Chapter One

Introduction

Walk, and arise your fist
Affirm your decision to be free
Don’t walk three yards behind
It’s your place by right
Mother, woman!
The Revolution is you.

- Indira Kulkshreshtha

Literature is the art of written work and providential manipulation. It represents and links people, culture and tradition. The connection between literature and life is intimate and vital. Literature expresses individual and social life and thought through language. While the subject matter and treatment are of general human interest, the expression is emotive and the form gives aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction. Its theme may be a social problem or political revolution or religious movement with equal justification — an individual's passion, problem or fantasy. Literature is woven out of the stuff of life as its mirror. Its value depends on the depth and breadth of the life that it paints.

Literature has social functions. Art for art's sake, pursuit of pure beauty through art, the creation of a literary or artist’s masterpiece as an end in itself
is now falling into disfavour. Great literature voices the inmost desires, and
the noblest aspirations of people. By drawing the attention of the people to the
emerging truths of life, literature leads the people forward to a higher plane of
life and thought. The object of literature is to free, arouse and dilate the human
mind. Literature, in this sense, must emancipate the mind from its limitations
and arouse it to a consciousness of the dynamic urge of life.

Gynocentrism is a radical feminist discourse that champions female
consciousness, women-centred beliefs, identity crises, culture and social
consciousness. It is derived from the word Gyno which means woman and
Kentron which means centre. More than that, it challenges androcentric
production of masculine standard as normative and the presentation of those
standards as neutral rather than gendered. From the gynocentric perspective,
the assumption of masculine norms has meant that female sex has been
traditionally presented as deficient, secondary and lacking. Gynocentrism,
therefore, is concerned with recording sexual difference and femininity
positively.

Elaine Showalter is one of the first feminists to develop a systematic
programme, which is critical of androcentrism, of literary studies and it seeks
to illuminate the culture of women writers and readers. She coined the term
‘Gynocritics’ in her work Towards a Feminist Poetics (1986). The main
purpose of gynocentrism is to construct a female framework for the analysis
of women’s literature and to develop new models based on the study of
female experience, setting aside male models and theories. It begins at the
point where the female sex liberate themselves from the linear supremacy of literary history and stop trying to fit women in the line of male tradition and focus themselves on a newly formed world of female culture.

Gynocentrism is an intellectual commitment that seeks justice for women. Gynocentric theory and politics include the body, class, work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science and sexuality. Motivated by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural and political phenomena. It focuses on gender differences arising out of biological differences to point out the culturally determined notions of superiority. It tries to destroy the stereotype images of women by asking questions and answering them constructively. It approaches and discusses the impact of traditional concepts on feminists’ scholarships and examines the possibility of a work that a link between two traditions — conventional and modern. The concern of gynocentrism is the need of a society free from the colonization of women by patriarchy. It stands for the freedom of women, the freedom to express oneself beyond caste, creed and sex. It also exposes misrepresentation, literary abuse and textual harassment of women in literature.

One of the major assumptions of gynocentrism is that writings by women are always dominated by gender. It considers gender as a cultural construct and exposes the fact that there is no distinction between the experience of a man and a woman’s consciousness. It is essentially a new way
of reading and thinking about literature. It is preoccupied with exposing the misogyny of literary practice reflected in distorted and stereotype images of women in literary work.

Women who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalised in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for fulfilment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband and children. This disturbing picture of woman is not something new or unique only to India. This is the predicament of women all over the world. Ernestine in her *History of Women Suffrage* observes:

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

A woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and series of adjustments that she make in her life
faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. Mary Ann Fergusson in her *Images of Women in Literature* writes, “... in every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object - their roles in relationship to men” (4-5). As a woman grows, she is inculcated with the ideas of self-abnegation, pride in patience, the need to accept a lower status through the mythical models of Sita, Savithri and Gandhari. Following these models, she is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother. She must not only be a wife but also a counsellor and the playmate to the partner:

Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi

Rupecha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri

Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha

Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (Acharya 351)

(A woman should serve her husband as minister while counselling, by her looks she should be as Goddess Lakshmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a Mother like feeding and in bed, she must be like the celestial beauty).

