CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

“...myth supports the idea...that there is an original Great Goddess who creates the universe, the earth, and the heavens, and finally creates the gods and mankind. Eventually she bears, parthenogenetically, a son who later becomes her lover, then her consort, next her surrogate and finally, in patriarchal ages, the usurper of her power.”

(Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* 66)

The place of woman in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, yet one fact common to almost all ages is that woman has never been considered equal to man. According to Aristotle, “Woman was not completely developed as a human being; she was a ‘misbegotten’ or defective male” (qtd. in Swidler 114). Her status largely depends on the simple biological fact that she is the bearer of children and it is her sole responsibility to care for them. In fact, her sphere is usually restricted to familial roles and responsibilities. Mary Kassian, in her book *The Feminist Mystique Mistake*, exposes the mentality of patriarchal society saying, “Men have broad and large chests and small hips, and more understanding than the women, who have but small and narrow breasts, and broad hips, to the end they would remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children” (34). Since times immemorial woman has been the victim of male domination and oppression and treated like a beast of burden and an object for pleasure. Arlene Swidler narrates the psychological perception of male dominated society, “Man is the principle and end of woman, as God is the principle and end of man...Woman exists for the man, not man for the woman” (115). In fact, in the patriarchal society, man has always looked down upon her as the weaker sex, as his property and someone who is servile to him. Lisa S. Price rightly contends in this regard, “this male supremacist ideology contributes to the perpetuation of men’s sex/sexual violence” (27). This ideology has strengthened the concept of oppression, social control and dominance of men over women. Price further adds, “Men’s threatening, intimidating, abusive and violent behaviours are not aberrant and hence their origins
have in commonalities of cultural and social structure” (42). This structure has evolved myths which relegate the image of women against patriarchy, male supremacy and male dominance. So, these myths must be viewed as the origin of man’s supremacy over women in social control.

Different religions, perpetuating the myth of female servitude, have given sanction to the female’s subjugation to the male members of society. Susie Steinbach, in *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History*, has revealed the historical truth:

> Most theology and religious practice…was unkind to women or even misogynistic; many religious leaders held that, spiritually and otherwise, women were probably subordinate to men; most faiths had explicit bans on women as leaders of any kind. (141)

The social and religious theology and practices have bound them in shackles and stifled their creativity and self expression to home and their own individual self only. *The Holy Bible* in “Ephesians” clearly tells the women, “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord” (5:22). *The Holy Bible*, in Genesis states that woman is regarded subordinate to man because “it is believed that she was made out of man” (2:13). In fact, at various places the superiority of man over woman is stressed. Adam is shown as “the master who gives names to all beasts and animals” (Genesis 2:20) and he also gives name to his wife and calls her Eve.

In the Biblical myth, numerous prejudices and assumptions about women have been discovered that has presented her as inferior being of this universe. At the same time, man has been made a master of all and he rules over and controls every object on this earth including woman. St. Paul also gives a secondary position to women, “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (Corinthians 11:7). He further adds:

> Women should be silent during the church meetings. They are not to take part in the discussion, for they are subordinate to men as the scriptures also declare. If they have any questions to ask, let them ask their
husbands at home, for it is improper for women to express their opinion in church meetings. (Corinthians 14: 34-35)

The psychological myths regarding women prevalent during the early Christianity have affected their status for centuries to come, and the concept of the inferiority of women continues to find expression in such sayings as, “as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands” (Camus 20) or “the head of every man is Christ, but the head of woman is man” (Camus 20). These myths have mutilated the status of women in society. “Mary Wollstonecraft strongly condemns the religious attitude which is also responsible for giving secondary position to women” (Greer 172). In fact, it has opened the gate for the oppressed and exploited women and left no sense of justice for them.

The secondary position of women also finds manifestation in the numerical symbolism of Pythagoras who belonged to the sixth century B.C. and whose theory had tremendous impact upon the western culture. According to French:

The number one was the number of godhead and of maleness; the number two was the number of divisiveness and femaleness. One, God, man, were associated with light, order, good, right, rights, and the right hand. Two, divisiveness or chaos, woman, were associated with darkness, evil, magic, and the sinister, the left hand. To this day, the buttons on men’s shirts are on the right, on women’s, on the left; to this day, members of a wedding party arrange themselves in a place of worship in accord with these associations: groom’s party on the right, bride’s party on the left. (15)

Most noticeably, these approaches along with some other conventions and beliefs still exist and are followed in social culture where almost from the moment of birth, the contrast between male and female, rather than their common humanity is stressed. For example, as Katherine Bliss hints, “the baby girls are dressed in pink and baby boys in blue”(10). It seems to be a trifle, but such conventions go a long way in fixing the polarities of the sexes.
The theological approach has led all the writers, philosophers and thinkers of all ages to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. Jean Jacques Rousseau makes quite damaging statements about women and charges them with capricious nature. He says, “Women have or ought to have, but little liberty, they are apt to indulge themselves excessively in what is allowed them. Addicted in everything to extremes, they are even more transported at their diversions than boys” (qtd. in Wollstonecraft 179). Regarding the purpose of education of women, Rousseau gives this prescription:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them, these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy (qtd. in Millett 74).

In fact, in scriptures and myths, woman has been presented as a sub human creator. She has been depicted as an object of sexual gratification and considered to be man’s property. Since ages, the recurrent symbol of seed and earth has degraded her position, “Man provides the seed, the essence for the creation of the offspring; the seed determines the kind; the child’s identity is derived from the father for the group placement. The role of the mother is just to receive the seed and through her own blood provide warmth and nourishment and help it grow” (Camus 29). So, apart from religious and cultural factors, social events have also had their impact on the status and identity of women.

In fact, the history of women is largely the story of the subjugation of women until 1800 and of their gradual emancipation thereafter. In fact, for the first time, Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* (1386-94) and Christine de Pizan in her book, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), “presented the good picture of women” (Folbre 44). When Christine de Pizan raised the voice against the inequality between man and woman, it sensed a great growth of change in world society. But in such representations as Christine’s polemics and recuperative work and Margery
Kumar

Kempe’s critical self, it, indeed, found works that informed modern and postmodern feminist preoccupations with gender, empire, translation, textuality and embodiment. Plato was a feminist, who first dared to say “…women should be trained to rule (Republic, Book V), even though he was an exception in his historical context” (O’Brien 94). With the revival of learning in the Renaissance, there came many winds of change in human thought and action. But even the sixteenth century did not bring any marked change in the status of women. There happened many questions for women’s role as, “women's role in the family?” (Engels 45) Or “is it her role in the labour market?” (Bergmann 20), Or “is it simply women's biological role in reproduction?” (Firestone 70). Below the aristocratic level, woman’s education did not advance. Sir Thomas Mann might advocate equal education for the sexes in ‘Utopia’ (1516), but the women were still subjugated to man in his imaginary country. The idealization of women, frequently restored to imaginary portrayal, remained an unrealized dream in real life. It was the beginning of a dangerous dichotomy.

In the 17th and 18th centuries women emerge as personalities in cultured society, though yet not in politics. In the middle of 18th century there was fashionable circle of women intellectuals known as the Blue Stocking in London. At the end of the century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) made her well made appeal for women’s education in A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792). Gertrud Heinzelmann shares:

The “first wave” of feminism began in the late 1700s when an Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft, penned A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Within a year of its publication, Olympe de Gouges issued a street pamphlet in Paris entitled Les Droits de la Femme (The Rights of Woman) and an American, Judith Sargent Murray, published On the Equality of the Sexes in Massachusetts. (504)

With the rise of the middle class society, the status of the women improved and interests and occupation were cultivated in which women could partake. Puritan Protestantism with its emphasis upon private conscience “probably helped women to
achieve more prominence and to find some degree of independence” (Moore 75). Puritan Sects believed in sexual equality, at least in spiritual matters. As education spread gradually, intelligent women began to find a natural career in teaching. Another profession opening to women was theatre. Despite all the progress, the changing position of women in society was not altogether to their advantage. This was particularly true of attitude to the sexual relationships. “The puritan elevation of marriage and the family into something more sacred was incompatible with a frank acknowledgement of sexuality” (Engels 87). It came to be believed that a good woman does not have sexual desire. In fact, the very century in which the women were winning their social and political freedom was also the one in which they were restricted to an unnatural sexual code.

Jane Austen through her novels raised the issues of unmarried girls of the 1800s. She presented that how an individual girl struggled and survived with integrity with reality within a restricted society. Jane Austen tells:

She could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father captivated by youth and beauty and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem and confidence had vanished forever, and all his views of domestic happiness were over thrown. (qtd. in Singh 199)

She presented the family obligation with irony by placing her faith in the female characters’ observations towards social male hegemonic practices. In fact, right up to the Victorian age, “the novelistic plots were mostly based on the idea of female chastity as a kind of citadel under attack, making the novels extended account of repeated sexual invasions and defenses” (Folbre 108). Fragile, emotional and sentimental women were presented “as pretty dolls with little capacity for intelligence or action” (Okin 203). Women were not supposed to be competent enough to choose their husbands. Anthea Zeman described the whole situation:
These are the girls whose marriage chances depended entirely on their personal attractions. They have no money; everyone knows they have no money. They are in the same ballrooms and assemblies as more fortunate girls, the acknowledged heiress, which puts them in a singularly exposed position. Apart from the obvious fact that they will have fewer, and generally poorer, suitors to choose from, they are seen by the world as in need of a husband’s, as Mantraps prepared to do almost anything to secure a future and a fortune for themselves. (20)

Austen seemed to subscribe to the view that marriage dampened the personality, especially the female personality. She called marriage, “a sinking state for its dying liberty for female partner” (Zeman 98). She viewed that man-woman relationship in married life was fluctuating. Jane Austen was conscious of the pitfalls in the way of a happy married life. Her correspondence and her fiction gave the impression that she was most afraid of marriage.

