays the city as nothing more than a variation on the wilderness theme.
She is extremely versatile writer, in every novel she takes up the convention of a different narrative form – Gothic romance, fairy tale, spy thriller, science fiction or history – working within those conventions and reshaping them. Her writing insistently challenges the limits of traditional genres.

Alice Walker grounds her fiction in the experiences of the south and southern blacks. All her works depend upon what black life is, has been and can be in a specified landscape and it becomes emblematic of American life. Walkers paradigm communities are nearly always black, rural and southern, they become viable emblems of her creation of familial and social generations that underscore her concerns with familial identity, continuity and rupture and with social roles, order and change. For the blacks, the black liberation movement, was the rediscovery of their African heritage which was strengthening and invigorating, though it brought many problems to the surface. In the British women’s movement they had a stronger working-class and socialist feminist element than the Americans, though their movement was better organized and better resourced it was at times felt far more feisty. An awareness of one’s oppression and victimization that forces one to realize:
“that the possible reasons for one’s victimization are none other than one’s race, and gender constitutes black feminist consciousness. An awakening that one is oppressed not because one is ignorant, not because one is lazy not because one is stupid, but just because one is black and female creates a feeling of black feminist consciousness.” (Ranveer 69)

As a southerner she presents the land as a place from which their specific characteristics of survival and creativity has sprung. Her works confront the pain and struggle of black people’s history, which for her has resulted in a deeply spiritual tradition. In articulating the tradition she has found that the creativity of black women, the extent to which they are permitted to exercise it. As influential as her community was, the person that seems to have shaped her the most was her mother. The stories that she tells are the stories of her mother.

Her writing are an example of what her mother and others like her might have created if they were not the “mules of the world” and had the opportunity to write, paint or carve their own experiences. Many critics have commented on Alice Walker’s apparently natural quality of authenticity as a writer. She possess this quality of the expereience of ther maternal ancestors. Her dominant themes are spiritual survival and individual identity, as well as
freedom, power and community which link her to the literary heritages of both southern and black writers. Her structures and forms address most clearly the uniqueness of her particular vision within these traditions. Walker’s major concern is the black women themselves. She has made it very much clear in an interview with John O’Brien when she said:

“I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival of whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women.” (192)

Her themes are based on the experiences of the blacks. Their valuable experiences as ordinary human beings should not be misinterpreted. Her heritage and history provide a vehicle for understanding the modern world in which her characters live. It is because, she being a poor black women, is able to view the world differently from others. In her work she discusses about sexual violence and physical abuse to portray the breaches in black generation, also she incorporates white character as perpetration of the crime against the blacks. Walker attributes the search for freedom to black literary tradition based upon slave narratives which foster the belief in escape from the body along with freedom for the soul. Her poetry like her short stories is
praised for its honesty and depth of feeling but her literary reputations rest largely on her novels:

“Throughout her writings she has tried to highlight the issues pertaining to the life of these hapless women. Her works are committed to exposing the sexist tragedy of black women and protest against their on-going degradation. Her works expose sexism, racism and the patriarchal power structure and celebrating the black women’s intellectual capabilities and revolutionary vision.” (Ranveer CLC 104)

Bell Hooks states that only a few black women have rekindled the spirit of feminist struggle that stirred the hearts and minds of the nineteenth century sisters. Black women who advocate feminist ideology are pioneers. They are no longer victimized, unrecognized or afraid to take courage and move forward to reach their goal. In *The Color Purple* she uses the epistolary form but re-invents the eighteenth century genre. Walker asserts that her idea was not only to create and control literary images of women and black women in particular, but to give voice and representation to these women who have been silenced and confined by life and literature. In order to focus the story of the individual, the content of the letter is carried forward
through the narrative. Letters are both subjective and objective information about the world in which she moves.