A dichotomous perception of woman exists in the epics. She is deified as Goddess and Divine Mother, an epitome of patience, suffering and forbearance, while on the other hand, a woman is also viewed as the precursor of evil, and an epitome of lust. Alladi Uma observes:
The Hindu mind has created schismatic Goddesses; on the one hand Durga is difficult to know or to approach; on the other, as Mother of the Universe, she epitomises tender love . . . Kali, often thought of as Evil, Death, Destroyer, Devourer, is also Creator. (4)

For centuries, the Hindu woman idealised the mythic models from the Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetypal women like Sita, the silent sufferer. Often the Indian woman is passive and accepts the given role in shaping her destiny. At every stage of her life, she is dependent for her status and survival upon man — her father, her husband and her sons. The role of woman has been full of contradictions, so far as Indian customs and traditions are concerned. However, this gloomy picture did not exist in the pre-historic period when there was no gender-bias and women were not even considered as separate entities. Women had a pride of place in the Vedic period, when they were deified and glorified.

During the Vedic period, (2500 BC - 1500 BC) according to historians like Altekar (1962), Indira (1955) and Kapadia (1958), women were treated with dignity and respect in all matters — religious, social, political and economical. Basically, in the Vedic society, two types of women were visualized — Brahmavadhini and Sadyovadhu. Brahmavadhini was the ascetic type who carried on the quest of truth, knowledge and spiritual pursuits. Upanayana or initiation to learning was accepted as a routine event. Women’s education was encouraged and a woman meant for learning was
addressed as *Yagnopavatini*. Wives of great *rishis* were encouraged to take part in intellectual discussions. Women were permitted to attend important assemblies, state functions, religious duties and rituals and take up profession as priests. These women were called *Sabotimini Sabhadharmini* or coreligionists, and both man and wife together offered their worship testifying the fact that they were equal in status. Women distinguished themselves in arts, science and in political events. They were honoured and termed as *Grihalakshmi*. In Dutt’s *History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, the Vedic woman was the highest symbol of Hindu womanhood. Dutt asserts that:

> Women were honoured in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe. They were considered the intellectual companions of their husbands . . . affectionate helpers in the journey of life, and . . . inseparable partners in their religious duties. (67)

Throughout the Vedic period, woman was given a status equal to that of man. Her participation was essential in sacrificial rites like Yagas and she was on an equal footing with man in upholding dharma. She could fight wars, go to the battle field like Kaikakyee, take part in philosophic discussions like Gargi and Maitreyi or even remain unmarried if she desired so. Friedrich Max Muller an Anglo-German scholar upholds the Vedic period in his writing:

> So great an influence has the Vedic age . . . upon all succeeding periods of Indian history . . . so deeply have the religious and moral ideas of that primitive era taken root in the mind of the
Indian nation, so minutely has almost every private and public act of Indian life been regulated by old traditionary precepts, that it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging Indian religion, morals and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age. (135)

A. S. Altekar claims that the status of women is one of the best gauges of the “spirit of a civilisation, its excellencies and its limitations” (9). He states that the Vedic age was one in which women enjoyed singular freedom. More than twenty Brahmavadhis are said to have composed hymns of the Rigveda, according to Saravanukramanika. Shakuntala Rao, commenting on the status of women in the Vedic age, says that, “Woman was regarded with due respect in every sphere of life, and she was not subject to any of the miraculous laws of an unsympathetic society” (37).

During the subsequent periods, there was a gradual decline in the status of woman. During the Atharvanaveda period, people were seen displaying a strong preference for boys. The birth of a son was welcomed. The common belief was that a son would save his father from the hell called “Punnama narakam” (Prasanna Sree 5). There was not a single word for the daughter. A wife was asked to be the mother of sons and only sons. As a woman’s destiny depended on her sons, it was natural for her to perform austerity and penances for begetting sons.

The theory of perpetual tutelage of women is found in the Manusmriti, the earliest and most authoritative work representing the Hindu life and
culture. Manusmriti is the earliest that deals with social philosophy, perpetuating a dependent role for woman. “. . . Pita rakshati kaumare, bharttarakshati yauwane, rakshanti sthavire putra Na stri swatantryamarhati” (9/3). (Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of their families . . . Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her son protects her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence).

Manu does not advocate equality of status between man and woman. His ideal is that of oneness of the two and not of equality with each other. It is however evident that Manu is not a woman hater, for he has also said, “where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards” (Manusmriti IX 18). Manu regards woman as more emotional and less rational than man. He says “when creating them, God allotted to women a love of their bed, of their seat and of ornaments, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and base conduct” (Manusmriti IX 18). The double standard of morality set up by Manu worsened the position of women, and this further went down in the later years due to lack of education and introduction of child marriage during the Mughal period. Series of invasions by foreigners jeopardized the security of women’s life. Women were carried away as commodities by the invaders. Jauhar, Sati, Purdah came into being, further impinging on the social liberties of women.