In the Victorian England, the novels of Bronte sisters and George Eliot expressed the woman’s predicament still more radically. George Eliot’s Middlemarch and The Mill on the Floss pertained to the severe limitations of women in her time, explained them away in general humanistic terms presenting highly deficient in succumbing to hegemonic patriarchal structures. Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855) and her sisters Emily Bronte (1818-1848) and Anne Bronte (1820-1849) pointed out the gender discriminations in classics as Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall respectively. Charlotte Bronte in Jane Eyre raises the issue of womanhood:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and
embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (qtd. in Shapiro 189)

Charlotte Bronte’s portrayal of plain and passionate woman was in contrast with the exquisitely beautiful but passionless women in earlier novels. She has “represented passionate love for a woman’s standpoint and shocked many readers who thought that she lacked the feminine reticence”(Sage, WHF 201). Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights (1847) was still more original. She contrasted different kind of love, “especially that of normally acceptable marriage with that of instinctive passion and raised the question whether the deeper and wider feelings of men and women could be acceptable to society at all” (Sage, WHF 233). The novels of Bronte sisters reflect a persistent and in many ways revolutionary interest in the essential nature of woman. They gave an injection of vitality and reality to English novel. “The ‘woman question’ had formed an essential part of Victorian thought during most of the reign, and there had already been much agonizing over both the formal status of women and general conceptions of the female role” (Delphy 4). Some women writers also wrote articles on women’s problems but they were not given enough attention. For example, Harriet Martineau (1802-76), a contemporary of Elizabeth Barrett and Charlotte Bronte, was a serious feminist. Her feminist writings are scattered through magazines, newspapers and periodicals. She made a plea for better education for girls in Household Education (1849). She also valued education for women to their fullest capacities. Martineau often wrote about the problems of working women and discriminatory treatment meted out to them, and about women in prison and problems of women with “violent husbands” (Oakley, SGS 334). In fact, the Victorian novel criticized the male conventions and revealed female revolutionary nature.

However, the period from 1800-1918 was the heroic age for British women. It was after 1870 that they fought their main battle for social status, educational advancement, professional and material freedom and political rights and equality. Women had found support for their claims among some of the leading writers. John
Stuart Mill’s *Subjugation of Women* (1869) became “a gospel for emancipation” (79). He makes his arguments for the justice for women:

Those who maintain that men have a right to command and women an obligation to obey, or that men are fit for government and women unfit, are on the affirmative side of the question, and are bound to positive evidence for their position or accept that it has been defeated. (2)

Political awareness came through ‘Suffragette Movement’. The reluctance to yield equality to women must have had psychological causes. Perhaps, it was difficult for male to break the image of woman as an ideal yet dependant creature. Industrial upsurge in 19th century provided more opportunity for women for economic independence, though at a low level. Women put a plain resentment of social patterns that restrict and shackles their self expression and liberty. It had culminated in the winning of the right to cast vote in England in 1918. At the same time, women of a strong character began to open up the professions hitherto closed to them. Women became writers and journalists. They also entered the medical profession and finally women came to be entitled to the same education as men.

D.H. Lawrence in his novels, especially, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* made fascinating exposure of “the problem of today, the establishment of new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between man and woman” (Barr 546). He presented “woman becoming individual, self responsible, taking her own initiative” (Barr 165). The coming trends are foreshadowed in Hardy’s fiction. Hardy’s tragedy demonstrates how easily the world could destroy a woman who did not understand or accept its values” (Sage, WHF 126). Hardy was pessimistic about formalized marriage relationship. About marriage his idea was, “marriage should be primarily for the happiness of the parties themselves rather than for any abstract notion of good of the community” (Sage, WHF 25). For him marriage was not a license for legal rape. Hardy also depicted the gap of intellectual emancipation and emotional dependence in women.
Hardy’s unorthodox treatment of feminine issues involved a questioning of the socially accepted sexual ethics. His bold departure from the conventional pictures of womanhood decidedly secures him a place among the precursors of modernism, but it is Virginia Woolf who emerged as a main spokesperson for women’s cause in the early decades of the twentieth century. She can be called the pioneer of feminist awareness in British women. She in her theoretical works *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) or in *Three Guineas* stressed the need for social, political, academic and economic independence of women, “shedding all gender bias against women, she dreamed of a world where there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex. Her concept of the “androgynous mind” (Stubbs 114) included aspects of femininity and masculinity. It did not mean sterility or barrenness, but recognition the otherness of others. The theory of androgyny propounds that man and woman are separate but are inseparable. Virginia Woolf was against the prejudices of being male or female. If the women are conscious of being women, if they use their body as weapon, advertise it, exploit it to seduce other, they might create complications. So the extremity of femininity or masculinity is to be sloughed off. So, androgynous mind does not mean a dull, neutral or inactive mind but it means more powerful mind to create and encompass more experience. As far as the status of British women was concerned, she called her, “a step daughter of England” (qtd. in Stubbs 7). She was the member not only of intelligentsia but of ignorantsia. Vehemently stressing upon economic freedom, she was against women being reduced to domestic decorative pieces. She advocated derision against advertising of merits for fame or praise and she was in favour of freedom from unreal loyalties, shunning the pride of nationality, race, religion, family or sex.

The focus of Virginia Woolf was upon the transition from womanhood to personhood. The claim was not merely for woman’s rights. It was larger and deeper. In fact it was all to respect the great principles of Justice, Equality and Liberty. Such a view naturally disturbs a number of profound male prejudices. Man needs to feel that woman is inferior so that he can have a feeling of self assurance. Women constitute one half of human population. But they lack the economic freedom to
assert their equality. Still women have not flooded the profession in proportion to their numbers. The need is to win equal recognition, collectively as persons. But recognizing women as “an individual with rights as well as duties, with legitimate sexual passion, with an independent autonomous existence” (Stubbs 98) means a challenge to the patriarchal authority. Men have yet to prepare themselves for the true liberation of women which might make new demands in personal relationship. Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf’s effort, as an exercise in consciousness raising, was pioneering.

Since 1945, the struggle for women’s rights gained more momentum. The sexual revolution enabled women to overcome many of the so-called disadvantages of the body. Anatomy no longer defined the female destiny. It was the right climate for the growth of feminism. Simone de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex* (1949) came as a seminal influence in moulding opinion against the secondary status given to women in patriarchal order. The book heaped up, “all the anthropological, philosophical, sociological and psychological evidence on the dependence and the “otherness” of women” (9) and inspired women not to sense inconvenience or an obstacle in femininity. Underlining the importance of womanhood, Bell Hooks views:

We did not see “Womanhood” as important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and regard race as the only relevant label of identification. We are just asked to deny a part of ourselves and we did… We cling to the hope that liberation from oppression would be all that was necessary for us to be free. (1)

But, black sexism existed long before slavery and consequently before colonialism. This existed at the socio-economic and political levels. Roman Selden holds that “feminism as a field is very vast and dominant in America and Britain” (71). He notes however that despite the vastness, the central idea with feminism is to “challenge male chauvinism and to end women’s exploitation by patriarchy at all levels” (Selden 135). This matches Bill Ashcroft’s view that “feminism generally attempts to unmask, reject patriarchy and fight for female equality” (249). Elizabeth
Spelman concurs by saying that “Feminism is a politics: a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women (the only world-wide majority to be treated as a minority), and the resolve to do something about it” (10). From this background, it becomes very clear that the identity of the woman had been totally fragmented and shattered by the forces of colonisation, tradition and patriarchy. However, deconstruction, according to Jonathan Culler can be simply defined as a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured Western thought:

Inside/Outside, Mind/Body, Literal/metaphorical, Speech/writing, presence/absence, nature/culture, form/meaning. To deconstruct an opposition is to show that it is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it, and to show that it is a construction in a work of deconstruction that seeks to dismantle it— that is not destroy it but give it a different structure and functioning. (127)

With the arrivals of post structuralism on the critical scene, philosophers and critics such as “Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray developed a notion of ‘women’s writing’. Focusing on the language of women’s writing they postulated a fluid, non linear, elliptical, part mythic, mystic writing” (Nayar 98). As the feminist movement gained momentum as a political programme, there appeared a spate of books highlighting the cultural and literary implication of feminism.

Regardless of the changing face of women, the traditional images focus on their domestic and sexual roles. These images have become imprinted on the women’s psyche. The women’s movement knows this and so attempts to combat the cultural stereotypes. Feminists are to “create alternative image or to demolish old ones” (Okin 12) to recast the roles of women in the changed society. Rigid categorization of bad and good woman, and effective methods of dividing and ruling, has faded now. Morality has become a relative term and not an absolute matter. Psychological investigation has proved that frigidity in women is a historical phenomenon and not a biological one. Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics reveals the patriarchal politics, whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over women. Kate Millett shows that the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity is
a cultural bias. Sex is biological and gender is a social imposition. According to her, the patriarchal authority has given woman the minority status that inflict on her “self hatred and self rejection, contempt both for herself and for her fellows” (Millett 10). Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists* examines the women novelists in the light of women’s experience. She defines the tradition by establishing three phases ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ each achieving a greater liberation than its predecessor without losing its distinction as woman’s writing. She says:

First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards of arts and its views on social roles. Second there is phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, feminine, feminist and female. (11)

These books are well known and have added new dimensions in the field of feminist criticism. Feminists have offered a reevaluation of half the human race. It is a system of political, economic and social equality between the sexes. Feminism, the movement for the rights of women, has already begun to re-examine and re-write political and cultural history. There is a cross fertilization between feminism and contemporary feminine fiction. Feminism has led to the reappraisal of literary works and the emergence of theories of gender differences as applied to reading, writing and literary interpretation of novels.

