Chapter One

Introduction

Women always bear the mark and meaning of their sex, which inscribes them within a cultural hierarchy. Williamson.

The present day Indian woman is torn between western practices and Indian culture. She appears to be in a dilemma. The phallocentric culture pushes the woman to the periphery and she tries to move towards the centre, demanding recognition in the family as well as in the society. She feels marginalized, feels inferior but tries to express herself, to voice her opinions. The periphery or the marginal space of women in an androcentric world acts as a creative force through which women try to invade and occupy the centre. Victor Turner defines marginality based on W.E Dubois’ concept of double consciousness:

[Marginals] are simultaneously members by ascription, … self-definition or achievement of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from and often even opposed to one another. . . What is interesting about such marginals is that they often look to their group of origin, the so called inferior group for communities, and to the more prestigious group, in which they aspire to higher status, as their structural reference group. (233)

Her attempt to enter into the main stream from the margins, periphery or border is not only trying to assert herself as a ‘marginal’ but is also intent on demanding a rightful place as a person. To Kristeva, femininity in an androcentric set up is marginality. She
observes: “I therefore understand by ‘woman’ . . . that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies” (21). Ernestine also observes in this regard:

Humanity recognizes no sex, life and death, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence; …like him she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature’s laws, and for greater penalties she has to suffer from ignorance…like man, she also enjoys or suffers with her country. Yet she is not recognized as his equal. (1)

Thus, relegated to a subaltern space in an androcentric culture, women have invented new ways of hitting back from the periphery of power by trying to dislodge those who occupy the centre, by exercising their powers to show that they can occupy the centre, thus voicing their own cultural perception. Before narrowing down the focus on the writer’s in context, it is apt to comprehend the terms, culture and feminism properly.

Broadly speaking, feminism is the fight for equality with men or women’s struggle to establish themselves as human beings and not to be treated as ‘other’, thereby trying to erase marginalization. So, feminism is not anti-men but fights against any social set up which permits female subordination. Shashi Deshpande raises the same question in Writing from the Margin and Other, “And how can feminism be anti-men when it is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women, instead of the uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed?” (84).

Feminists argue that literature all along has been written by male writers in support of men and so women are often marginalized or silenced in their literary
works. They try to articulate the notions of being marginalized through their writings. Alice Jardine defines feminism as a “movement from the point of view of, by, and for women” (qtd in Singh 61).

Cultural Studies presupposes highlighting the plight of the marginalized people. Dalits in India and the native blacks are birds of the same feather. Reading literature in terms of race, ethnicity and gender differences and also the subjugation of the marginalized provides ambience to redescribe the representations of the outer world in the writings of the oppressed.

Women writers begin to write about their emotions and experiences from women’s point of view. Helene Cixous says:

> When I started writing, I instinctively felt an ethical obligation towards women and decided to take up cudgels on behalf of them. When I say ‘women’ I’m speaking of women in their inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal women subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history . . . We don’t need to be a part of men, we stand as entities by ourselves. (qtd in Singh 22)

Virginia Woolf expresses her opinion in bringing out the male and female experience thus: “. . . there is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact, not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself” (26).

The protagonists of the women writers, therefore, are the role models for the oppressed women who read their stories. The women novelists write with this attitude.
by reinterpreting old myths and by questioning the validity of tradition and customs which give women the subordinate position in the society. As Paul Abbot says in a very different context,

Whereas repression banishes its object into the unconscious, forgets and attempts to forget the forgetting, discrimination must constantly invite its representations into consciousness, reinforcing the crucial recognition of difference which they embody and revitalizing them for the perception on which its effectivity depends . . . It must sustain itself on the presence of the very difference which is also its object. (67 )

In the ancient Indian History, women have been deified, glorified and also regarded on par with men. They were free, emancipated, well educated and respected by the members of the society. They possessed a calm philosophy and a tranquil outlook on life. They were capable of enduring untold hardships or receiving the highest honours that could be paid to mortal beings with the same equanimity. The extraordinary goodness of the heroines depicted in the epics stand witness to the greatness of women who were revered and extolled.

This position accorded to women began to fade slowly and during the days of Manu, the great law giver of the fifth century BC, women were regarded as chattels. Manu feels, “a woman’s father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; she is never fit for independence” (qtd in Sen Gupta 134). The Laws of Manu are at the root of the traditional, orthodox manner in which men in Indian society are conditioned to look at and treat women. Men are directed towards governing social and moral behaviour, while the woman is only somebody’s daughter, sister; wife or mother. The men are clearly given the upper
hand that under no circumstances should women be granted freedom and that they should be kept strictly under control. Women are fated to be dependent on the father in childhood, husband in youth and sons in old age and are forbidden from being self-reliant at any stage. Men were against being even a little careless towards women as women are fickle minded and incapable of taking care of themselves. But now times have changed as women have started to protest against the androcentric society in order to capture the lost rights that once exalted and respected women.

Literature portrays a few insurgent minorities who protest against the existing ills. Simone de Beauvoir says, “Much more interesting are the insurgent females who have challenged this unjust society, a literature of protest can engender sincere and powerful work” (518).

Betty Friedan in her *The Feminine Mystique* argues a woman can no longer ignore the voice within her that says, “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home” (67). She further argues that the core of the problem for women today “is . . . a problem of identity – a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique . . . Our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings” (49).

N.M. Nigam in her article “Feminist consciousness in Namita Gokhle” takes up a feminist stance when she incorporates Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* as the manifestation of the historical women’s liberation movement. While acknowledging the point that Friedan emphasizes, the woman’s right to develop herself holistically, Nigam, by the way, underlines the historical imperative, as suggested by Friedan — to fight the male —. This is a well known passage in which
Dr. Sushila Singh writes: “Feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization . . . As a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep seated causes of women’s oppression . . . [as] it is a concept of the raising of the consciousness of the entire culture” (qtd in Nigam 54).

While, increasingly, women writers focus on a woman’s psyche, they never miss the potential inevitability of a female consciousness in developing home and eventually society. Hence, Anshul Chandra writes, “Feminist consciousness provides a new awareness of the woman’s role in the modern complex world” (81). The feminist consciousness has taken up a woman’s role in the modern world as crucially linked to the pattern of self-individualization, which ultimately decides her career. This consciousness is pivotal and hence crucial in that, as Anshul Chandra feels, a woman has reacted the point of the awareness “of the limits and dangers of femininity” (81). The following comment by Anshul Chandra is a direct reference to this feminine consciousness: “Increasing consciousness of their oppressed situation has given rise of the women’s struggle against male dominance, against the strictures passed by renowned men. If she can understand her past and the working of her culture, she can break away from externally imposed gender restrictions” (81).

The extreme reluctance to passively accept the male norms constitutes the character of the post modern women’s literature. B.R. Agarwal is sufficiently clear on this point as she writes, “A refusal to accept all certainties and fixities, subversion of received hegemonies and a questioning impulse constitute some of the chief features of postmodernism” (91).

Women have now established themselves as autonomous beings, free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also free from their own fears and
guilt. There are two types of women characters – traditional and modern (conventional and unconventional) – Modern women who are unconventional in their ways suffer because they violate or try to violate the accepted norms of the society. Sometimes these women lose their identity and suppress their individuality and subdue their rebelliousness and are forced to accept the traditional ways. The conventional and tradition-bound women also suffer because they follow the norms of Indian culture i.e., patriarchal culture. It may be remembered here as Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt observe in their text *Contemporary Cultural Theory* that “women’s resistance to patriarchal oppression is very probably as old as patriarchy itself . . .” (129). Thus, the conflict between tradition and modernity is seen in almost all female characters portrayed by women novelists.