Women were denied the right to study the Vedas, and were bracketed with sinners and slaves. The code of Manu was so rigorously observed that the
role of women was confined to the family, and thus they were denied rights equal to men. Although her lot in the family kept changing with the times, it invariably remained an inferior one and she was hardly given much freedom. Shantha Krishnaswamy comments on the general lot of women thus:

She is a creature who as a child is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband’s family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre to be acclaimed as ‘Sita-Savitri’, as an immortal. (8)

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of some great women writers like Toru Dutt, Ghoshal, Sorabji Cornelia and Krupabal Sathianathan. K. S. Ramamurti, in his book Rise of the Indian Novel in English, says, “it [their works] was qualitatively superior to those of many others who wrote before and after them” (66). Aurobindo in his The Foundation of Indian Culture grieves at the degraded position of the Indian women thus:

In India . . . the woman had at first a free and more dignified position than in Greece and Rome, but the slave was soon replaced by the proletariat, called in India the Sudhra, and the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of the common life and culture to the Shudra and the woman brought down Indian society to the level of the Western conquerors. (103-04)
The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed an improvement in the women’s lot, and this was the outcome of the movements of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jotiba Phule. A major change was effected by Mahatma Gandhi’s emphasis on women’s participation in his non-violent movement. In an article on Gandhi entitled “Not By Faith Alone,” Ramachandra Guha observes:

Woman is the companion, Gandhiji affirmed as early as 1918 with equal mental capacities and she has the same right of freedom and liberty. He (Gandhi) dismissed the ideas put forward by Manu as an interpolation and if it was not an interpolation, he could only say that in Manu’s days, women did not have the status they deserved. (2)

Simultaneous with it was the introduction of western liberal education that forced new values of life upon women. Legally, woman was given equal right with man; but this did not disturb the male-dominance in the family. The male mentality is so shaped that it cannot adjust to the notion of woman being equal to man.

Despite equal opportunities of education and economic independence, woman remains a victim of domestic injustice within the family, and other legal rights outside. Despite the universally acknowledged fact that women perform on par with men physically and mentally, they are denied the freedom to express their feelings, thoughts and anguish. Women work indoors and outdoors, but their services remain unrecognized. Although the lot of women
in the family and society has changed with the times for the better, women invariably remain inferior to men.

The movements of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi proved a great relief to women as they were brought out of the tyranny of the social evils. Still the number of women enjoying considerable freedom is very meagre. For the majority of women, subordination to men and misery are synonymous. The battle for emancipation was taken over by a few educated women, and they turned to be writers. The motive was to voice their own bitter experiences as women with a view to influencing the society and effecting social reforms. John B. Alphonso–Karkala in his book *Indo-English Literature of the Nineteenth Century* writes:

They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers, both in India and abroad. (78)

The ideal image of woman like the traditional Sita or Savitri was gradually replaced by the realistic one, i.e. the frustrated and alienated one. The introduction of liberal English education not only brought significant changes in the middle-class life-style but also raised a consciousness of freedom in the minds of women. This only led to a romantic desire for a freedom that was not easy to come by. The women writers, thus, used this conflict between tradition and modernity as a dominant theme in writing. It was a portrayal of women
facing the conflicts and problems that arose from the old to the new; from the
traditional to the modern, that affected both the sexes, but the fair sex gets the
worst of it — the crisis of value adaptation being the more excruciating. The
modern age has left women confused between the opposing forces of
modernity and tradition, and they find it difficult to reconcile between their
romantic aspirations and the realities of life. It is a conflict between a personal
fulfilment of desires and their duty towards family and children. Thus most of
the woman novelists took up the theme of the problem of adjustment, and
women are shown adjusting themselves to the ground reality. Earlier the
problems of women were more of an emotional nature due to the attachment
to home and family. However with her increasing consciousness as an
individual, she has begun to assert herself within the family and outside it as
well. A society conditioned to the age-old patriarchal mindset opposes and
rejects such deviation from the established social norms, and man’s opposition
to woman’s quest for identity and selfhood becomes a cause of her seemingly
impossible struggle.

The road ahead is rugged and full of hurdles in a chauvinistic society
where most women cannot support the movement for fear of losing the little
freedom they enjoy in the confinement of the four-walls. Sushila Singh rightly
observes:

Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the
masculine experience with the result that the collective image of
humanity has been one-sided and incomplete. Woman has not
been defined as a subject in her own right but merely has an
entity that concern man either in his real life or his fantasy life.

(7)

Since the inception of the feminist movement in the 1960s in the West, much
has been written on women, but much still remains to be done to reflect the
injustices meted out to women and also to rid the male–psyche off the
prejudices and misconceptions regarding them.