Jean Hampton confirms that “Women subordination, while not biological in origin, should be located in hierarchical division of labour that was anchored in the organisation of housework and child bearing and rearing” (89). So the relegation of women to the background cannot be attributed to the biological difference. It should rather be blamed on societal discourses. Bill Aschroft puts his view, “women in many societies have been relegated to the position of other, marginalized and, in a
metaphorical sense, colonized, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from that imperium” (174). This informs us that a woman is not supposed to take lead. She only has to be calm, sit and listen without any objection to what the man says. All these conventions push the men to dominate women even in close relationships. So the women since time immemorial have always been running after the man. Helen Longino discloses, “a woman’s limitations are varied. In an argument with her husband, man is always right and any woman who tries to dominate her husband is considered a monster “(131). Moreover, Flora Nwapa in One is Enough, intimates that “you don’t argue with your husband. A woman who tried to win an argument over her husband was regarded as a ‘He woman’…and quite opposite to the realism…” (82). So, a man feels his position threatened whenever woman tries to put him on the right footing. Consequently, he does everything to grasp his position as Gender here becomes a social construct.

Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963) has taken the patriarchal society by storm. Feminism as it now exists dates from the publication of this book, which has had a tremendous impact on society. Based mainly on interviews with the Friedan’s classmates, fifteen years after graduating from a woman’s college, the book challenges the popular belief that a woman’s place is at her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood and domesticity, which has religiously been perpetuated all through the ages. Defining the ‘feminine mystique’ or the “incommunicable quality,” she writes in the preface, “there is a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique” (Friedan, TFM 9).

Most of the women whom Friedan has interviewed are married, has comfortable homes, children and are blessed with all the comforts of life, yet they conform to the image of Friedan’s ‘feminine mystique’. They have no purpose in their lives and are faithfully playing their roles of devoted wives and loving mothers and are supposed to seek fulfilment in it. But this, in fact, has created a sense of “emptiness, non-existence and nothingness” (Friedan, TFM 264) in them. Friedan accuses society for not permitting women to gratify their basic needs of self fulfilment to grow and
fulfil their potential as human beings. Seeking an independent identity is considered only the male’s privilege. The core problem for women is not sex but identity which has always been denied to them. Friedan says that a woman can never ask questions like “Who am I? What do I want?”, but now for the first time women are becoming aware of this identity crisis which has begun much earlier. Friedan also rejects Freud’s opinion about women that they can find glory only in their own femininity. Friedan finally declares:

For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfilment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted. Woman’s sexual problems are, in this sense, by-products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfilment ignores. (282)

She further argues that a woman can find fulfilment only in a creative work of her own. Friedan, however, does not discard the institution of marriage as the militant feminists later have done.

In her book, The Female Eunuch (1970), Germaine Greer suggests, “women ought not to enter into socially sanctioned relationship, like marriage” because “if women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry”(319). To study man-woman relationship, Greer uses the analogy of employer and employee and calls women “life-contracted unpaid workers” (329) who cannot expect liberation “unless individual women agree to be outcasts, eccentrics, perverts, and whatever the powers-that-be choose to call them” (328). She tells women that “to be emancipated from the helplessness and need and walk freely upon the earth that is your birth right” (330) and they have to fight for it.

During 1970s, a group of radical feminists advocate their theories of equality. In this period, Shulamith Firestone’s The Dialectic of Sex (1970), Eva Feder Kittay’s Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality (1979), Susan Moller Okin’s Women in
Defining radical feminism, Shulamith Firestone observes:

In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in history. Its aim: overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex, a system consolidated over the thousands of years, lending archetypal male and female roles an undeserved sexual legitimacy and seeming permanence. The Western feminist movement is the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structure setup by Nature and reinforced by men. (16)

These feminists reject any kind of discrimination on the basis of sex and declare in the epigraph of one of the books on the subject, “The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces but in our institutions, woman is made, not born” (qtd. in Gornick and Moran 83). It has made it explicit that women have started recognizing their strengths and mythologies regarding women have come under feminine investigation to look after all the women rights.

Women’s oppression is traced not to individual male malevolence but to the social and familial structures based on patriarchy. The problem as identified is that a woman’s identity is expected to be merged with her roles of wife and mother. In fact, it is this cultural conditioning that is the culprit, not any inherent biological difference. Hence, women are urged to fight such conditioning by attaining positions of power and prestige and by eliminating gender differences because ultimately, as Sheila Rowbotham suggests, “the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings” (11). There are certain differences in the ideological viewpoints among the various groups of feminists. While the more radical group rejects outright the institution of marriage and considers it as an organized rape, the less militant feminists like Betty Friedan want to seek fulfilment within marriage itself, but oppose nuclear family system. The members of the radical group in the process of
“consciousness-raising” rituals came together against men and confided to women of the group their adverse experiences at the hands of men:

They have also evolved a new vocabulary, viz., ‘consciousness raisins’ (making women conscious of their subordinate position to men in the society and questioning this subordination), ‘male chauvinism’ (the assumption that male needs and capabilities are superior to those of women), ‘sexist’ (to prejudge role by gender), ‘sex-object’ (a woman seen primarily in terms of sexual attractiveness to men), ‘full humanity.’ (Price 182)

Later, Sandra Lee Bartkey also publicizes “Ms” (49), a new liberated form of address which avoids identifying women on the basis of their marital status.

These radical feminists, apart from demanding equal educational and career opportunities, have also advocated a drastic reorganization of society and gender roles. They have threatened a revolution which would overthrow the dominance of one half of the world’s population over the other on the basis of sex. And for that purpose they want that women should be united to achieve self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-respect and together they should fight for this cause and not aspire for favours from men. Thus, the concept of “sisterhood” has come out which means women must develop friendship and assert their identification with one another. In a patriarchal society, they have been separated from each other. They want to unite all women, Black or White, working or non-working, of lower or middle-class. Ann Oakley explains:

The concept of sisterhood means much more than sharing work or responsibility. It involves a redefinition of the value and status of personal experience. The personal becomes the political; that is, the nature of women’s oppression can be analyzed through the medium of accounts of private experiences. (SGS 11)

The radicals, in fact, have made an extreme demand to “abolish all differences in dress and demeanor, personal adornment, sexual initiative and the allocation of
homemaking and parental duties”(Kopp 27) and wanted to lead “the androgynous life” (Kopp 27) to save themselves from time-wasting frivolity and petty narcissism.

The aim of different groups of feminists is the same, i.e. to liberate women from male oppression and to promote women’s rights. But the radicals further suggest that woman must not be a slave to her biological functions. Child bearing must be voluntary, and hence, woman must have the right to have abortion on demand. The state must treat abortion at par with other forms of medical care so that a poor woman is not denied abortion if she cannot afford to pay the exorbitant rates. Feminists condemn prostitution and rape and advise their sisters to learn to defend themselves against it. The radical feminists do not want to work politically with men or in ‘male organizations’.

In fact, feminists want a humanist and unprejudiced attitude towards women. Though there are different strands of thought within feminism, all of them see women as a distinct and oppressed social group. They may use different vocabularies and concepts, but their analysis of women’s problems is essentially the same. All of them believe that breaking down male and female stereotypes and giving women equality is the only way to a better world. As Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson observe, women’s liberation is an “Umbrella movement, a ‘broad church’ that could accommodate every kind of feminism” (qtd. in White 77).

Among the many groups of women’s movement is a less popular group known as ‘Bourgeois Feminism’ which has become known during the mid-twentieth century. Bourgeois Feminism has been defined by Julie Mitchell, “Bourgeois Feminism in the mid-twentieth century must indicate a tendency within the women’s movement that believes that its demand can be met within the context of the present capitalist society” (380). It has added a new chapter to the feminism and made it clear that women want all round development and acquisition of all human rights which are due to them.

Socialist feminists hold that women’s inferior status is rooted in private property and class-divided society. They find it necessary to understand the operation of hierarchical sexual ordering of the society within the class structure.
They feel that overthrow of the capitalist system by itself will not mean a transformation of the patriarchal ideology. It would be necessary to organize struggles simultaneously against capitalism and patriarchy. According to socialist feminists, the powerlessness of women in society is rooted in four basic structures as those of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Family is an institution which reinforces women’s oppressive condition. The unequal and hierarchical sex roles operate in the domain of both family and economy. They do not believe in the primacy of male powers but believe that the subordination of woman arose “as a result of capitalism” (Mitchell 77). Hence, the socialist feminists cannot accept the divorce of women’s oppression from all other oppressions, “…in a class society, and faced with the global aggression of imperialist capitalism and the existence of national liberation struggles, women had to form alliances with other exploited and oppressed groups to free themselves and their sisters” (Mitchell 79).

The socialists emphasize the primacy of social and economic system while the radicals explain even social and economic exploitation in terms of male dominance. Women get identified with all sorts of marginalized groups. Woman has been equated with unprivileged groups like blacks or slaves and her position sidelined or “marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order”(Moi 212) in the society. Feminists strongly resent this ‘border-line” position of women and feel it necessary “to defend women as women in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women as women” (Moi 214). In the West, especially in Britain during the 1980s, coloured women formed their own group known as Black Feminists. They criticized the radical group which they alleged was dominated by white women and called them racists. While for the earlier feminists sexual emancipation was taboo, the modern feminists discuss female sexuality openly and believe that women are not merely vessels of male sexual gratification. Woman too can enjoy biological function and give it some meaning in her emotional and physical life. In their desire to assert their independence and revolt against male sexual tyranny, they are turning towards lesbianism as a solution to the problems of heterosexual relationships.