A woman who is brought up in a patriarchal society is expected to sacrifice her happiness for the welfare of her family members. She is to never bother about her personal happiness and her sole duty is to make others happy. She must uphold all the traditions and conventions of Indian patriarchal culture. Amidst all these strictures a woman often searches for her identity in the society but she is never understood by the family as well as by the society. Almost all women writers, who are also brought up in this patriarchal society, have reflected this attitude in their novels. When a girl is married, she is expected to surrender her identity. Here, Simone de Beauvoir’s words are apt to be quoted. “One is not born but rather becomes a woman . . .” (267). Women are prepared to put up with repression as long as they see that there is something in it for them, if too much is demanded of them, however, they are likely to fall sick. This form of sickness is known as neurosis; all human beings must be repressed to some degree, it is possible to speak of the human race, in the words of one of Freud’s commentators, as the ‘neurotic animal’.
Terry Eagleton in her *Literary Theory* comments:

The woman is both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between man and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself. This is why she troubles the neat categories of such a regime, blurring its well-defined boundaries. Women are represented within male-governed society, fixed by sign, image, meaning, yet because they are also the ‘negative’ of that social order there is always in them something which is left over, superfluous, unrepresentable which refuses to be figured there. (165)

Many feminist theories begin to contend that quite a lot of women writers, while manifesting man as a proof of tyranny, have begun to pursue reality in such a way that their protagonists successfully reach the valid and viable female cultural centre. Simone de Beauvoir observes, “Man is at once judge and party to the case; but so is woman. What we need is an angel—neither man nor woman—but where shall we find one? Still the angel would be poorly qualified to speak, for an angel is ignorant of all the basic facts involved in the problem” (54).

While Simone de Beauvoir holds angel status of women as culturally weak, Francoise de Eaubonne holds this status as culturally potential in maneuvering a new identity. Beauvoir writes, “The new advent of women has provided the young with the opportunity to live marginally and to manifest in every possible way, destructively but peacefully, their desire to start from scratch—spit on Hegel!” (66).
Ultimately, one is led to contemporary feminist theories to a reevaluation of the function of motherhood. One finds women having been more culturally advantaged to encounter the oppressor’s discourse so that a new identity is maintained and here Claudine Herman’s quote warrants mention:

So, women will often be welcome. They will be laughed at behind their backs because of their eagerness to pursue a goal that will bring them nothing and because of their ability to love those who exploit them. They will be mocked because of their belief in the immense social super structure that gives a useful, virtuous façade to the most brazen schemes. If woman remains true to herself, and continues to think in terms of harmony rather than struggle, of giving rather than exchange, she will be ruthlessly crushed. If she adopts masculine values along the way, like coldness and imperialism, she will succeed only by destroying herself, and she will surely be the object of ridicule. What she gains in the social arena she will lose on a personal level. In philosophy woman is always on the side of passivity. (qtd in Upadhyay 89-90)

This perception of women for generation together has laid her capabilities dormant. They now have started to wake up from their inert passivity to strike back and move further to the centre which once they held.

Culture forces the woman to be a daughter or a sister in her parental family and to be a wife or mother in her husband’s family. Also she plays her professional role and Nature reminds her that she is limited biologically. Elaine Showalter in her Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness says “Victorian anthropologists believed that the
frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus that women were inferior in intelligence” (331). While discussing gender, Catherine Stimpson says:

Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each other, or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace. In patriarchal cultures, the struggle must end in the victor of the masculine; complementarity must arrange itself hierarchically: androgyny must be a mythic fiction. (1)

Therefore it can be said, “The women of today, therefore, speak in the language of psychology that has a near schizophrenic personality; one side steadily ‘accepts’ while the other craves to speak, to think and express the life of the mind” (Bharvani 150). Homi K. Bhabha in his The Location of Culture comments that culture only emerges as a problem, or problematic, at the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, genders, races and nations.

Yet the reality of the limit or limit – text of culture is rarely theorized outside of well-intentioned moralist polemics against prejudice and stereotype, or the blanket assertion of individual or institutional racism – that describe the effect rather than the structure of the problem. The need to think the limit of culture as a problem of the enunciation of cultural difference is disavowed. (Bhabha 50)
In Dutt’s *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, the Vedic woman was the highest symbol of Hindu womanhood. Dutt further argues that, “Women were honoured in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe. They were considered ‘the intellectual companions of their husbands’ . . . affectionate helpers in the journey of life and . . . inseparable partners in their religious duties” (qtd in Ramesh 67). Their position offered immense scope to bring out their real nature which typically feminine was soft and delicate yet strong and determined. Here it is worth quoting Ian Watt’s words: “The feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel” (57).

As literature is reflective of life in the society, it is naturally perceived to be the mirror that shines back the various levels of human kind. Understandably, a writer who produces a piece of literature makes it a point to reflect the lives of those (s)he encounters and also the various psychic levels which could be naturally categorized into the subconscious and the unconscious. One could surmise that a writer produces a pattern of life which enunciates the principle of living at a particular time and space. Hence, time and space are the contributive factors that help a writer create a unique human proclivity. The writer negotiates the cultural totems of a landscape of which (s)he is a part before forging a new structure that mirrors a new culture and psyche. As Meena Shirwadkar observes:

As women received education, they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition – bound surroundings, resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and behaviour problems at home and
at place of work or in society – all come up in a welter of projection.

(201)

Dieter Riemenschneider in his essay, “Indian Writing in English: The Short Story” has observed:

[Indian women writers] are neither concerned with an analysis of their heroines’ decisions to be free . . . Rather they confine themselves to portraying a woman’s deliberate step to liberate herself from the shackles of traditional roles. The act itself . . . is the essential point . . . [The Writers] ignore questions . . . of morality, an astounding development considering the emphasis on respectability in Indian society. (31)

The twentieth century literature is no exception to this as it frequently exploits culture and psyche and no wonder it has encapsulated itself into various epistemologies.

*Postmodern* is a term which is used to recognize today’s literature before identifying the various patterns involved in its production. Writers of today need a fixed landscape to foreground the psychic patterns evolving out of their own selves as well as those they witness. Cultural feminism is of those knocked down contributive of the postmodern factor. This is one theoretical precept which helps in the assessment of literature especially the literature produced by women writers. Though cultural feminism like post modern feminism is not part of the accepted school of thinking, it has been associated with the usual combination of a landscape with which the *feminine* has been yoked by compulsion. It is the consolidation of the mythical compulsions of a particular landscape on the feminine psyche. “Cultures do receive outside traits and complexes but reinterpret them and endow them with new
definitions through the provision of location to external traits in their cultural space” (Atal 207). Helene Cixous says in *The Newly Born Woman*,

> When ‘The Repressed’ of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is *absolutely* shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before . . . Throughout their deafening dumb history, they have lived in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions. (95)

The new Indian woman depicted by the writers is conscious of her self-identity and is also aware of her position and role in family and society. She tries to assert her right in the society. Ellen E. Jordan observes that “the English feminists endowed the ‘New Woman’ with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a man capable of leading a financially, self sufficient single and yet fulfilling life”(19). This trust in education takes them a step ahead as they begin to assess their situation and there crops their problem of who they really are.

Homi Bhabha talks of identity, which in the search of it leaves a stain on the searcher as one who resists.

> The question of identity always poised uncertainly, tenebrously, between shadow and substance. The symbolic consciousness gives the sign (of the self) a sense of autonomy or solitariness ‘as if it stands by itself in the world’ privileging an individuality and a unitariness whose integrity is expressed in a certain richness of agony and anomie. Barthes calls it a mythic prestige, almost totemic in ‘its form [which is] constantly exceeded by the power and movement of its context . . .
much less a codified form of communication than an (affective) instrument of participation’. Each time the encounter with identity occurs at the point at which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as site of identity and autonomy and – most important – leaves a resistant race, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance. (70)

Thus, a quest for identity in a self becomes a sign of resistance to the set norms of a patriarchal society.

Culture and History are the major twin concerns of Postcolonial writers as well as a few postmodern writers. Even though postmodern writers have been accused of relegating history to the dust bin of an obsolete episteme, arguing gleefully that history does not exist except as text, it has been argued effectively that they only problematise history. They also have been associated with the commodification of culture in relation to the consumerism of late capitalism. But here again, it has been shown that postmodernism sees culture in the subtle negotiation of meaning across institutions and their concern is with its manifestation in the everyday activities of life.

This view of culture is akin to that of Raymond Williams, though his starting point is Marx whose concept of base-superstructure is reinterpreted by him. “Culture, is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Language”. (qtd in Contemporary Literary Criticism 9). He also says that, in culture, cultural practice and cultural production are not simply derived from an otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution. In this conception, culture is not some ‘informing spirit’ within the society but the signifying – system through
which necessarily a social system is communicated, reproduced and explored. (qtd. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 9).