Alexander Dumas, the nineteenth century French writer, best known
for his historical novels of high adventure, was the first to use the term
‘feminism’ for the movement of women’s political rights. Later it spread
across the world to secure complete rights for women — political, social,
economic and educational. The movement grew up from strength to strength
and, by the end of the twentieth century, made the complacent society to think
anew about the age-old distorted beliefs.

Ibsen heralded the idea of women’s emancipation with his character
Nora in *A Doll’s House*. It is Simone de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex*, first
published in French in the year 1949 that sowed the seeds for women’s
movement and it won great acclaim as a feminist book. Its English translation
became accessible to the world and Beauvoir successfully shatters the myth of
femininity and shows how deprived of their social, economic and political
rights, the woman remain relegated to the background. Despite their great
contribution, they are dubbed as the weaker sex. Inspite of their numerical
strength, they are told that their femininity is in danger. Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* writes:

All agree in recognizing the fact that female exists in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? or is it a platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination. (13)

Beauvoir lent great force to the women’s liberation movement in the mid-nineteenth century by laying bare the gross inequalities in society. Drawing heavily on disciplines like biology, psychology and history, she discusses girl’s education, love, sex, marriage, prostitution and domestic drudgery as well. She frankly talks about sexual exploitation and sexual pleasure for women, and does not give way to sentiments while discussing maternity.

The feminist movement was sparked off by Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. She interviewed many wives and mothers and discovered the falsity of a woman’s achieving happiness and contentment in marriage and motherhood, although they had been blessed with all the comforts of life. All were merely trying to seek fulfilment by playing the role of a devoted wife and caring mother. Friedan writes:
For a woman, as for a man the need for self-fulfilment — autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation — is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Women’s sexual problems are, in this sense, by-products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfil her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminism fulfilment ignores. (282)

Kate Millett is another important feminist of the twentieth century. Her book *Sexual Politics*, published in 1969, vehemently argues that women are in such an intolerable, subordinate position in the patriarchal social set up that most of them repress and deny its existence. In the two studies conducted by her, she found that, were the female children given a choice, most of them would prefer to be born a boy. She graphically explains the sense of insecurity in women and the problems society would face in future in the form of female foeticide through pre-natal sex-determination tests. She writes:

> The phenomenon of parents’ prenatal preferences for male issues is too common to require such elaboration. In the light of the imminent possibility of parents actually choosing the sex of their child, such a tendency is becoming the cause of some concern in scientific circles. (56-57)

Sylvia Plath’s *Bell Jar* is about Esther, a young, innocent and oppressed heroine who later becomes vengeful. Plath uses the metaphor of an
exquisitely handcrafted mat made by Mrs. Willard for Esther’s oppressive state. The mat is not a thing for interior decoration but is used to be soiled under feet. Esther thinks:

    And I know that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out under his feet like Mrs. Willard’s kitchen mat. (88-89)

Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood have also contributed greatly to the movement, and have been internationally acclaimed as great feminist novelists. A couple of centuries back women writers dared not to express themselves honestly by defying the rigid norms laid down by society, inviting social censure. Though, there were many spinster writers like Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Stevie Smith, Charlotte Mew, Mananne Moor and Elizabeth Smith, the freedom to express themselves from the core of their heart was sought at the price of giving up the so-called womanliness — sex, marriage, children and the social status of a wife.

    In India, the trio — Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao — did not pay much attention to women’s emancipation. Although they had in their hand a great material on freedom movement and the role women played, they let themselves miss out on this opportunity. Excepting *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Anand is deeply involved in championing the cause of the have-nots. Gauri, its heroine, is a fine example of his idea of women’s
emancipation. Narayan’s portrayal of women characters ranges from the meek and submissive wife of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Savitri in *The Dark Room* to the vibrant and radical women characters like Daisy and Rosie in *The Painter of Signs* and *The Guide* respectively.

Women, in Raja Rao’s novels, suffer from domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition, but the writer suggests no way out of their dilemma. His women characters, who are a little ambitious, end up playing the devoted role of a wife like Savitri in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Indian culture being rooted into his consciousness fails him to offer any concrete solution to the besetting women’s issue.

Bhabani Bhattacharya’s portrayal of women is too optimistic to be realistic. His women are tender, charming, and virtuous, and play a significant role in effecting social change. In spite of being tender and virtuous, they are victimized. Kajoli, in *So Many Hungers*, undergoes immense suffering and misery, but her spirit remains invincible. Mohini, in *Music for Mohini*, causes social reforms in Behula village steeped in superstitions and obsolete customs.