In the eighties, certain feminists have postulated new theories on feminism in which they have changed their earlier radical stand and have taken a fresh view of
the woman’s problems. For these feminists, equality does not mean a rejection of femaleness. They seek rights within the existing social and familial patterns. Two decades after *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan states in her *The Second Stage* (1981) that humanity can only survive if women make certain compromises. Her argument is that women have changed, family patterns have changed, sexual norms have shifted, and the institutions must also change to accommodate present reality in order to survive. It requires not only a shift in women’s consciousness, but flexibility that will allow institutions to absorb present experience without de-stabilizing themselves. If in the first stage women have been involved in breaking stranglehold of the feminine mystique, she writes, “it is the feminist mystique that must be laid aside. Improbable as it may seem, we can bridge the conservative liberal chasm, if we realize the true potential of that elusive new male-female, second-stage mode” (Friedan, TSS 341). Here, she adopts a new vision of the family. The emphasis is on women abandoning their rage, their ‘strident anti-family and anti-male position and going back to the family, which she stresses, has always been the source of women’s power. Free from the constriction of the feminism mystique, women can re-embrace the institution. Women, she writes, need to cherish the more human labour of nurture and the security of close relationships because these are women’s real needs. “We are beginning to be afraid because the cycle we broke and have to re-embrace again is basic to life” (Friedan, TSS 36). She admits that “it may sound corny, but there is a power in women’s ability to create life, closeness to life, that men don’t have” (Friedan, TSS 161). It seems to be a panorama of woman’s abilities.

Marilyn French, better known for her novels, *The Women’s Room* (1978) and *The Bleeding Heart* (1980), in her feminist text *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1986) expresses similar view in a different garb. She defines feminism as “a political movement demanding access to the rewards and responsibilities of the ‘male’ world, but it is more: it is a revolutionary moral movement, intending to use political power to transform society, to ‘feminize’ it” (478). She argues that unless we embrace alternative human and humane values which have been considered feminine, we are heading towards a totalitarian world. She is convinced that only feminism with its vision of a new morality can restore harmony to life. Marilyn
French investigates the nature and effects of power and calls on a number of disciplines as “history, anthropology, political theory, medicine and law” (47) to demonstrate that path neither natural nor inevitable and that, in fact, no model exists for it. She says ancient matriarchies with their emphasis on nurture and sharing are overthrown by a male ideology which have sought to control nature and achieve transcendence over earthly life. Women are identified with nature and patriarchy suppressed women and worshipped power and controlled every essence of nature and brought the world on the brink of extinction. The quintessence of her argument is that only when men influenced by the values of feminism replace power with pleasure, competitiveness with cooperation, individualism with community and transcendence with the joys of living and reorder their priorities accordingly can the world really change.

The Australian born “apocalyptic” feminist Lynne Segal also puts forth a similar argument in her study Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism (1987). She challenges the feminist orthodoxies on marriage, motherhood and female sexuality. She argues that in order to understand and alter the power relations between men and women, we must look at the diverse patterns of domination and exploitation in the home, at work, and in our cultural and political lives, and work out strategies to forge a new future for women and men. Like Marilyn French she also suggests that to save the world from destruction feminine values should be given equal significance along with masculine values.

To consider some of the different consequents for responding to the phenomenon of intersectionality, let’s return to the schematic claims that women are oppressed and this oppression is wrong or unjust. Very broadly, then, one may characterize the goal of feminism to be ending the oppression of women. And some feminists have adopted this interpretation. Charles Shapiro has presented the same idea, “But if we also acknowledge that women are oppressed not just by sexism, but in many ways, e.g., by classism, homophobia, racism, ageism, ableism, etc., then it might seem that the goal of feminism is to end all oppression that affects women” (124). Although most feminists would probably agree that there is some sense of
“rights” on which achieving equal rights for women is a necessary condition for feminism to succeed, most would also argue that this would not be sufficient. This is because women’s oppression under male domination is seen. They are deprived their political and legal rights. It also extends “the structure of our society and the content of our culture, and permeates our consciousness” (Bartky 82). Moreover, as indicated by the ellipsis above, the descriptive component of a substantive feminist view will not be articulable in a single claim, but will involve an account of the specific social mechanisms that deprive women of, e.g., rights and respect. “Women as a group experience many different forms of injustice, and the sexism they interact in complex ways with other systems of oppression. In contemporary terms, this is known as the problem of intersectionality” (Crenshaw 43). This critique has led some theorists to resist the label “feminism” and adopt a different name for their view. Earlier, during the 1860s–80s, the term womanhood had sometimes been used for such intellectual and political commitments; more recently, Alice Walker has proposed, “womanhood provides a contemporary alternative to ‘feminism’ that better addresses the needs of Black and white women more generally” (370). Then, the feminists have made their perception stronger than before.

So, in the Postmodern period, “the critics and feminists demand to demystify the desires and real image of female which is named as Womanhood” (Okin 67). Alison Jaggar says, “two feminists may agree that women are unjustly being denied proper rights and respect and yet substantively differ in their accounts of how or why the injustice occurs and what is required to end it”(94). About the need of change in the attitude of the feminists, Susan James characterizes feminism as follows:

Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program. (576)
James seems here to be using the notions of “oppression” (231) and “disadvantage” (239) as placeholders for more substantive accounts of injustice.


In the historical context, the contemporary feminine novel is passing through a renaissance. In the Post World War II fictions, the growing awareness of feminism and emergence of many women writers are parallel phenomena which have influenced each other. Since most of the fictional works of these writers embody the women’s view of life and probe women’s experience and consciousness, they can be termed feminine fictions. Such fictional works primarily focus attention on the life and loves, actions and reactions, feelings and instincts, failures and frustrations of women in a male dominated world. “Broadly speaking, in ‘feminine fiction’ feminism is mellowed into a fiction which combines awareness with delight” (Nayar 124). The fiction of Jeanette Winterson, A.L. Kennedy, Fay Weldon, Kathy Acker and Angela Carter embodies that came to be termed the Ecriture feminine. Ecriture feminine works predominantly upset the notions of language, form, narrative ‘order’, organization. The new language of women’s writing is fluid, non-linear,
elliptical, part mythic, and part realistic, mystic and slippery. It is autobiographical and part fictional. It thrives on sexualized imagery and seeks to capture the fluidity of women’s writing. It identifies the mother figures and refuses to privilege the male.

Iris Murdoch, Angela Carter, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble have raised the issue of womanhood in their fiction. Margaret Drabble, “a cautious feminist” (Nayar 99) have complained of her sense of pressure on the contemporary women writers to produce politically correct models that contribute to the emancipation of women. In fact, all these authors “have followed the woman’s point of view in their writing” (Nayar 201) and it has cultivated a different and new position of women both as gender and novelists. “Communism for Lessing, liberalism fro Murdoch, existentialism for de Beauvoir and Christine doctrine for Spark. Each of them longs to write a book powered, with an intellectual and or moral passion strong enough to create order or to create a new way of looking life” (Nayar 61). Given the problematic relationship between women and voice, “it is hardly surprising that most of the great innovators in the use of free discourse (the quintessential, masquerade, subversion, satire, contested authority, intimacy, dialogism and irony) have been women writers” (Stubbs 205). In fact, these novelists are more explicit and attentive on their issues.

All those writers, who are more explicitly committed to feminist politics and more formally adventurous in their engagements with the post modern, are equally resistant to the indiscriminate aestheticization, or idealization of female experience and identities. Iris Murdoch in Flight from the Enchanter, The Italian Girl and An Accidental Man presents a challenging self of a woman for the patriarchal society. Her woman is not submissive anyhow to the social complications. Angela Carter in Wise Children, Magic Toyshop and Nights at the Circus views that man and woman are equal and there should be no specification for any gender. But, her women characters are submissive and after little effort for emancipation, they get agreed to follow the patriarchy. Margaret Drabble in her novels The Waterfall and A Summer Bird’s Cage criticizes the unfortunate circumstances that do not let women grow. Her women are not vulnerable and make their best to prove the skills of woman being a human being with equal potential to any other sex. Muriel Spark in The Prime of
Miss Jean Brodie, Driver’s Seat and Not to Disturb targets the people who cheat women and create opposite circumstance for them to achieve their institutive goals. In fact, women writers of this generation therefore have often been both cautious about utopian politics and also anxious to explore the issue of female authorship in the context of broader ethical and political commitments.

Among them all, Doris Lessing’s writing has come as a revolution that is to be perceived in the female sensitivity to the unfair or highly limited roles of woman, to their restricted representation in society and its literature. She holes in pompous, hypocritical and essentially a male fabric society where man is unfulfilled figure and a replica of the mythical image of power. On the opposite, she portrays that woman has overcome the odds and liberated herself not only from patriarchal set up but also from mental, emotional, physical, social and even political oppression. She demystifies all the stereotyped aspects associated with womanhood in her novels. She attempts to bring woman from the margin to the centre. Her novels explore woman’s search for her identity as human being, independent of her traditional role as a daughter, wife or mother. She has a great zeal for personal, social and economical development of her women characters.

For demystifying the different myths associated with women, Doris Lessing has called for inquiry into what are typically considered private practices and personal concerns, such as the family, sexuality, the body, to balance what has seemed to be a masculine pre-occupation with ‘public.’ She has developed a polemic and recuperative work. Her concept of the “androgynous mind” (Stubbs 114) makes her fight against the different faces of oppression, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and systematic violence against woman. Throughout her novels, her central idea is to challenge male chauvinism and to end women’s exploitation by patriarchy at all levels. Doing this, she has earned an identity of “a demystifier, a critical observer of social process and systems, an outsider who could see through to the inside, a radical realist” (Sage, DL 24). In fact, their entwinement lays a cornerstone for all of Lessing’s early works, in which personal development is always determined by the greater social framework.
In fact, Doris Lessing, in her personal life also, has demystified the different myths which she has herself faced being at her home and society around. In her autobiographies *Under My Skin– Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* and *Walking in the Shade – Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949 to 1962*, she tells that her mother Emily McVeagh and father Alfred Cook believed in the mystified image of woman and considered woman as second being to man in all matters. Especially, her relationship with her mother was complicated, as Emily wanted and expected a boy rather than a girl, and Lessing was left feeling unloved, “What I remember is hard bundling hands, impatient arms and her voice telling me over and over again that she had not wanted a girl, she wanted a boy. I knew from the beginning she loved my little brother unconditionally, and she did not love me” (Lessing, UMS 25). The psychological effect of this is seen in her *The Grass is Singing*, novels of *Children of Violence* and later, her *Memoirs*, where the relationship between mother and daughter is one of the central issues. She has not believed in the myth that woman is slave to man and marriage is a source of service to the lord. She first married Frank Wisdom and had two children, John and Jean, but due to the psychological differences, they divorced in 1943, and the children stayed with their father. In 1945, she married her second husband, Gottfried Lessing, who was a German political activist and a member of the inner circle of the Rhodesian Communist Party. They had a son together, Peter, but this marriage also failed and they divorced again in 1949 as Gottfried was caught up of inferiority complex seeing her androgynous development. After this, she participated in political activities and then other social acts. Over all, her approach towards marriage and then leaving the children is a way towards creating a ‘New Woman’ who is highly concerned about her development as a human being.