Culture is not very easy to define; yet it is a concept that lies at the core of all human understanding inherited and nurtured. Ngugi Wa Thiongo provides a working definition of culture as:

> ...a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science, and all their social institutions, including their systems of belief and rituals ... [cultural] values are often expressed through the people’s songs, dances, folklore, drawing, sculpture, rites and ceremonies. (4)

In this view cultural formations are determined by the inherited tradition of creativity in each society.

Culture is the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. It refers to the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically.

Indian culture is unique with its richness and diversity. The values and beliefs of the Indians remain unchanged even after embracing a modernized way of living. The values are rooted deep in the mind, body and soul of the people, a quality which is influenced by the culture of the nation.

Robert C. Carneiro, a notable anthropologist interprets culture as “... a uniquely human attribute ... which man interposes between himself and his
environment in order to ensure the security and survival” (551). For Edward B. Tylor, it is“. . . that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society” (1). Alfred Knoeber, who has studied women’s fashions as examples of his grasp of culture, defines a culture trait as “. . . super organic and super individual in that, although carried, participated in and produced by organic individuals, it is acquired by learning” (254). And for Clifford Geertz, “Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (145).

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the ‘middle passage’ of slavery and indenture, the ‘voyage out’ of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of ‘global’ media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue.

In India, the individual’s beliefs and values are constructed through cultural and political pressures and sometimes by oneself. The clash between the private and the public, between one’s individual beliefs and the beliefs of others is thus a confrontation that sometimes results in a riot. The Indian mind has been shaped by remarkably diverse forces such as, the ancient Hindu tradition, myth, scripture; the impact of Islam and Christianity; and two centuries of British Colonial rule. The result is unique. Pluralism is a reality that emerges from the very nature of India. With
diversity emerging from the geography of India and inscribed in the history of India, India is made for pluralism.

Western culture is essentially intellectual, individualistic and freedom-oriented whereas Indian culture is essentially spiritualistic and restraint-oriented. Hence, values have perforce to be redefined, so also human relationships, especially within the family. The case is especially so with the fairly educated and enlightened middle class that finds itself in an apparently insoluble dilemma. It requires tremendous amount of courage to break away from tradition. So, despite western education, the Indian psyche remains tradition-oriented. A vast majority of women in families outside the pale of civilized society are reconciled to a life of humiliation in the form of gender-bias while performing the roles of wives and mothers in the rigidly custom-bound milieu they live in. But what is shockingly true is that even women with liberal modern education who nurse an irrepressible yearning to break loose from the time-honoured, crippling and iniquitous social laws that condemn women to a role abjectly inferior to that of men, do often lose their moorings and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situations due to a variety of reasons. The modern woman is caught in a transitional phase – running between two opposing forces, the traditional and modern values. This external conflict with the society results in an internal conflict within the selves of the women.

In recent times, there is an increasing realization in the world that a woman can play an equal part with man only if she gains a distinct voice of her own and learns to transcend the traditional limits of her silence. “Though their culture may prefer them to be silent, they must have the faculty of speech in order that they may be recognized as human” (Walder 314). According to Ferguson, the moral behind all myths and legends is that: “. . . docility in a wife leads to happiness for all husband-
wife, father; and that upsetting the domestic order may lead to disrupting social and cosmic order. Woman in her place is the corner stone of the society” (19).

The dictates of Manu have been a dominant force in Indian life and thought, and most often women are shown as inferior and subservient to men. The women are shown suffering either from male domination or abject poverty, but that the suffering is the inevitable fate of the women, is what the writers seem to underline. Woman as objects of pity are portrayed from the male point of view – The girl child, neglected and overburdened with the work of an adult woman or living an infernal life in stinking hutments, the daughter cursed at birth by parents for far of dowry, as a helpless wife being tormented by the husband and his family or accused for giving birth to a girl or for being barren woman as mother, eking out a marginalized existence, particularly if widowed, of woman as vulnerable to mental hostility and physical assault from man, both at home and in society are also portrayed.

After the critical reference of the theoretical precepts evolved out of the above mentioned theoretical observations, the researcher arrives at one crucial point which is the point of purpose. It is the speculation of feminine psyche as having been consistently, yet culturally fixed to a landscape. Eventually, it is most fitting to confine oneself to women writers of a variegated time and space.

Indian English literature has nowadays attracted a wide spread interest both in India and abroad. Also as Indian writing in English has entered a new phase, many women writers write about the plight of the Indian women in the patriarchal society. These writers are dissatisfied with their position – their cultural and sexual roles in the society make them write. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal,
Mahasweta Devi and other writers have recorded this female resistance in their novels thereby depicting a new woman’s role in a patriarchy maintained Indian culture.

Kamala Markandaya’s novels are an endeavour to portray her concerns, and she uses her novels as a platform of expressing her protest against the existing preconceptions and prejudices against the downtrodden. The novelist deals with a severe blow to the flippery and gaudy attitude of the modern artists, particularly Indians who look towards the West as a sort of cultural capital of the world and thereby distorting Indian art and culture in the process. Though the novelist can also be accused of the same charges, she, in her real life chose to stay in England with her English husband and it has raised a lot of eyebrows. Though she does not envisage any radical change or solution to the problems that are projected in her works, the novelist creates a new pattern of protest against exploitation and established institutions. Her important works are, *Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, A Handful of Rice, The Coffer Dams, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, The Golden Honeycomb* and *Pleasure City (Shalimar)*.

Anita Desai concentrates more on the actual problems and situations confronted by the individuals than the wider themes of social, political and cultural significance. In almost all her novels, she deals with the psychological conflicts faced by the individuals. She analyses the emotions of both men and women and deals with how they react to different situations when they are under much stress and strain. The tension between tradition and modernity, individualism and social unity form the theme of Desai’s novels. Some of her important works are, *Voices in the City, Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of the Day, Fasting Feasting* and *In Custody*. 
Gita Hariharan, the recipient of the prestigious Commonwealth Award for her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* portrays women who battle in their relationship with men and society. Her other novels include *The Ghosts of Vasu Master, When Dreams Travel, In Times of Siege*, and the new *Fugitive Histories*. Her latest book, *Fugitive Histories* exposes the legacy of prejudice that, sometimes insidiously, sometimes perceptibly, continues to affect disparate lives in present-day India. Gita Hariharan portrays the web of human connections that binds as much as it divides.

“All my novels and stories look at power politics in some way or the other. Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations” (26) mentions Gita. Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee, Gita Hariharan, and Shashi Deshpande belong to the next generation of writers who portray the modern women who are torn between tradition and modernity.

As cultural feminism is a universal phenomenon, not confined to Indian scenario alone, it would be worthy to study the fact that the status accorded and the roles taken up by women are everywhere the same. In this context, a study on the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence is taken as both share certain qualities common to women all over the world.

Both Canada and India have been colonies of the British Empire and are new members of commonwealth. But the major difference between these two countries is that India remained subjugated by them for more than three hundred years, whereas in Canada the immigrant Europeans settled down in the prairies and made it their permanent homeland. India had a glorious cultural heritage but the impact of western culture was much and it created a tension both in the family and in the society. Shashi Deshpande in almost all her works raises the question of tradition against modernity, marital discords, contempt for the conventional values and also the different cultural
responses to the impact of the west. Margaret Laurence and the other Canadian writers are concerned about the passions, aspirations and hopes of the settlers. But the only thing which is common in both these writers is the multi-cultural ethos in their writings. They are aware of the social, economic and cultural realities around them. A close study of Laurence’s novels reveals that her focus is so much on “the inner world of feeling and sensibility that even the impact of feminist movements has generated more of poetic or lyrical articulation of the inner tensions of women than social documentaries voicing the cause of women” (Ramamoorthi 182).

Like Deshpande, she withdraws into the inner self. Her novels, like Deshpande’s move towards the discovery of the self, the landscape across which her journey takes place is neither social nor cultural but the interior landscape which transcends all local, regional or cultural concerns. Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* comments:

All agree in recognizing the fact that female exists in the human species: today as always they make up about one half of humanity. 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. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination. (67)

Therefore, it becomes essential one ought to be feminine, to be a woman.
While reading Laurence’s Manawaka novels like *A Jest of God* and *The Diviners*, the socio-cultural setting as well as the spirit of the place comes alive on the pages of these novels. Canadian women caught in the vortex of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism suffer neurotic states and psychic disturbances. The innermost psyche of the protagonist is revealed through their interaction with who are emotionally related to them. As Bruce King rightly observes, at a deeper level, the novel “records a woman stripping her of social mask, defences and ideals to discover her essential self” (King 213).