Walker’s *The Color Purple* is in epistolary form. By using the epistolary form she brings out the lives and experiences of women. The epistolary form indicates that the focus of the story will be on the individual, that is the letter writer, letters proclaims the women central focus on the novel. Letters bring out both the subjective and the objective information that is about the character (Celie) and her relationship towards / with the world in which she lives / moves. The novel is less like a series of letters but rather like a series of conversations. The novel centres around violence against women like, rape, incest, forced marriage, struggle against oppression, woman’s search for fulfilment, thereby asserting the spiritual awareness with the sense of oneness, with the universe. The discovery of letters is a process of ongoing self-definition. In all her works she has tried to highlight the hopeless life of women:

“Written in epistolary and autobiographical form, the novel imitates the slave narratives that has not only influenced and shaped Afro-American writing but has also helped the Afro-American slaves to move from object to subject.” (Mishra 178)
In *The Color Purple* she uses the black dialect, explores and expands upon concerns introduced in Walker’s earlier works. In *The Color Purple* she talks about racial and sexual oppression. She has said that the black women are the only people she respects, “collectively with no reservation”. In this novel she shows an intense empathy for the black woman who faces violent subjugation by blackmen, as well as white racists. Walker has a keen eye for the beauty and grace found in the most ordinary people or subjects. The main theme of *The Color Purple* is “love redeems”, “meanness kills”, the theme of the most of the world’s great fiction.

“This is why, …” The black woman’s novel survive with a white man’s embrace, the redemptive love that is selectively even prickly celebrated. White folk figure rarely in its pages and never to their advantage and black men are recovered only to the extend that they buckle down to house work and let women attend to business.”

(Prescott CLC 450)

For Walker redemptive love requires the female bonding. The bond liberates women from men, who are predators at worst, idle at best. *The Color Purple* is a struggle between redemption and revenge. The chief agency of redemption is the strength of the relationships between women: their friendship, their love, their shared oppression. Walker didacticism is
evident through Nettie’s letter from Africa, which make up for the large portion of the book. Walker has learnt a lot about plotting and structuring what is clearly intended to be a realistic novel. Nettie’s experience in Africa along with the missionary couples and the two adopted children is meant to be a counterweight to Celie’s story but it lacks authenticity, not because Walker is ignorant of Africa, but because she has failed to endow Nettie with her own distinctive voice.

Walker challenges the monumental myth of black motherhood in *Meridian*. She also maintains the importance of the perspective and culture that the historical role has given women:

“…ideology of black motherhood in this country is celebrated by the true meaning of motherhood, by tracing the history of black people, not through battles or legislation, but in terms of the lives of mother. Walker demonstrates how motherhood is an angle of seeing life; of valuing all life, of resisting all that might destroy it — is other words that motherhood is not merely a biological state but an attitude towards life.” (Christian CLC 386)

In *The Color Purple* is the oppression, of black women’s experience in their relationship with black men and the sisterhood they must share with each other in order to liberate themselves. As a vehicle for those themes, two
sisters’ letters – Celie’s to God, Nettie’s to Celie and finally Celie’s to Nettie provide the novels form. Form and content are inseparable in *The Color Purple*. Nettie’s letters also provide other dimension of history. They graphically demonstrate Afro-American’s knowledge of their ancestral link to Africa, which contrary to American myth, predates the black power movement of the 1960s and they emphasize concrete ways in which colonization disrupts African life and values.

*The Color Purple* is remarkable in language - radical themes, and techniques, than other works. it affirms that the most abused of the abused can transform herself. It completes the cycle Walker announced a decade ago: the survival and liberation of black through the strength and wisdom of others. Walker’s optimism is ultimately born on her belief that something of the divine exists in every human and non-human participation in the universe, inspite of the forces of sexism and racism that often deny them their identities. Walker contends that definition of self must come from within and that the right to say who are and who one should be must never be surrendered to another person.

Alice Walker is too much of an artist to write a purely political novel, and so her feminist impulse does not prevent her from allowing her characters, women and men, to grow and change. The men in her story lead
miserable lives, but like their women begin to come to terms with what life doles out to them, and accept it. Walker’s work should be admired not because it represents a flowering of black or female consciousness, but because at best, it brings to life the varied scents and colours of human experience.