Doris Lessing definitely sets up a good model for the later writers to follow as she has taken her all women characters from margin to the centre. Almost all of her novels open up with the discussion among women characters or discussion over women issues. Her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* is opened with the statement:

Mary Turner, Wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning.
The house boy, who has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It was though he was in search of some valuables. (Lessing, GIS 1)

Her famous novel *The Golden Notebook* begins with, “The two women were alone in the London flat” (Lessing, GN 25) and finishes with, “The two women kissed and separated” (Lessing, GN 576). Her series of five novel *Children of Violence* begins with, “Two elderly women sat knitting on the part of the veranda” (Lessing, MQ 3). In fact, in her all the novels, she begins with the mystified image of woman and soon after, the woman protagonist breaks the mystique and proves the ability of woman in the society. The central issue of her different forms of tragedy, socialist realism, Bildungsroman is the development of woman as a being and it brings an original picture of woman to the society. She emerges as a writer who is always restless, moving, probing and exploring, who surpasses the limits of possibility and seeks for something new against the nightmare repetition of the past.

The critical studies on Lessing’s works begin in the 1960s which further flourish in the following decades. Dorothy Brewser’s *Doris Lessing* is the first biographical book on her published in 1965. In this book *The Golden Notebook* has been analysed by Dorothy Brewser as a composite image of our society’s dilemmas. She has discussed the different social conflicts which prevent an individual to have its best efforts to stand and shine. In 1973, Paul Schluerter published *The Novels of Doris Lessing* which is a comprehensive analysis of Lessing’s key themes and plots. He shows that the narrative technique is supreme in her works. Through her technique, she successfully reveals the social constraints on men and women in African society. Later, Mary Ann Singleton made a survey in her book *City and the Veld: the Fiction of Doris Lessing* (1977) from the perspective of myth, archetype and symbol and its effect on the social aspects of life. She discusses the different esoteric aspects in modern society. She argues that everything she has written since she left Africa, not only her African writing is the “voice of such as an exile” (Badode 26). In 1979, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* was published by Roberta Rubenstein. This is the first systematic analysis of mental processes, representations of consciousness and
psychological frames of the protagonists of Lessing. Rubenstein’s application of Jungian theory has given better perception for Lessing’s characters in the novel, and her analysis of Sufi has also made it possible for the readers to understand the unpredictable world in Lessing’s later fictions.

Ruth Olsen Saxton in his *Garments of the Mind: Clothing and Appearance in the Fiction of Doris Lessing* (1980) shows that how Lessing has presented the ills of Southern African society and different psychological barriers among the whites and blacks of Africa. Minnesota Betsy Draine’s *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1983) and Lorna Saga’s *Doris Lessing* (1983) have analyzed Lessing’s science fiction in her books and concluded that the novelist is ironically willing to confirm her own sense of cultural marginality by exploiting and indeed exhausting the available conventions of a popular genre. She has presented that any survival is not confined to the individual alone; it encompasses societies, nations and finally the planet earth itself. Katherine Fishburn’s *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing: A Study in Narrative Technique* (1985) is the first full length study of Lessing’s novels after 1970s. She adds to Darko Suvin’s ‘cognitive estrangement’ and Victor Shklovsky’s ‘defamiliarisation’ her own term of ‘re-cognition’ and ‘recognition’ to explain how Lessing’s science fiction affects the reader. She shows that how Lessing’s personal commitments to social change and the way in which her interest in Marxism still define her fiction. Next, Ruth Whittaker’s *Doris Lessing* (1988) examines her major inclinations on colonialism, politics, racism, madness, dreams, prophecy and Sufism.

In the 1990s, the attentions for her literary works reach a high peak both at home and aboard. Jean Pickering has published *Understanding Doris Lessing* in 1990, which gives a comprehensive study on all of her major works ranging from *The Grass is Singing* to *The Fifth Child*. Besides the career and overview of Doris Lessing, she gives a rather detailed analysis for each of Lessing’s work from the perspective of themes, use of language, point of view, structure, symbolism and responses to experience. Elizabeth Maslen in her book, *Doris Lessing* (1994), says that Doris Lessing is always primarily concerned with social change with the social
constraints on men and women as to their gender roles rather than with specific explorations of women solely in terms of sexual difference. After this in 1994, Shadia S. Fahim published *Doris Lessing: Sufi Equilibrium and the Form of the Novel*, where a detailed analysis of Lessing’s works from perspective of Sufism has been undertaken.

In 1997, Gayle Greene, a Professor in Scripps College, published *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change*. Although, Doris Lessing has made various changes and explorations in her novels for many years, Greene’s book is the comprehensive one to analyze the poetic changes of Lessing’s major works. She has pointed out that *The Diaries of Jane Somers* is the filial atonements and new romances, and she gives a clear explanation why *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four, and Five* is an enquiry, a remaking and an inspiration for Doris Lessing. She puts forward in her book that the evolution of Lessing’s thought has resolved the paradox that informed the earlier novels. Lessing has found a way beyond determinism and a place beyond culture by positioning an essential self in touch with a universal consciousness. Later in 1997, based on the former research on Lessing’s Sufism, Muge Galin has published *Between East and West: Sufism in the novels of Doris Lessing* which further analyzes Sufi influence in Lessing’s works. Susan Watkins, in *Doris Lessing* (2004) examines the writing career of Doris Lessing and her different steps as her interest in writing and participating in political acts and stages as racism and sexism which have influenced her writing throughout her writing career.

Liza Das in *Gender, Culture and Writing: Essays on Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch* (2005) is a comparative study on Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch. She points out that Doris Lessing is a woman writer with the epic vision of the great nineteenth century social realists like Dostoevsky and though Murdoch admires writers like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy but she fails to attain their stature as a result of her limited scope. She observes:

Lessing takes the whole of civilization into the gamut of her writing, though two specific cultural forces-colonialisation and patriarchy – are her major areas of deliberation. This crucial difference in the novels of
Doris Lessing and those of Irish Murdoch may be accounted for by the author’s personal experiences and ways of life. As a much travelled, transcultural writer, Lessing’s aerial view is perhaps inevitable. (VIII)

In fact, Das observes that both Lessing and Murdoch postulate alternative ways of looking at culture and cultural forms.

Doris Lessing’s novels attracted the attention of a number of scholars and critics. The great feminist and critic, Toril Moi in her article, “I am not a woman writer’. About Women, Literature and Feminist Theory Today” suggests the need of women centered novels as women are also of the same importance in the society. Gillian Dooley in “Doris Lessing Versus Her Readers: The Case of The Golden Notebook” describes the different ways Doris Lessing uses to explain womanhood in the different sections of The Golden Notebook. Shenli Song in “Alienation and Isolation-Problems of the Modern Society in Doris Lessing’s The Golden Notebook” writes that Doris Lessing as a woman author, maintains her concern in the female issues; and she does it very well in using this issue as a vent through which the panorama of the current society is depicted, especially people’s psychological crisis which is becoming more and more serious nowadays. Mahima Gautam in “Doris Lessing: The Free Woman’s Commitment” observes that marriage is the deepest as well as the most problematic of all human relations. Doris Lessing delineates with keen perception and sensitivity, the problems and sufferings of women in marriage. Women feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, the reaction which she shows in her novels. Some of her women characters accept their fate unhesitatingly, but most want freedom and gradually go for separation or for divorce to live a meaningful life.

Robin Visel reveals the efforts of Doris Lessing to bring out the denied reputation of women in “Review of Jean Pickering’s Understanding Doris Lessing.” Clare Sprague in “Without Contraries is no Progression: Lessing’s The Four Gated City” defines the different racial circumstances which effect Mary’s life at all the corner of life. Marlene Briggs views in “Born in the Year 1919: Doris Lessing, the First World War, and the Children of Violence” that Doris has been most influenced
by her local atmosphere which seems against humanity because there was no environment for women to develop themselves as liberal human beings. But, Martha Quest emerges as a new woman who not only develops the positive system for women but lives her life more independently than anybody there around. Sophia Barnes views in her essay, “Stating the Problem: Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and the Possibility of Representation” explores the open-ended aesthetic and radically disjointed structure of Lessing’s structure. It criticizes the postmodernist rejection of the activist or the politically committed text of Lessing through representation dilemma in the novel's structure. It also considers the novel as a critique of a postmodern literature. Rachel Blau Duplessis says in “Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers” that the style pattern of Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook* is women oriented. She writes about the desires of new woman through her female protagonists. She has opted woman oriented novels and given a new identity to women writing in the postmodern novel.