Besides the portrayal of the inner conflict of the protagonist, the geographical details, social structure and familial relationships, form the backdrop of the action of her novels. Nancy Bailey’s comment on the Manawaka novels is worth to be quoted here: “Laurence gives us unforgettable portraits of women wrestling with their personal demons, striving through self-examination to find meaningful patterns in their lives” (307). Each of the Manawaka novels may be described as “a fictional and confessional autobiography” (Scott 89).

Living, for the protagonists of the novels of Deshpande and Laurence, means keeping their identities intact, whereas, love demands sympathetic understanding and devotion to each other. In a successful, balanced relationship, love tends to be what Erich Fromm calls “Interpersonal fusion” (89). The portrayal of the inner experiences of the protagonists of both Laurence and Deshpande – their memories of home and childhood, parental relationships, betrayal in love and marriage, attitude to the child born as well as unborn, attitude to sex and, above all attitude to men and male-dominated world – register a considerable similarity. These women find themselves in predicaments in which any sensitive woman anywhere in the modern world finds
herself suffering from the same neurotic state and psychic disturbance which sensitive women suffer in a male dominated world all over.

The novels of the pre-independence era discuss the socio-political situation of the contemporary society. But modern novels glorify Indian culture and focus on the life and manners, beliefs, myths and superstitions, joys, sorrows and sufferings of the people. M.K. Naik writes: “Fiction, of all literary forms, is most vitally concerned with social conditions and values, and at this time, Indian society galvanized into a new social and political awareness, was bound to seek creative expression for its new consciousness and the novel has in all ages been a handy instrument for this purpose” (57).

On the whole, almost all the Indian novels emphasize the tradition and culture of the people of India. Harvey Pearce rightly expresses his view that by “studying history, we study culture”. (qtd in Smith 12) Shashi Deshpande in *The Stone Women* comments:

> Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need them to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large dent in the fabric of our culture. On the other hand, if we are not able to make them meaningful to our lives, they will cease to survive. In India, specially, myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truths about themselves, about the human condition. What women writers are doing today is not a rejection of the myths, but a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them. We are looking
for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. (94)

Most of the novelists remained middle class in their attitudes and opinions. They give much importance to the past traditions and histories of their country. But Somerset Maugham says “The novel is not simply a record of the facts of life, for, fact is a poor story – teller” (qtd in Sharma 79). The majority of the Indo-Anglian novelists are very much particular in revealing the socio-cultural complexities of modern India. Hence novel writing is just reflecting reality as John Peck portrays: “. . . The novel is the ideal form for presenting a picture of human experience, in particular the problems that beset the individual in society, so far the novel has been treated almost as a clear window of the world” (52). The Indo-Anglian novelist presents affectionate pictures of Indian life to the readers abroad. Every literature is a native tradition of thought and culture carried forward through the works of individual talents and Indo-Anglian literature is no exception.

A reading of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals a deep understanding of the female psyche. Her protagonists are educated, urban and middle-class women. Deshpande is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English novelist who has written four volumes of short stories, four children’s books and nine novels to her credit. She was born on 19 August 1938 and brought up in Dharwad, Karnataka, and is the daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Adya Rangacharya whose pen name is Sriranga. Sriranga is described as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada Theatre. She graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College Bombay in 1956 and learnt law from Government Law College, Bangalore. Later after twenty eight years she earned a post-graduate degree in English from the Mysore University. She married Dr. Deshpande, a neuro-pathologist in 1962 and the initial years of her
marriage were spent in bringing up her two sons, Vikram born in 1962 and Raghunandan in 1964.

Shashi Deshpande has so far published nine novels, eight collections of short stories, a collection of essays, two short crime novels and four books for children. She has received awards for three of her novels, including the Sahitya Akademi award for *That Long Silence*. The novels of Shashi Deshpande chosen for research are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*. Deshpande says in *The Stone Women*,

. . . the family is not a divine, sacred institution, but one created by humans for the benefit of all society; and therefore, it should be built, not on the sacrifice of some, but on the co-operation and compromises of all its members. The loud cry of the new-born is a triumphant assertion of being – I AM. Does a baby girl cry less loudly? (84)

Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* opens with the moment of crisis in the life of Sarita, a successful doctor. It is the story of Sarita’s relationship with her parents and her husband and her agonizing search for self-identity. The novel opens with Saru returning to her parents’ house after a gap of fifteen years. Her stay in her parents’ house gives her a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her mother, her children and her dead brother, Dhruva. When she thinks about her childhood days, she remembers the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhruva. Saru’s mother believes that a boy is an asset to the family whereas a girl is a liability. Also, her mother often talks about her dark complexion and never allows her to step into the sun because the sunlight would
worsen her colour. But Dhruva doesn’t get any such restrictions because he is a boy. Thus, Saru becomes rebellious in nature.

When Dhruva drowns in the pond, she at first silently watches the whole scene without trying to rescue him. Then she tries to save him but her efforts end in vain. Later, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother blames her for Dhruva’s death. Her life becomes miserable after Dhruva’s death. There are no celebrations at home. When her mother accuses her for Dhruva’s death, she never denies the charges. Thus, Saru slowly develops hatred towards her mother. Due to that, she develops an aversion to traditional practices in the crucial years of puberty and adolescence. She hates her mother and wants to hurt her. Later, she goes to Bombay to study medicine against the wishes of her mother. But her father encourages her to study medicine. Her confrontation with her mother reaches its height when she decides to marry Manu (Manohar), a low-caste boy.

Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in a one-room apartment. As long as Saru is a student, Manu is the bread winner; there is peace in the house. But when Saru becomes a doctor, her economic independence makes Manu feel jealous and insecure. This sense of inferiority makes him brutal in his behaviour. Manu behaves like a wild animal at night by abusing her physically in their bedroom.

As a doctor, she doesn’t feel comfortable to stay in their one room apartment. She wants to move to a more decent house. Now Saru aims higher and wants to specialize in order to achieve the things she dreams of. It is here that she uses the services of Boozie, her professor to improve her career. Saru maintains a good friendship with him just to get his help in setting up a consulting room. Thus Saru establishes herself as a successful doctor and Manu feels jealous of her. Her
profession keeps her away from Manu for longer hours and sometimes she reaches home late at night. She silently bears his brutality but fears that she may die a painful death.

At that time, she comes to know of her mother’s death through her friend Manda. She goes to her father’s house after a gap of fifteen years. Saru expects moral support from her father. So she explains him about her problems. But after listening to Saru, her father simply leaves her without responding to her agonies. Saru lives an isolated and lonely life in her father’s house. She is upset on seeing the unchanging attitude of her father. She even regrets for having come to her parents’ house.

Towards the end of the novel, Saru receives a letter about Manu’s arrival. She wishes that Manu might turn away, tired after knocking at the door. But when she goes out to attend a patient, she tells her father to inform Manu to wait for some time. Her profession gives her some courage to confront reality. The readers understand that Saru will no longer be an object for Manu to vent his frustration on.

Deshpande’s novel *That Long Silence* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for best Indian – English novel. The title *That Long Silence* is taken from the words of Elizabeth Robins “If I were a man who cared for the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of the long silence of one half of the world” (qtd in Dhawan 163). In the novel *That Long Silence*, Deshpande depicts the anxiety and difficulty of a middle class family. Mohan, the protagonist Jaya’s husband is involved in some malpractice. He loses his job and Agarwal, a co-partner advises him to stay away from the office until the storm is over. Mohan, along with his wife Jaya resides for a while at Jaya’s maternal uncle’s flat at Dadar. They live there till the shifting to a big flat in Church gate. Although in silent indignation,
the mode of self-examination and self-criticism begin for Jaya. She is ever haunted by the memories of the past – her earlier life and her marriage with Mohan. They leave their children Rahul and Rati with Jaya’s friend Rupa who goes on a trip to South India. Jaya is also reminded of her intimate friendship with Kamat, her upstairs neighbour at Dadar. He is a widower and his only son has settled abroad. He lives alone in the house and performs all house hold duties himself. He has shown a lot of understanding and sympathy for Jaya. Jaya is more free with him than she is with her husband. But such type of friendship between a married woman and another man is always looked down upon. That is why when Kamat’s dead body was lying on the floor of his flat, Jaya did not stay and pay homage to her best friend for the fear of destroying her married life. So she does her role of a wife but fails as a human being.