Walker pays homage to the feminist by portraying a woman who struggles through adversity to assert herself against almost impossible odds, and by portraying a relationship between two women that reads like a school girl fairy tale in its ultimate adherence to the convention of the happy resolution, to the black nationalist by opposing colonialism.

In Walker’s *Meridian* Meridian is an even more graphic illustration of the importance of her story to black women’s life. One of the novel’s major themes is both a rich critique of the ideology of black motherhood in this country and a celebration of the true meanings of motherhood. Walker demonstrates how motherhood an ‘angle of seeing life’, of valuing all life, of resisting all that might destory it, in other words motherhood is not merely a biological state but an attitude towards life. Probing deep into the meaning of motherhood she allows to highlight the insidious ways by using her story in which both the black and white society restrict, punish individual mothers even as they canonize motherhood. Meridian awakens from her subordinate
state as wife, daughter or mother in order to become the maternal provider of the larger black community.

Black women develop as consumers, an awareness which allow them to arrive at a deepened sense of self and to grow stronger by speaking from and for that self. In *Meridian* Meridian having sinned against biological motherhood becomes a mother by expanding her mind with action. She makes it clear as it has been defined by heterosexual relationships in a racist society which is the single most insurmountable obstacle to a black woman’s self-affirmation. In *Meridian* Walker uses a variation on the theme by speculating what black woman will decide to do when they are given a choice. *Meridian* is such a work that demonstrates the relationship between the history of ordinary black folk, particularly women and the philosophical character:

“In the initial stage of her life Meridian experiences motherhood, then decides to get rid of her own baby Eddie Jr. to seek admission in college, to find out her own part and identity. This new way an idenity enables her to attain, “the highest point of power prosperity, splendour, health, vigor etc. (Times Magazines 94)
In *Meridian* childbearing is linked to images of murder and suicide. Meridian who questions it “whether is it necessary, it right, to kill ?” provides the central theme of the novel.

In all her works Walker has explored her issue as the spiritual survival of the blacks. This search leads her to discuss issues that other writers have avioded and issues that anger many of her critics. She is also committed to causes that go beyond the black community, seeing blacks as a part of large world that must be saved from destruction.

The narrative technique used in Walker’s novels makes it possible for Walker to expand the scope of her novel. The narratives also moves her novel beyond the question of race relation in the United States to a consideration of the place of those of African descent in the western world. Creativity and art, which appear in much of her works are persent as vital important areas of life, not as forbidden dreams.

They talk about the gradual improvement of women from Darkness to Light or from a passive or stereotype or the feminine to move to a state of a survivor and hence become empowered. All these three writers Anita Desai, Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker focused on the same theme, in all their works. Women are found moving from a suppressed stage to a stage of
awareness or rather they have come to know that were lying down silently and being oppressed.

A deep analysis of the novels written by these three women novelists Anita Desai, Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker reveals three important images of women. The first stage *The Feminine*, belongs to the stereotype women who are stoic and angelic. Caught in the trap of loveless marriage, they are the poor victims of male brutality and cruelty. The man imprisons the women in the cage of male tyranny and stifles the spirit. The cult of true womanhood defined the ‘feminine’ to be pious, pure, domestic and submissive.

The next stage – *The Survivors* – women of power who are strong, dominating are discussed. These women who are assertive and energetic fight against odds and emerge as survivors. The survivors who stand on the threshold of women’s emancipation instil courage and inspiration to the weak. They are women who succeed in finding themselves just because they recognize their problems. They have the mental strength to fight against the odds and come out successful.

The third stage is that of *The Empowered* or the new women who are defined as individual women. They defy authority that interfere with their freedom. They represent women who began to declare their independence.
from roles which seemed to suppress their individuality. The driving ideology of the new women is to discard the feminine and develop a new image for themselves.

These novelists write primarily about women of this generation, the ‘Empowered’ women. The present century is an era of wonderful development for women as they focus on heroic women / empowered women who are in search of liberty and freedom. They “still rise”, fighting their own battle soaring in the new horizon of freedom and liberty.
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