Simon Gikundi in essay titled, “Lessing, Doris”, published in *Encyclopaedia of African Literature* narrates the different opposite circumstance both for blacks and white women in Southern Rhodesia. Eva Hunter, in her article “Marriage as Death: A Reading of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*”, has counted the social flaws as marriage, motherhood and daughterhood and above all sick mentality of patriarchal society which restrict the development of woman. Frederick R. Karl writes in his article, “Doris Lessing in the Sixties : The New Anatomy of Melancholy ” that social environment has put a challenge to the self of a woman who calls herself a new woman and desires to participate equally in the male dominated society. Magali Cornier Michael shows in “Woolf’s *Between the Acts* and Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*: From Modern to Postmodern Subjectivity” the certain growth woman has achieved and made its impact over the present time that In fact, brings a new wave of feminism called, ‘Androgynous Female’ that brings up a competitive self of a woman. Lisa Tyler in her article, “Self-Hatred and the Demonic in Doris Lessing’s Fiction” concentrates on the divided self of a woman between her self- motivated perception and social traumas. The old women characters are not able to develop their mentality against the social norms; rather, they submissively accept all those.
The young generation observes all the discriminations which restrict development as human being.

It becomes evident from the review of the criticism on Lessing that the aspect of new women in her fiction has either been overlooked or not given adequate attention by the critics. Therefore, the present work examines Lessing’s women characters who challenge the patriarchal society to find their individual identity. All the women protagonists in her novels assert equal political, economical and social rights for themselves. Mary Turner (*The Grass is Singing*), Julia Barr (*Retreat to Innocence*), Anna Wulf (*The Golden Notebook*) and Martha Quest (*Children of Violence*, a series of five novels) are all aware of their abilities to challenge the conventional stereotypes. They are socially determined, politically sharp and economically independent. Through her women characters, Doris Lessing reinstates her experiences as a woman of substance against all the misogynistic acts of male. Her women protagonists, by joining Communist party, intend to enhance the social reputation and ability of women in the governing system of a nation. In fact, Doris Lessing demystifies all the fatal familial pleasures and social conventions that negate the rights of a woman and emphasizes their individuality, independence and self-realization.

Doris Lessing exposes how the birth place or family of a woman is the hub of all the religious and social myths of culturally constructed norms. R. D. Laing in *The Politics of the Family* explores the different circumstances in childhood, teenage and married life which turn the family into an institution of woman’s oppression. Masculinity has been called the source of intelligence and power. R.D. Laing points out that woman is not considered to be the transmitter of the family. In fact, the initial psychological frame of a female child is to be set up by her family members. It emerges, in fact, as “a source of women’s oppression” (Bigsy 145). Men dominate the world since their childhood because they are taught to be dominant. Sexual discriminations start at home with the difference in treatment given to a son and a daughter. A son is given better facilities and a girl child has to bear ordinary is provided to her. Contrary to this, Doris Lessing artistically presents the ideal growth of woman right from her parental home to the world outside. Her women break the
different familial myths which restrict their development. Lessing presents her intellectual criticism and superior knowledge which help her to overcome all the familial ideologies affected by the patriarchal and colonial perceptions.

Doris Lessing considers family a fundamental institution whose social function, unfortunately, prevents women from realizing their potential. She removes the familial obstacles discussed by Friedrich Engels in her book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Friedrich Angels discusses the sexist behaviour of the family members of a woman. Lessing exposes the different mystiques of woman created as obstacles by her own family members. Martha’s mother believes that women are weak and subordinate to men. Lessing, in fact, stresses the importance of biological and reproductive female identity, which women cannot do without as they are biologically predestined to it. She presents a contrast between her women protagonists and the conventional women. Martha’s continuous conflicts with her mother over the image of woman show difference of opinion among two generations of women. Her mother wants her to follow the traditional image of woman but Martha looks keen to establish a new identity of woman.

Laing points out the different psychological barriers in the relation of mother and daughter. In *Children of Violence*, Martha’s continuous conflicts with her mother regarding the role of woman in life show the sense of awareness among the young generation of women towards their rights of familial, social and political freedom. Martha’s mother does her best to impose the social restrictions which she has herself accepted under the pressures of patriarchy. Her mother wants her to learn the art of winning “masculine attention” (Segal 118). She tries to teach that man is the master of a woman and she has to do everything what a man thinks is right. But, Martha Quest continuously asserts her individuality and shows it in her actions and thoughts. In fact, Lessing presents the human development which has taken place in the life of woman within a family.

Motherhood for Lessing’s women is both constricting and marginal; the mother is depicted either as unloving or guilty which is absolutely different from the conventional concept of ‘motherhood’ where mothers are expected to be self
sacrificing and their primary role is to rear up children. Lessing’s unconventional mother strives for her own identity and gives more importance to her personal growth. To be bound in the cobweb of motherhood is claustrophobic for her. However, she does not deny motherhood completely. In fact, Lessing’s concept of motherhood involves the simultaneity of maternal and erotic life which is modernistic in approach.

Tess Cosslett in *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood* presents the principle of an ideal woman whereby a woman is expected to perform her responsibilities both of a mother and a working woman. Lessing’s women try to combine these two equally demanding roles. The men all along remain indifferent and selfish and never help women in the process of child-rearing. In the name of mammalian responsibilities, women are condemned to a fettered existence. However, if the responsibility of child-rearing is shared by both the parents, the chances of happiness and satisfaction for the family life increase. Alvin Toffler observes in this regard, “parenting” is a shared responsibility and a shared pleasure”(135). But the responsibility is usually not shared and family proves to be a source of exploitation for most of the women.

Doris Lessing recommends the idea of Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone that biologically motherhood lays at the heart of women’s oppression. She dislikes childbirth and pregnancy as, “furtive secrecy” (Lessing, PM 105) and “distasteful intimacies, hidden sickness” (Lessing, PM 105). Her women characters call pregnancy “humiliating and intolerable” (Lessing, PM 152). In fact, it is man’s attitude makes them feel so. Toffler says that men see it, “a device of securing more power over women” (127). However, her attitude towards pregnancy is ambivalent because she considers it a blessing, expecting the equal responsibility from the male partner. She condemns the idea of accepting pregnancy as a compulsion to woman. Rather, she likes the idea of Juliet Mitchell that both husband and wife are equally responsible for the care and growth of the child. She prefers child delivery but demands the mature care from the male partner. In fact, Lessing advocates the idea of ‘mature parenting’ and ‘collective childcare’.
Doris Lessing follows the concept of Raymond Williams and Juliet Mitchell that sisterhood and social relations among women should exist. She eclipses the rivalry among her women characters and increases the personal and social relationship among them. Her women discuss the feminine issues such as roles of women both at home and outside, man’s treachery and patriarchal norms mutilating womanhood. They do not fit in Freud’s theory that jealousy exists in the nature of women. However, Lessing follows Rubenstein’s idea that all women need to stay together and fight against the patriarchal norms. There is a sense of collectiveness and togetherness in all the women protagonists. They have a great understanding which enables them to voice against the tyranny of the patriarchal society. Male characters often feel troubled due to their sense of collectivism and solidarity.

Lessing confronts the problematic aspects of marriage pointed by Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett. She revolts against it as a traditional offer and condemns it as a private property. In Simone de Beauvoir’s opinion it is, indeed, woman’s role as a sexual object that dooms her to ‘immanence’. She describes woman in a patriarchal order as the ‘other’. She views, “For him, she is sex-absolute sex, no less and no more” (58). Kate Millett in the second part of the first chapter “Theory of Sexual Politics,” refers the word 'politics' “to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of people is controlled by another”(23). She shows the power which men have over women, over society and the family. Women and men have a relationship of dominant/dominated. Kate Millett views, “male and female are considered as being part of two different cultures that are constructed from childhood” (31). But, Doris Lessing’s women make triumph over all the social hurdles and hole in pompous hypocritical and male fabric society where man is a replica of the mythical image of power. Lessing posits that women have liberated themselves from the mental, physical, and psychological oppressions.

Doris Lessing’s women break the idea of patriarchal society where woman is considered as a slave in married life. J.S. Mills, Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer call marriage a source of annihilation of woman. These feminists condemn the institution of marriage. But Lessing’s women first marry and then share their radical abilities to sustain against all the social prejudices where woman is subjugated,
marginalized, sidelined and taken as ‘utility item’. Following the ideology of Lynne Segal and Marilyn French that morality in human relations between a man and woman is needed; her women show their maximum devotion on the aspects of nurturing and sharing responsibilities. Lessing takes marriage as a source of companionship, mutuality, healthy relations, freedom to individual independence and self realization. Her women dislike marriage as an institution where one sex dominates the other.

J.S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* calls marriage a “worse form of slavery for women” (207). Simone de Beauvoir also argues that woman should not marry. It sucks all the social opportunities of the women. Germaine Greer favours Simone de Beauvoir’s ideas on marriage repeating, “woman should not get married” (320). Sara Ruddick views, “marriage leads woman towards subalterns”(730). Saxton calls it, “bondage to freedom”(536). Doris Lessing feels that institution of marriage is tottering. The safety of marriage is a façade. For Lessing’s new women, the psychological satisfaction is more important than the social facade of marriage. She presents that how her new women make a new way of living life among all the social and psychological hurdles in conjugal life created by the patriarchy and family.

Lessing condemns the patriarchal society where a husband is considered to be the master of his wife and determines and shapes her future for the rest of life. The traditional feminine virtues and graces are expected in a woman so that she can be a successful commodity in the married life. She shows that marriage is the greatest ambition of every woman. But her women highly resent the culturally constructed norms which make them as objects to men in various forms. She does not deny the biological differences between a male and a female, but there is no reason to presume, as men do, that these physical differences make them superior to women. She critically examines the words of Beauvoir, “woman is not born but made by the society” (Beauvoir 449). Lessing, through her traditional women, shows that throughout history, they have been considered as sexual objects. Karl Marx says, “Marriage... is incontestably a form of exclusive private property”(qtd. in Mitchell 110). Lessing exposes that marriage turns out to be an institution of oppression for a
woman in various forms rather than of her protection for which it is primarily instituted.