Once, the depressed, angry Mohan accuses Jaya for not taking care of the children, of isolating herself from him and his concerns, and of being a false wife. But Jaya is still a caring wife and loving mother. Jaya laughs at him and comments that he is speaking like a child. Then after a heated argument between the couple, Mohan angrily leaves the house and does not return for several days. The disappointed Jaya goes to her Church gate home and receives the news from Rupa that Rahul is missing. Jaya is anxious and later comes to know that he has gone to his uncle Vasant. She asks Rahul to come home immediately. Jaya is in high fever when she returns to Dadar. She is in delirium and her neighbour Mukta attends her. Rahul comes home but speaks nothing of his visit to his uncle. Jaya receives a telegram from Mohan that all is well and he will return soon.

Jaya’s imaginative, creative writing is not appreciated by her husband Mohan. On reading his wife’s stories, Mohan feels irritated and comments that Jaya has revealed their lives to the world. This comment makes Jaya write under the pen
name – Seeta on what people want to read but not what she wants to write. Even the pen name she chooses shows her decision to be a traditional Indian woman who treads the expected path of a dutiful wife. She suppresses her creative genius under her husband’s ego. It is only at the end of the novel, Jaya decides to break her silence. She tries to come to terms with conflicting identities, that of a wife, mother, woman and writer.

Urmila, the protagonist of the novel The Binding Vine often referred to as Urmi is an upper middle class career woman. She has lost her baby daughter Anu and has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. She becomes sympathetic to Kalpana, who is a rape victim and thus she is friendly with Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother who belongs to a different strata of society. She is also sympathetic to Mira, her dead mother-in-law who was subjected to rape in her marriage. Vanaa, her friend and sister-in-law, her mother Inni and brother Amrut try to bring Urmi back to normal life.

Urmia reads Mira’s poems and diaries and establishes a communion with her. Mira died “in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, giving birth to her son at twenty two” (BV 48). Mira is a symbol of female oppression. Urmi knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most women of her time. Kalpana, Shakutai’s daughter is brutally raped and she is both physically and mentally injured. Shakutai who overhears the conversation between Dr. Bhasker and Vanaa cries, “. . . don’t tell anyone, I will never be able to hold up my head again. Who’ll marry the girl, we are decent people Doctor” (58). Urmi tries to explain to Shakutai that kalpana is not at fault. She is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up a rape case.
Vinnarasi, an advocate throws light on an important issue related to sexual harassment. These crimes are peculiar as the sufferer is victimized by society and forced to go through mental trauma when she turns to justice. They are re-living the assault mentally with greater pain during questioning at the police station and also during court proceedings. She opines “... for fear of going through this humiliation, many victims hesitate to go public and get the culprit punished. This fear of social ostracism has been taken advantage of by culprits” (The Hindu 10 March 2013).

When the hospital authorities try to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, Urmi presents the case in the press with the help of Malcolm. Later, just because of her interruption, the police investigation brings the rapist into light. Her acquaintance with Shakutai gives Urmi an opportunity to understand the lives of women living in the slums. Urmi is furious that even educated urban women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage.

Urmi’s friendship with women provides space for confidence and sharing and they also reflect the unwritten restrictions imposed by the society. Her friendship with Bhaskar is commented upon both by Inni, her mother and Vanaa, her sister-in-law. Both advise her to consider the social implication. Her long separation from her husband gives her an opportunity to think of another intimate relationship with Bhaskar but when Dr. Bhasker declares his love for her, she holds back. Deshpande seems to mean that chastity and virtue are self-imposed restrictions, not necessarily the absence of desire. The dead child Anu is the binding vine of feeling and emotion between mother and daughter, Urmi and Anu and Urmi and her mother Inni.

In her novel, *A Matter of Time*, Deshpande liberates herself from the narrow outlook on women and their problems and enters into the world of philosophy. The
novel is the story of three women from three generations from the same family and how they come out of the tragedy that comes across their lives.

*A Matter of Time* particularly deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. In the very beginning of the novel, how Sumi, the protagonist reacts to her husband Gopal’s desertion is very touching. Gopal suddenly decides to leave her and their three teenage daughters. Sumi and Gopal have been married for twenty years and have a happy married life. Gopal’s desertion of Sumi without any proper reason leaves her in confusion about their future. But there is no fretting and fuming on the part of the protagonist. Instead, she is proud and does not need anyone’s sympathy. She assures herself that life must go on as such and mentally strengthens herself for the sake of her three daughters. Thus, she accepts the hard realities of life.

The novel actually revolves around four generations of women but since the first generation woman, Manorama is dead, the story is mainly about three living characters, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. Sumi returns to her natal home ‘Big House’ with her three daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema where her parents Sripati and Kalyani live in a strange oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for thirty-five years. The novelist draws a parallel between Sripathi’s desertion of Kalyani and Gopal’s desertion of Sumi. Through the lives of Kalyani and Sumi, Deshpande portrays how these women live their lives without men and how they are not dependent on them financially also. She shows the potentialities of these women in the absence of their husbands. Sumi and her daughters, especially Aru considers Gopal’s desertion as a shame and disgrace. Sumi is terribly upset during her last night stay in their own house but the next day Aru finds her mother looking so bright after her bath. Sumi doesn’t like to show her agony to her daughters. She likes to appear to be a bold woman, uncaring of her husband’s desertion.
Sumi, not liking to be a burden for her parents, looks for a house to live in with her daughters. This shows her self-esteem and also she never likes to wallow in self-pity by depending on others. She begins writing plays and her first play *The Gardener’s Son* gives her some encouragement to deal with women’s problems.

On Aru’s eighteenth birthday Sumi informs the family that she has got a job and herself and Seema are going to move to Devagiri. Aru is upset but Sumi convinces her. Actually, Sumi dies suddenly when she is about to begin a new life. When she meets with an accident, the readers are upset and their sympathies go for the protagonist. Thus, she establishes her identity before her death.

Canadian literature is characterized by a new strain in the quest for identity and survival. It is the proclamation of a new social construct based on a new identity paradigm which could be compressed in one simple essentialist position. The essentialist position is projective of a new verve in literature which attempts to take advantage of those hostile climate and the longer obstacles. In a sense, Canadian literature could be regarded as the consequence of the settlement paradigm enacted by the French, the English, the Jewish and the Ukrainian wanguards of civilization. These pioneers have made a conscious attempt to withstand the lack of history. Hence they could be singled out for their moral and literary rigour which they used to create new literature uniquely different from other literatures.

Canadian Literature asserts the fact that it is not only different from other literatures but also significantly situated in its essentially rootlessness. While encompassing the crucial traits of culture and psyche, Canadian literature projects the very idea of creation as uniquely cultureless and hence lacking in much of history.
Ron Dollman, the Canadian Consul observed:

Canadians do not have a strong sense of a Canadian identity or nationality. There are no great archetypes that define what is to be Canadian. There was no defining moment, nothing equivalent to the Indian struggle for Independence or the American Revolution, to help create a national identity. This has let room for ethnic identities and culture to persist and be tolerated. (qtd in Srinath 198)

The central idea that reigns supreme in Canadian writing is that it is preoccupied with the idea and the essential strategies of survival. In other words, Canadian literature does not proceed from the historical centre but the doctrinal source gathered from all over the world. This is one of the reasons why Canadian literature has preoccupied with the conscious attempt to reach harmony not through history but through ideology.

According to Margaret Atwood, “Canadian literature is undoubtedly Survival, la Surveillance.” (32). W.H. New observes, “Writers began to seek structures of expression that would rephrase and so reinterpret their culture, free it from the definitions of the ‘Other’, so to speak, and hence encode a new authenticity of self” (212). The literature incorporates a single unifying idea of identity in a hostile world. While “the history of Canada is the history of colonized culture” (New 212), the culture of Canada is the culture of a colonized history. Thus, Canadian literature is the historical consequence of the imperialist intrusion and the colonial experience that was entwined in it. This is one new process that helped to work out the adaptation of a new identity sans nationalist sentiments and historical impediments. While on the one side, it is the search for a new self, on the other, it is a search for a new colonial space.
Here, this colonial perception deconstructs the historical colonial space so that a progressive continuum of self is infiltrated so as to be stabilized with the sense of identity.