Lessing’s woman is bolder and quicker to decide and break, if needed, the stifling bondage of marriage. In fact, she refers to unconventional behaviour of an emancipated young woman who does not want to conform to her husband’s expectations. However, woman has got the high level of self sacrifice and dedication in relationship with her husband. Woman’s alienation, both from her parents and her husband, is just a starting point for her quest for the self. A woman marries and remarries not because she wants to gratify her sexual urges rather she strives for love in the form of understanding, sharing and participation. Sex is ‘essentially emotional’ for woman. Lessing presents that men are largely incurable womanizers. They want a number of mistresses or ‘keeps’. On the contrary, for a woman, love means complete emotional involvement with the man. Woman wants stable and permanent relationship with one man only. In fact, Lessing shows that men are polygamous by nature and women are monogamous.

Lessing posits that woman always tries to bolster-up man, encourage him by covering up all his weaknesses. But, man treats her as the ‘other’. He constantly blames her and projects his own infirmities on woman. Whereas she gives him confidence, he criticizes her for faults which are not even hers. A free woman experiences not only an awful feeling of disgust, loneliness and futility but still, she longs for companionship and togetherness with man. In fact, Lessing emphatically insists on the importance of women becoming aware of themselves as individuals and shaping their own destinies by assertiveness and self-confidence. She presents two kinds of women. While one is traditional woman who accepts her false conditioning into subordination and dependence without demur and the second is the sensitive and aware woman who realizes the need for individuality and revolt against the established norms by leaving a marriage that has become an emotional wasteland for her.

Lessing’s women characters challenge the stereotype that woman’s real occupation is to be “housewife” (Friedan, TFM 61). Feminists like Lynne Segal in Is
The subordination, submission and dependence which are cognitive traits associated with a woman in a patriarchal society. In fact, male dominated society never allows women to grow equally because it challenges their social existence. Eleanor Flexner exposes the mentality of men towards women:

Washing the men’s clothes, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin ‘coeds’ were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood. (qtd. in Friedan, TFM 30)

But, Doris Lessing’s Martha Quest, Mary and Anna Wulf teach a hard lesson to such mentality. They emerge as ‘New Women’, who are not only good at offices or social fronts but at home also. Lessing seems to believe in Quindlen’s views, “I asked them to steer me not to the neurotic, frustrated house wives, but to able, intelligent, educated women who were adjusted full time housewives and mothers” (qtd. in Friedan, TFM 333). In fact, the identity of woman is divided into several fragments. Lessing in A Proper Marriage shows the psychological conflicts of Martha Quest, “She did not feel like Douglas’s wife or Caroline’s mother. She was not even bored. It was as if three parts of herself stood on one side, idle, waiting to be called into action” (277). Martha, instead of being a housewife, wants to develop her modern and independent image which she feels as it is out of her natural female desire. Lessing views that a woman should follow the “voice of their female selves”, although, “it seems to be a duty for them” (Lessing, PM 280). She feels that a woman can perform at both familial and social fronts.

Socially, Lessing’s women have taken a metamorphic growth. They are not willing to be directed by men. They are very determined and firm on their decisions. In fact, they are different from the traditional women who keep dancing to the tunes of the men. Pickering favours the attitude of Lessing’s women for, “healthy relations
between man and woman” (56). Anna criticizes the psychology of man which is affected by the patriarchal environment:

Practically all the men, one knows are married to nice ordinary dreary women. So sad for them. As it happens, Marion is a good person, not stupid at all, but she’s been married for fifteen years to a man who makes her feel stupid. What would they do, these men, without their stupid wives? (Lessing, GN 44)

Lessing presents the sense of hollowness and human cavity that exists among the males of the society. She presents the independent human consciousness of her women protagonists which is set against the restricted approach of society.

Doris Lessing presents the social development of her women. She is well focused on female self definition in spite of the position they have been pushed to by patriarchy. She succeeds in breaking, “the female oppression” (Rowabatham 214) through her major female characters. They shatter all “the patriarchal standards imposed on them” (Moi 57). Her women take their decisions and stick to them. Anna Wulf, Molly, Julia Barr, Mary Turner and Martha Quest show their abilities of taking individual decisions. Right from their birth, Mary and Martha Quest start realizing the social oppression of woman on different fronts simply because they are biologically less stronger than man.

Lessing presents a socially active and liberated woman who struggles against the contradictions and horrors of the violence ridden male hegemonic society. Her women do not follow the social standards such as submission to men, acceptance to the patriarchal norms and acceptance to the male hegemony etc. In fact, Lessing provides the social rights to women discussed by Sheila Rowabatham in *Women, Resistance and Revolution* and Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics*. Elizabethan Maslen views that Lessing has enabled her women to interact with the social groups to make them realize their potential as human beings. She calls her women, “boulder pushers” (Lessing GN 215) who like to follow truth and honesty. Her women do not bow to the cruelty, slavery and violence of the male dominated society. Patricia
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Meyer Spacks calls it, “a new kind of consciousness” (149), which exposes the “suffocation and strangulation” (Karl 87) of sexist society. Lessing’s women oppose the double standards, the callousness, hypocrisies, sexist violence and narrow mindedness of patriarchal society.

Lessing demystifies the pressures and prejudices of society mentioned by Betty Friedan. She breaks the male dominated aspects which restrict a woman to her home and does not allow her to come out of the social barriers mentioned by Friedan:

I ask myself why I’m so satisfied. I’ve got my health, fine children, a lovely new home, enough money. My husband has a real future as an electronics Engineer. He doesn’t have any of these feelings. He says maybe I need a vacation; let’s go to New York for a weekend. But that isn’t it. I always had this idea we should do everything together. I can’t sit down and read a book alone. If the children are napping and I have one hour to myself I just walk through the house waiting for them to wake up. (TFM 65)

Lessing’s woman rises to fight against all the lies and injustice of the society against her. However, during all this, she, sometimes, feels betrayed and therefore she suffers from time to time. She is psychologically and socially motivated. She is conscious of her personal, social and spiritual development. She is not satisfied with what she has rather she asks for more which is due to her to assert her equality in society.

Woman’s struggle against stasis and her urge for crossing the social frontiers bring a new challenge to the society. She challenges the stereotype that woman has to depend on man for her identity. She presents her women as integrated individuals who do not submit themselves to the multiple negotiations and restrictions of the patriarchy. Lessing enriches her women with the sense of empathy. This ability of Lessing’s women becomes an enemy of their personalities. R.D. Laing’s statement in *The Politics of the Family* that the society prefers “normal being” (1) fits so much...
that none of the husbands allows women to become socially active. It frightens them of losing their powers and dominance on social and political level to women.

Lessing focuses on the mature understanding of the female psyche. She deeply explores the various issues of women in her social, sexual and domestic milieu. Her women resent society’s sexist assumptions, viz., the stereotype of women which define them primarily through their attraction or usefulness to men. They do not want to be treated like a ‘sex-objects.’ They use and abuse women as objects and their personal possessions and try to crush their ‘self’ in order to enslave them. However, they do not advocate sexual liberty for women as such but find nothing wrong in relationships based on mutual love and respect. For Lessing, it is emotional fulfilment rather than sexual freedom that she philosophizes. In fact, she wants her women protagonists to be recognized as complete individuals in their own rights. For the stance of their individuality and independence, she rejects the “feminine mystique” which glorifies only the physical beauty and utility of women as ‘sexual object’ only.

Lessing stresses the need for social, political, academic and economic independence of women which has been discussed by Virginia Woolf in her theoretical works A Room of One’s Own and Three Guinaes. Virginia Woolf might believe J.S. Mill for his ideas, “What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges not a protection apart a sentimental priesthood” (10). She is in favour of the rights of a multitude of diverse ‘women’. Her ideas in her great feminist polemics approve the stance of equality and justice for women, in fact, an economic freedom of women. Lessing’s concept of the “androgynous mind” (Stubbs 114) too includes aspects of femininity and masculinity. Patricia Stubbs tells, “shedding all gender bias against women, she dreamed of a world where there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex” (102). Jean Pickering calls Anna Wulf, “Virginia Wulf” (93). Anna Wulf’s inclination on the existence of women as equal to the existence of men reveals the inner psychological feelings of women. Anna also desires the sense of liberty and frankness for a woman writer. Anna’s novel “The Shadow of the Third” is a monument against the narrow psychological sexist differences for the working class women in the minds of the men. In fact,
Lessing withdraws all the narrow elements of feudal patriarchal order of the colonies which subordinates women in the society.

Doris Lessing demystifies the mystique discussed by Betty Friedan that woman is underestimated on her interests and abilities to participate in the national affairs. She is stereotyped as an incapable person to discuss politics. Betty Friedan shows the mystique:

They are not interested in the broad public issue of the day. They are not interested in national and international affairs. They are only interested in family and the home. They are not interested in politics, unless it is related to an immediate need in the home, like the price of coffee….

(TFM 144)

Doris Lessing involves her women in the matters, which are originally intended to be reserved only for men. In fact, she places them in positions where they are not only seen but heard, where they are not passive but the active participants in national issues. She gives her women “a power of politics; a stance to sustain and develop in modern society” (Sage, DL 171). Particularly, she records the various political, social and psychological problems which a woman faces in the patriarchal system. She enables her women protagonists to focus on the political discourses. They take active participation in politics during the war. For them, national development and participation in making decisions for the development of the country is more important. Martha even participates in significant national events organized by the Coloured people and she realizes that something like racial equality must exist in Rhodesia.

In the later period of 20th century, a small development has taken place in which woman is allowed to have education with some masculine checks. Ernest Jones discloses, “The best adjusted girl probably one who is intelligent enough to do well in school but no so brilliant to get all A’s…capable but not in areas relatively new to women; able to stand on her own feet and to earn a living, but not so good a living as to compete with men” (qtd. in Friedan, TFM 422). But, Lessing’s women
protagonists, after being educated, emerge as androgynous women who disrupt the hierarchical order, such as Martha’s involvement in politics, Anna Wulfs efforts of writing novels and Mary’s involvement in the organization of farm matters.

Lessing provides her women a stance of firm ability to work equally to men in the market place. She follows the idea of Katherine Bliss that women are more intelligent in taking decision and performing duties at working places. Through her novels, Lessing condemns the gender biased social environment against the working class women. Society mystifies woman as a docile figure and expect her to perform according to the wishes of her husband as she is financially dependent on him. But, Lessing’s women protagonists as Martha Quest, Julia Barr and Anna Wulf are financially self dependent women. They not only perform but get recognized for their works.

Lessing enables her women protagonists to break the sexual terrorism and social discrimination pointed out by Lisa S. Price in her book, *Feminist Frameworks: Building Theories on Violence against Women* and Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Her women protagonists make their efforts to come over all the patriarchal norms against women to diminish their chances to be the part of decision making process of the society. Lessing targets the social issues that disturb the healthy environment for women to participate in politics and other external affairs where women can perform equal to men or better than them. By their participation, both Martha and Mary are able to prove their ability to act along with men and to take an active part in the social issues. This approach, however, poses a question of how, or to what extent, such attempts are effective and how they may possibly be accepted by bourgeois society:

Martha tries to form an identity in a society where the division of labour between the sexes is strictly defined according to the norms of the bourgeois family, women are confined to domestic life, they are wives, mothers and lovers, whereas men have their main function within the social and political spheres of life. Marriage is a white middle class woman’s way of realizing her social potential.... (Hooks 57)
In spite of all the social and psychological barriers of patriarchal society, Lessing’s women emerge as best performers at working place. Martha does well at typing place in assistant’s job and then finally in politics. Mary Turner proves to be a hard working woman on farm to earn for the livings of her family. Anna Wulf is excellent at writing and earning enough through her successful novel, ‘The Frontiers of War.’

Lessing’s ideology for human world resembles Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideology of liberty, equality and fraternity for the whole of mankind. Lessing’s women, with their persuasive and well reasoned logics, condemn the social system. They want to seek their rights to participate in political acts and prove their abilities in the field. Dr. N. Shanta Iyer views, “on the political and economic aspects of ideology, the movement is further divided as liberal feminism which seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform without altering the structure of the society”(5). By participating in politics, Doris Lessing’s women with their intellectual, multi-dimensional abilities, want to remove class oppression and gender oppression.

Lessing’s women desire to liberate themselves from the social and masculine clutches. Her women believe in the political philosophy of communism. They work towards the establishments of a new role where the blacks are treated equal. In Martha’s enthusiasm, she finds family and other institutions stumbling a block. She sacrifices her personal interests in order to work towards the establishment of a human order where “the development of each is the condition for development of all” (Mitchell 76). After joining the politics, she rejects the oppressors who cannot accept a system that promises justice and equality for all.

Lessing’s ideology of politics is reflected when she symbolizes that “transcendental homelessness” (Lessing, RTI 168) which Lukacs relates with the problematic relations between the individual and the world. Being in South Africa, she has to bear the burden of being a white; her status is essentially that of a bemused colonial in London, the cultural centre. Virginia Held views, “Since we are the prisoners of our experience, so South Africa unavoidably becomes the main arena where Doris Lessing’s human values initially formulate and integrate with
political concerns” (JC 43). For Lessing, it, therefore, seems appropriate to explore South African environment to investigate the condition of women in the politics.

Lessing’s women protagonists have a special position in their hearts for the needy and exploited people of Southern Africa. Her women join the politics so that it may help them to prepare ‘human favoured’ policies and equality between races. She becomes conscious about the condition of blacks in Southern Rhodesia, “...if the blacks were not to revolt..., they must be fed and housed...” (Lessing, FGC 289). In A Proper Marriage, Mr Player wants to win the favour of Martha Quest. So, he says, “it was in no one’s interest that the blacks ...should be ill-fed and ill-housed into a condition where they weren’t fit for work” (Lessing 63). Martha reiterates, “The blacks need firm treatment” (Lessing, PM 67). However, the Rhodesian policy regarding races is not at all based on the laws of equality. Throughout her journey in politics, Lessing struggles to achieve the rights of poor and marginalized people. Her ability to “reason and underline choice” (Price 78) proves women as androgynous beings and challenge the patriarchal perceptions of the male oriented society.

Lessing’s women show their humane attitude towards the marginalized blacks and Jews of African society. Being in the politics of South Africa, she constitutes the category of the population which is mostly affected by white inequality as both white women and black people are subject to double oppression. While the white women face oppression because of their gender and their class, the black people experience oppression because of their gender, race and class. Lessing not only presents the racial aspects but also gives a message that she dislikes the social norms of Southern African society where woman is considered poor, helpless and second class. In fact, she shows that sexual relation between white women and black men are unthinkable in white society. Her first novel The Grass is Singing is described as, “a psychological exploration of the colonial settler class and the frustrations caused by imposed racial and sexual boundaries” (Gikundi 287). Her work presents a true picture of African history in term of relations of women with whites and then blacks. “Sexual relation between the races is a powerful challenge to their separateness; here, a double standard prevailed. Miscegenation between white men and black women is shown to be tolerated, although not approved” (Whittaker 20). Lessing
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shows a smooth corner for the black people in the hearts of her women characters. They not only criticize racism but violate against all the social norms and develop human relations with them.

In fact, Lessing’s portrayal of her women is basically sympathetic towards the marginalized people. Besides going through the hardships of poverty and loneliness, her women not only handle their different issues of existence but emerge as a panacea for the problems of their men too. Mary Turner helps Dick in his farm works after completing household affairs. Even after knowing the truth of his present financial situation, she stands by him and decides to go along with him in all the adverse circumstances of life. Martha develops human relations with Blacks and Jews for their human development which has been struck in by the white people. Julia Barr’s kind approach towards an unknown old person is the consequence of her kind behaviour and human approach.

In fact, Doris Lessing demystifies all the myths of women raised by Engels, Bergman and Firestone as; “women's role in the family?” (Engels 45) Or “is it her role in the labor market?” (Bergman 20), Or “is it simply women's biological role in reproduction?” (Firestone 70). But, she presents a dreaming self of a woman that feminists may doubt to imagine. That is why several critics have written about Lessing’s interest in empathy. Green discusses Lessing’s understanding of “imagination as empathy” (22) and the “empathic receptiveness’ of her characters” (221). Lessing has idealized woman by giving her humane qualities in the adverse circumstances as, “she is all free from the boundaries of conformist sex roles, political affiliations, racial and class status” (Rigney 7). She gives “an ideal approach to all of her female characters” (Sage, DR 114). In fact, her approach towards imagination in all the contrary circumstances get more motivated and she achieves a harmony among all. “She is one of the very few novelists who have refused to believe that the contemporary world is too complicated to understand. She is not afraid of ideas,” (Young 341). She cultivates innovative ideology which curtails the male hegemonic powers in patriarchal society.

Thus, Doris Lessing breaks the different religious and social mystiques of women through her women protagonists. She challenges all the myths which restrict
the development of a woman as human being. She breaks the image of woman who is bound to homely affairs as washing clothes, preparing children for schools, cooking three times in a day, cleaning the home, all the time staying at home, waiting for husband, dependent on men for financial needs, weak in decision making, poor in social services, playing in the arms of man for his physical pleasure, leaving everything on men, etc. She explores women’s search for their identity as human beings, independent of their traditional role as a daughter, wife or mother. Mary Turner, Martha Quest, Julia Barr and Anna Wulf have a strong sense of belonging towards their sex. They are very curious about their existence and related affairs.

Doris Lessing attempts to bring women from back to the front. Her woman sacrifices her personal life, deserts her husband and son and joins Communist party for the development of women and blacks. She aims, by joining Communist party, to enhance the social reputation and ability of a woman in governing system of a country. All of her women characters dislike the social norms of Southern African society where blacks are considered poor and helpless, even enemies of the whites. They want to remove all the social and psychological differences among men and women of patriarchal society. They show all her female protagonists as ‘Free Women,’ having androgynous qualities. Lessing has a great zeal for personal, social and economical development of her female characters. She believes that marriage should be given respect on psychological level and if not then it is not important to follow it. Men also need good women and if they do not get they have to suffer. However, she says that feminism does not mean just talk about rights of women. This is the reason that she refuses to become a spokesperson for any kind of movement. In fact, her view is that men and women both need assistance of each other. If women want to overcome the problems related to humanity, both man and woman should come together and fight against them. Her struggle is not reductive and confined to the gender identity alone. The struggle and the quest for self-awareness, for which woman is concerned, is an issue of ‘everyone’ and goes beyond the mere sexual identity. Doris Lessing seems probing deeply into the question of what it means to be an emancipated woman in patriarchal society,
especially a woman involved with politics, with writing, with love and sex, a woman
who frankly admits her sexuality, who refuses to compromise her essential being.

On the whole, her writing displays a meticulously cultivated pattern, sexually
aware and genuinely humane in approach. However, the aspects of womanhood has
a prominent place in most of Lessing’s novels but keeping in view the scope and
time frame of the study, the present research focuses on her early eight novels The
Grass is Singing, Retreat to Innocence, The Golden Notebook and five novels of
Children of Violence series as Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage, A Ripple from the
Storm, Landlocked and The Four Gated City. The subsequent chapters represent an
attempt to bring together and to explore the interaction between feminist theory and
aspect of womanhood in Doris Lessing’s novels. In fact, the present study is a
humble effort to trace the development of Doris Lessing’s women as individuals, as
members of society and as ideal human beings. Further, it will seek to analyze the
status of women in relation to men, other women, family, society, political spheres
and working class.