The Colonial outlook induces among other things, not merely a simple nostalgia for the lost way of life but also an admiration for the (m)other culture which engenders a sense of insufficiency and/or inadequacy in the colonial psyche. This in turn results in an antipathy towards the self in the form of self-disdain and self-hate and disallows thereby an adequate perception of the self or a confident assertion of the cultural identity. (Salat 3)

A few words of C.N. Srinath in his keynote address at the National Workshop in Canadian studies are worth to be quoted here: “One of the Canadian Prime Ministers made an interesting observation about Canada: ‘If some countries have too much history we have too much geography . . . it’s the landscape, the prairie, the bush, the frontier that give some identity to the people, generating new myths and legends’ ” (196).

The Canadian writers have engaged their protagonists in a separate struggle which is pointed toward not only the identity but also the quest for a structure, all influenced by the toughness of the Canadian Prairie. In this regard, it is worth quoting Sunita Sinha here. She writes of Margaret Laurence thus:

Canadian literature is remarkable for the prominence of women writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro . . .

Margaret Laurence has emerged as a predominant shaper of post-war Canadian literature. Her novels portray strong women striving for self
definition while immersed in the daily struggle to make a living in a male dominated world. (Preface XV)

The Canadian women writers have shaped the culture of Canadian women by their portrayal in their novels.

Alice Munro is a Canadian short story writer, the winner of the 2009 Man Booker International Prize, a three time winner of Canada’s Governor General’s Award for fiction, and a perennial contender for the Nobel Prize. Her female characters are more complex. A frequent theme of her work has been the dilemma of a girl coming of age and coming to terms with her family and the small towns she grew up. In recent works such as *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and *Runaway*, she has shifted her focus to the travails of middle age, of women alone and of the elderly.

Gabrielle Roy is considered one of the most important Canadian writers of the post-war period. Laurence and Roy had a seven year correspondence-somewhat frequent in the beginning and growing sparer in the end when Laurence wrote to Roy soon before Roy died of a heart attack in July 1983. They met only once but developed a friendship through letters based on their common bond of writing. Lawrence valued their friendship a lot because she felt they were members of the same tribe and was from the same Manitoba town.

Although Roy has often been treated as a feminine writer, she has always been viewed as a traditionalist rather than a feminist. Gabrielle Roy seems to have been more concerned with independent, revolutionary female characters. Her deep preoccupation with women and their struggles, as well as her preference for female characters has continued in her major fiction. Almost all of Roy’s early fictions
revolve around some aspect of a woman’s life. Some of her important novels are *The Tin Flute*, *Where Nests the Water Hen*, *The Cashier*, *Street of Riches*, *The Hidden Mountain*, *The Road Past Altamont*, *Windflower*, *Enchanted Summer*, *Garden in the Wind*, *My Cow Bossie*, *Children of My Heart*, *The Fragile Lights of Earth*, *Cliptrail*, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, *The Tortoise Shell and the Pekinese*.

Atwood’s contributions to the theorizing of Canadian identity have garnered attention both in Canada and internationally. Her principal work of literary criticism, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, is considered outdated in Canada but remains the standard introduction to Canadian literature in Canadian Studies programmes internationally. In *Survival*, Atwood postulates that Canadian literature, and by extension Canadian identity, is characterized by the symbol of survival. Several of her works, including *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin* and *Surfacing*, are examples of what postmodern literary theorist Linda Hutcheon calls “Historiographic Metafiction”. Margaret Atwood often portrays female characters dominated by patriarchy in her novels. Still, Atwood denies that *The Edible Woman*, for example, published in 1969 and coinciding with the early second wave of the feminist movement, is feminist and claims that she wrote it four years before the movement. Atwood believes that the feminist label can only be applied to writers who consciously work within the framework of the feminist movement.

When Margaret Laurence died on January 5, 1987, she had published 16 books – five African books based on Somalia, Ghana and Nigeria: five Manawaka novels modeled after her childhood home town of Neepawa and other prairie towns; four children’s books: one book of essays; and a memoir – besides innumerable poems; magazines and newspapers. Laurence was presented with the Governor
General’s Award in 1967 and again in 1975. From 1981-1983, she was Chancellor of Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. Interim chairman of the committee set up to found the Writers’ union of Canada, Laurence received eleven honorary degrees between 1970-1981 and refused many others. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982.

Laurence had roots in Canada and its Scottish tradition, for, her paternal grandparents came from Fife and Edinburgh and her Scots – Irish maternal great – grandparents came to Canada from country Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Robert Wemyss, a partner in his father’s law firm in Neepawa, married Verna Simpson in 1922. Jean Margaret Wemyss, their daughter was born on July 19, 1926. When she was four, her mother died. Her mother’s sister, a teacher of English, became Laurence’s step mother. With her Margaret Laurence began her literary career. They read many books and talked especially about Canadian literature, long before it was a subject taught in Canadian Universities and schools. Laurence graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Honors English in 1947 and became a journalist for the Winnipeg Citizen. In 1948, she married Jack Laurence, an engineer.

In England and then in Somalia (1950-1952) Margaret kept journals, which became the bases, ten years later for her memoir/travelogue *The prophet’s Camel Bell* (1963) known in America as *A New Wind in a Dry Land*. Her first book *A Tree for Poverty* was innovative because she wrote the first translations of two Somali oral literature forms into other language. It was published by the British Protectorate of Somaliland Government (Nairobi, 1954), reprinted by Irish (Dublin, Ireland) and Mc Master (Hamilton, Canada) University Presses (1970), and again reprinted with an introduction by ECW Press (Toronto, Canada, 1993). Between 1952 and 1957 she bore two children, Jocelyn and David in Ghana. While living there, Margaret
Laurence wrote short stories which were published in Canadian journals (1957 to 1962) and later collected in _The Tomorrow – Tamer and other Stories_ (1963). Ghana is the setting for her first novel, _This Side Jordan_ (1960), one of the earliest to portray African and British cultures together. She wrote the first book-length critique of literature in English by Nigerians, _Long Drums and Cannons_ (1968).

In writing these five books and many newspaper reviews and articles, Laurence matured in her literary techniques. She then returned to Canada where she wrote her Manawaka novels. In Vancouver, where she returned in 1957, she wrote the first drafts in 1961 and 1962 of _The Stone Angel_. _The Stone Angel_ was published in 1964. Her next Manawaka novels were _A Jest of God_ published in 1966 and _The Fire Dwellers_ published in 1969. From 1962-1969, she also published stories which were collected in _A Bird in the House_ (1970). _The Diviners_ (1974) was written when she was in Canada.

Mc Master University Archives is the repository of these five Manawaka manuscripts. Several articles were republished in _Heart of a Stranger_ (1976). Films were made of her life and of some novels. Near her death in 1987, she wrote a memoir, _Dance on the Earth_ (1989), which highlights her relationship with her mother, step mother, and mother-in-law. This modest woman with her love of writing and receiving letters corresponded with many and wrote about twenty-five hundred letters a year, now in York University Archives, Toronto.

Laurence has an international place in contemporary literature. She is well-known to Americans because three novels were published simultaneously, two novels were Book-of-the-Month Club selections, and one was made into the movie (Rachel, Rachel). _The Diviners_ is widely read and taught in women’s studies and literature
courses in American Universities and the University of Chicago Press has issued all five Manawaka novels. Her portrayal of a wide range of protagonists show her expertise and innovation – a ninety-year-old finishing-school graduate turned farmer’s wife and housekeeper Hagar Currie Shipley; teacher Rachel Cameron in her thirties; Vanessa MacLeod up to her forties; high-school drop-out Stacey Mac Aindra in her forties; and writer Morag Gunn in her fifties. Margaret Laurence delineates their experiences as women in several roles – daughters, unmarried women, wives, mothers, and grandmother. Though she is one of the women writers to have themes of old age and death in women’s experience, astonishingly, she is not near the age of her protagonists. She was only in her mid thirties when she wrote *The Stone Angel*; its protagonist is in her nineties. Until this novel was published in 1954, very few writers had depicted old age in women or men.

*The Stone Angel* is the first of Laurence’s Manawaka novels. Hagar Shipley, the protagonist of the novel speaks of her spiritual journey towards freedom and self-knowledge. Laurence communicates through Hagar, the character of the protagonist as well as the multifaceted portrait of a complex and self-contradictory woman. The skilful portrayal of the picture of Hagar reveals her qualities to the reader thereby helping them to assess this complicated character.

In the brief reverie which opens the book, Laurence identifies personal values which shaped Hagar’s character and communal attitudes which were the foundation of her society. For Hagar, the stone angels in the Manawaka cemetery are symbols of passive and weak-spirited women. They did not have the strength to cope with life. Her sympathies are with the strong-willed women who survive. The blind stone angel which marks the grave of Hagar’s mother symbolizes the emotional blindness that affects Hagar for a long time. The story of Hagar Shipley is narrated in two segments.
The first one is an episode of her personal examination shortly before her death. It is
about her consciousness at ninety, living in Vancouver during the final years of her
life. Her memories of the past and the present leave her in a confused state. The
second one is her life in Manawaka. This sequence begins with a fragmented memory
starting from a time when Hagar was about six.

Educated by her father, the proud patriarch Jason Currie, a self-made man,
motherless Hagar tries to be the strong son he never had. Her brothers Matt and Dan
are weaklings like their mother. She rejects her womanhood and learns contempt for
women, especially her mother who died in giving birth to her. Hagar is proud and
stubborn and she almost rejects the female familial roles of wife, mother, daughter
and even the roles of lover and friend.

_The Stone Angel_ is a novel about death, and the subject of mortality gives the
text its power. Hagar begins her narrative in a cemetery – like Pip of _Great
Expectations_ who achieves self-awareness in a graveyard. W.H. New calls Hagar’s
story “an essentially tragic one” (138).

Like many tragic figures, Hagar has a tragic flaw – pride. Critics have noted
that pride is both her strength and weakness. Calling herself “Proud as . . . Lucifer”
(191), the rebel angel, she tries to outface death. She is proud of her lineage. With no
mother to teach her to be a woman, Hagar is her father’s daughter and his would-be
son. Though she despises his snobbish values and rebels against them, she absorbs his
pride and prejudice and repeats his maxims to her son John. She presents the Currie
plaid pin to John and he trades it for the Tonnerre’s hunting knife.

Hagar marries Bram Shipley, a crude and uncivilized farmer against the
wishes of her father. Since they are from different backgrounds, they have different
concepts of good living. Hagar is college-educated, while Bram reads Eaton’s catalogue “to improve his mind” (SA 113). She feels “I could have been proud, going to town or church with him, if only he’d never opened his mouth” (70). She wants to convert Bram in order to impress her father. But all her attempts end in vain. She is keen on keeping her house well furnished and decorated but Bram wants only horses and nothing else. She feels frustrated and after giving birth to Marvin and John, she leaves the house with John.

She works as a house keeper with Mr. Oatley where she rears her son John. She tries to inculcate good habits in John. John falls in love with Arlene and desires to marry her against the wishes of her mother. When Bram is in death bed, Hagar goes to Manawaka, spends time and money on the dying Bram. Soon after his death, she comes back to Mr. Oatley’s house telling him that the man dead is her brother. Then John drives with Arlene on a railway bridge and kills themselves in a self-destructive game of chicken with a freight train. Hagar often feels guilty over her part in John and Arlene’s death. She laments at the outset of her retrospective, for she has lost her father, her husband, and her son but she rejects all thought of her responsibility for their loss. At the age of ninety, she realizes that she could have permitted John to marry Arlene, but it is just a late realization because the accident has already taken place.

During her last days, she lives with Marvin and his wife Doris. Marvin does everything to win her approval. But he never wins any approval or acknowledgement from his mother. It is her pride that comes between her and those she loves. But at the end of the novel, she is willing to praise Marvin, which all along he longed. She accepts that he has been a better son to her than John. In the last scene of the novel, she refuses to let the nurse help her drink a glass of water. She insists on holding it in
her hands and dies dignified. As Buss points out, “We may measure Hagar’s growth in her last days by her changing attitudes towards women, her increasing ability to receive mothering love and to offer love in return . . . Hagar begins a process whereby she allows other women to touch her life” (12).

* A Jest of God * is the second novel in the Manawaka series of Margaret Laurence. Rachel Cameron, the protagonist of the novel is a middle-aged introverted, spinster school teacher who lives with her mother in the prairie town of Manawaka. She has returned home to Manawaka from the university in Winnipeg after the death of her alcoholic father, Niall Cameron. She lives in a flat with her mother Mrs. May Cameron. Mrs. May Cameron is a hypochondriac mother, a good example of an elderly woman who controls others through her need of them.

Her bond of duty to her mother isolates her from other human contacts. Rachel’s life is inscribed by her mother in a suffocating manner. Victimized by what Norman Jeffares calls the “crippling conventionalism of a small community” (287), Mrs. Cameron’s real self lies totally submerged under her persona with which she mindlessly identifies. In her critical work *Survival*, Margaret Atwood sees Rachel as a victim of the Rapunzel Syndrome with her mother as “the wicked witch who has imprisoned her” (37) and the attitudes of the society as a tower in which she is imprisoned. True to Atwood’s remark, Mrs. Cameron exercises a ruthless hold on Rachel and seems to be the wicked witch. However, it is also possible to see her as the real Rapunzel of the story. Her mother fusses a lot about Rachel’s being “too conscientious” (*JG* 20) about her teaching and about Rachel’s health. If Rachel plans to go out in the evening, Mrs. Cameron reminds her to bring her pills from the medicine cabinet. Then, the very next moment, she assures Rachel that she’s sure she’ll be just fine, that Rachel should just go ahead and enjoy herself. The doctor has
warned her that she should not lift things. Even then, Mrs. May suggests her daughter that when Rachel has gone out, she would wash the blankets. Rachel realizes that her mother’s “weapons are invisible, and she would never admit even to carrying them, much less putting them to use” (46).

Amongst the people she meets in the school, she becomes friendly with Calla, a fellow teacher. Calla’s scorn for female fashion, her religious fervour and her independent spirit is a perfect foil for Rachel. Rachel’s life is focused on her mother and she completely rejects her own likes and dislikes. She is indecisive and is tempted by a world of the imagination. She is a detached individual and the only person she can talk to is God.

Rachel feels suffocated on the environment at home and so she longs for personal independent identity and freedom. She does not like to become the wife of the farmer Lennox Cates who has not finished his high school learning. She is often obsessed with a feeling of failure in life.

Rachel’s brief affair with Nick Kazlik, a high-school teacher from Winnipeg provides the catalyst for her development. He comes to Manawaka to visit his parents during one summer. She goes out with him in the evenings and considers it a great opportunity to free herself from the clutches of her mother. Rachel has a strong desire to have children. Once when they make love, Rachel says, “If I had a child, I would like it to be yours” (154). Nick responds, “I’m not God. I can’t solve anything” (154) and then he disappears.

As summer ends and school begins, Rachel has a terrible fear and a terrible hope of pregnancy. Her desperate struggle between acceptance and rejection of the child brings the anti-climax. When she goes for a medical check-up, she is told that
the growth in her uterus is not a foetus but a benign tumour which has to be removed by surgery. In the hospital at Winnipeg, the little tumour is removed and through her struggle, Rachel grows into a mature woman. Her mother becomes her “elderly child” (203). At the end of the novel, Rachel leaves Manawaka with her mother to pursue a healthier psychic life in Vancouver. Her decision to leave Manawaka against her mother’s wishes indicates that she has at last had an identity for herself.

In *The Fire-Dwellers* Stacey Mc Aindra, the protagonist often feels that she is caught in a dilemma. She never struggles for power and privilege but for equality and love. Stacey Mac Aindra, the thirty-nine year old protagonist of Laurence’s third Manawaka novel has so many roles upon her – wife, mother, mistress, daughter, sister and neighbour. She is expected to be pleasing and efficient in all these roles. But she often thinks that she is a failure. She feels a middle age identity crisis. She is a house wife and a mother of four children. Her salesman husband Clifford Mac Aindra never helps her in her domestic chores because he comes home late. Stacey has to bear the responsibilities of the family alone. Stacey suffers a good deal of mental agony on account of loneliness and neglect.

Sometimes Stacey is even sorry to have married Mac. He gets irritated when she pays more attention to the grown up children. He feels that the children should be made independent and she is ruining them. It hurts her deeply but when she feels lonely, her heart cries out “Mac, talk to me, Mac . . .” (*FD* 124).Stacey loves her children so much that she often prays to the Almighty to “let them be okay, all their lives, all four of them”. She also says, “Let me die before they do. Only not before they grow up, or what would happen to them?” (67). In the moments of loneliness, Stacey even craves for the company of other men.
She meets Luke Venturi, a young man when she takes a long drive to escape the monotony of her home. She hides her real age from him. She talks, discusses and argues with him without any hesitation. She sheds up all her inhibition in his presence. She feels consoled that Luke loves her in spite of her age and her extra weight. What she needs is a temporary break and when Luke asks her to go away with him far North, she thinks of her family and expresses her inability to do so. She is falsely accused by Buckle, Mac’s friend of being unfaithful to her husband. Later Mac believes that Buckle has told all lies to him that Stacey has not been to bed with him. But Stacey never feels guilty of her relationship with Luke.

Her younger daughter Jen is unable to speak at the age of two. And when she utters a full sentence, Stacey is mad with joy. But she cannot communicate with any of her children. There is a generation gap between herself and her elder daughter Katie. Duncan and Ian are spoilt by her excessive cuddling. She often compares herself with Tess Fogler, her neighbour and so she is not able to develop a healthy relationship with her.

At the end of the novel, Stacey is more practical. She calls Mac’s father Matthew as Dad for she never uses the word for anyone other than her dead father, Niall Cameron. She has shed up all her complex and emerges as a bright, morning star. The catalyst for overcoming Stacey’s identity crisis and communication gap is the same as Rachel’s – a summer romance. Stacey finally reconciles with the people she lives with, accepts their human limitation and has a strong belief that her family is “more or less okay” (281). Laurence writes, “Optimism in this world seems impossible to me. But in each novel, there is some hope, and that is a different thing entirely” (TYS 15).
A Bird in the House, Margaret Laurence’s book of short stories was published in 1970. Vanessa MacLeod is the young heroine of these stories which follow ten years of her life in Manawaka. The central character Vanessa MacLeod is present in two roles. She is presented as a young girl and then as a young woman and she is the protagonist in each story. Her family is seen around Vanessa and the characters of the family members do not change in all these stories.

Vanessa’s growth as an artist is narrated by her at different stages and this narration is given in the eight stories which form a novel. She resists her authoritative Grandfather Connor and adjusts with the situation to continue her writing career. Grandfather Connor is a suppressor belonging to the patriarchal community. She narrates how the other family members including her grandmother, mother, Aunt Edna and herself suffer by the tyrannical attitude of her grandfather. She hates the rigid hierarchical and patriarchal atmosphere prevalent in both the Connor’s and the MacLeod’s, her maternal and paternal grandparents. Vanessa feels angry and frustrated when her grandfather questions her boyfriend Michael.

Vanessa’s paternal grandmother MacLeod is very much proud of her Scottish lineage and she is in no way better than Grandfather Connor. She, as a proud woman, criticizes Aunt Edna’s language and often insists in order. Vanessa’s parents and Aunt Edna endure the authority of her grandparents but Vanessa protests against them. She leaves Manawaka after the failure of her love affair with Michael. She actually leaves for higher studies and comes back after twenty years. At the end, she admits that she has failed to defeat her grandfather. She realizes that she no longer needs to fight because he will always live in her blood. She is satisfied with the legacy of her roots and ancestors.
Laurence labels *A Bird in the House* “Semi-autobiographical fiction” (*HS* 8) and acknowledges in her essay “On ‘The Loons’” that “The character of Vanessa is based on myself as a child, and the MacLeod family is based on my own childhood family” (805).

Morag Gunn, the protagonist of *The Diviners* is born in a middle-class family. After the death of her parents, Morag has been brought up by Christie and Prin. Morag never considers her low-class foster-parents, Christie, the town’s garbage-collector and his wife Prin as her real parents. Prin often dresses in a socially awkward and unacceptable manner. Through his tales of the Clan Gunn, Christie tries to create a half-imaginary world with which Morag identifies herself. But while narrating the tales, Christie also expresses the agony and suffering of the dispossessed and exploited clans of the highland, the Metis and their struggle for survival.

She dates with a young Metis, Jules Skinner Tonnerre in her teen age. Both of them know well that it is mere teen-age passion and love. Jules is a vagrant and he disappears after having a very intimate relationship with Morag but he returns after sometime. When Morag expresses her wish to join a college in Winnipeg, he casually wishes her to marry a rich professor. Surprisingly, she falls in love with Dr. Brooke Skelton, her professor and marries him. Morag wants a baby but Brooke postpones it and treats her like his baby. Morag opposes it because she feels that by treating her like a child, Brooke dominates her.

It is at this stage that Morag concentrates on writing and attempts her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*. The novel is accepted and published. Morag, who has been longing to have a child, who has now grown into a feminist, goes to Jules Skinner. After a brief stay with Jules, she leaves for Vancouver, alone but pregnant with Jules’
child. Pique, her child is born. Jules and Morag are bonded by love and they lead a family life for three months. Jules sings to Pique who calls him ‘Dad’. He often reminds Morag to get back to her old foster-father. But she refuses and moves to London with Pique. Morag writes her novels, tends to the baby and also meets Mc Raith. Dan Mc Raith, a Highland Scot is a Presbyterian and an artist. During her visit to Scotland with Pique, the home of Mc Raith, she is reminded that it is the land of her ancestors. But later after her return to London, she realizes that the land of “Christie is her real country” (TD 113). On receiving the news that Christie is ill, she comes to Manawaka in time to call the poor old scavenger ‘father’ before he dies.

Then she returns to Canada and settles down in Mc Connell’s Landing. She writes her novel Shadow of Eden and Royland, an old diviner extends a great moral support to her. Royland takes her along when he goes divining for water. Morag also has been a diviner, probing and searching for the meaning of her life. Jules appears once more for a short while. Morag is forty-seven when Jules dies of cancer.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence confine themselves to focusing women as part of superstructure. On the one hand, they submit women as existing in the subaltern position of the male chauvinist superstructure which attempts to reinforce the mythical pressures on womankind. On the other hand, a few of the womankind attempt to script new meanings. Both their novels identify those areas of feminine dissidence, feminist radical proclamations, and pragmatic feminist passivism.

Both Laurence and Deshpande show their protagonists’ fragmentation-experience and at the end of the novels help them move to the centre from the periphery. Their women struggle hard to free themselves from the strong fortresses
built around them by the self-centred patriarchal society. Finally they come out as liberated women and occupy autonomous spaces. Though the protagonists are displaced, disinherited and excluded from the family or sometimes from the society, they come out successfully by not accepting the patriarchal law of the culture. They do not believe in establishing a gynocentric society by subverting the family and male power. So, moving towards ‘centre’ is actually moving towards to transform the phallocentric or androcentric society, to reach “the promised land in which gender would lose its power” (Showalter 345).

The thesis is chapterized as follows. The introduction explains the term ‘culture and feminism’ and its relevance today, compared to ancient times. It also introduces the authors in context, their biography and writings. The novels taken up for study are summarized briefly.

The second chapter explicitly deals with Shashi Deshpande and her novels. The various cultural and feministic aspects are analyzed. All Deshpande’s protagonists are educated individuals who are trapped in the conservative minded family, who try to break free from the shackles that bind them well within the cultural norms of the phallocratic society. Their pain and anguish in all their struggles teach them enough to bend and not to break, to compromise and not to cut off.

The third chapter deals with the novels of Laurence. The major part analyses the Manawaka novels. The Manawaka heroines are prairie women inheriting its toughness gradually as they face the struggles of life. Unlike Deshpande’s heroines, they are even ready to flout the set norms of the patriarchal society to prove their identity. They rebel and question the validity of their situation but as they mature they
are mellowed to take in everything in their stride and to prove their worth amid the conflicting and challenging situations.

The fourth chapter highlights the problems the protagonists face as women placed in androcentric world. They invariably face issues like identity crisis, alienation, male dominance, violence, silence and nostalgia and they are left to live their life with all these troubles besetting them. Yet they do not shirk from their duty but follow the leanings of their heart and mind and succeed in their attempt to stamp their identity. The last chapter summarizes the whole thesis.

It is a known fact that women in the present world are subject to manifold trials and tribulations. In spite of the marginalized status that has been allocated to them they take up the reins of their lives and try to relocate themselves in a fairly decent status where they can never be looked down upon. The following chapter analyses the women of Deshpande and their predicaments.