Thus, male writers, owing to a misconception about or ignorance of women in general, have failed to give an honest or real portrayal of their women characters. They either exposed the weaknesses and drawbacks of a woman, or place her on a high pedestal and deify it. Thus, the delineation of the real woman has escaped the pen of male writers somehow.

Modern feminist political activists like Shobha De and Arundathi Roy commonly campaign for women’s human right to bodily integrity and
autonomy on matters such as reproductive rights including the right to safe, legal abortion, access to contraception and quality prenatal care, protection from violence within a domestic partnership, sexual harassment, street harassment, discrimination and rape, and for workplace rights to maternity leave, and equal pay. These writers today regard feminism as a grass root movement that seeks to cross boundaries based on social class, race, culture and religion. They also argue that an effective feminist movement should address both universal issues such as rape, incest and prostitution and culturally specific issues relevant to the women of the society.

The thematic concerns of the early women writers led to the emergence of the Indian woman in the fast changing social milieu. Rajlakshmi Debi’s The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit raised a banner of revolt against the prevailing social conditions. Krupabai Sathianandhan’s Kamala: A Story of Hindu Wife is autobiographical. Nikambe’s Ratnabai, was a semi-autobiographical sketch with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience. Since these novelists lacked literary models, their work sometimes descended into sentimentality and didacticism. Rockey Sakhawat Hossain’s Sultana’s Dream presents a topsy-world in which men are kept behind purdahs. Man takes the status of a woman and the narrator has a caustic laugh at man. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati is described as the greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all history — the one who laid the foundation for women’s liberation in India. Ramabai’s book on high caste Hindu woman describes a typical arranged
marriage and aptly comments on the conjugal satisfaction of women in terms of their marriage. Susi Tharu and K. Lalitha in *Women Writing in India* observe:

> When the conjugal relation is brightened of mutual love, the happy wife has nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known from the beginning what freedom is, they are well content to remain in bondage. (247)

Swarna Kumari Ghosal, the elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore, is a novelist, poet, playwright, songwriter, and a journalist. *The Fatal Garland*, *The Unfinished Song* and *An Indian Love Story* are her major works. Her works mainly reflect the middle class milieu and as an editor of the journal *Bharathi*, she was mainly publishing scientific articles to educate the non-English speaking Indian women in new scientific concepts. Ghosal was one of the most distinguished literary figures of the time, and a torchbearer in the tradition of women’s writing in Bengal. The advent of Swarna Kumari on the literary scene of Bengal heralded a new era for women. She was the first writer to show up the strength of women’s writing and raise women’s creations to a position of respect.

Cornelia Sorabji, the Oxford-educated lawyer, with a spirit of adventure and missionary zeal, fought for the cause of women, especially widows and women in purdahs. Her works, *Love and Life Behind the Purdahs, Sun-Babies, Studies in the Child-Life of India, Behind the Twilights*
*India Calling* and *India Recalled* serve as instruments of social reform. Women in most of the early novels are essentially Indian in sensibility, endowed with the traditional feminine qualities of sincerity, love and resignation. The autobiographical elements in these novels, the transition from a concern with objective social reality to an exploration of the feminine sensibility find their echoes in the works of later women writers and this establishes their position as the forerunners of the Indian literary tradition in Indian English literature.

The depiction of women by the first generation women novelists was traditional in outlook. Under the influence of the popular British writers, these women’s writings tended to be imitative while some focused on the romantic idealization — reformative zeal was the option for others. On the whole, these women writers wrote mainly to voice their concern for and sympathize with the suffering of Indian women rather than to censure the society. Hence, there was no room for anger, irritation, or tension in their works despite intense sociological and reformatory motivation.

In the post-independence period, there appeared on the horizon of Indian English novels a number of woman writers who have made a significant contribution in the field of fiction, definitely enriched it a great deal and have voiced for woman’s empowerment through their novels in their own way. They include Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruthpawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Sobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Gita Mehta, Kusum Ansal, Arundhati Roy and many others. The
problem and perplexity of man-woman relationship has been the central subject matter for most of the major women novelists. B. D. Sharma and S. K. Sharma argue that “The problem of adjustment in the husband’s home has been the most widely treated problem in the novels written by women novelists. This has been treated, for instance, by Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande” (523).

The twentieth century is essentially an age of unrest, doubts, turmoil and the cradle of a number of complex ‘isms’. The sociological, psychological and intellectual climates of the present times have undergone thorough transformation. As Amarnath Prasad in his Feminist Fervour in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande says: “Time-tested beliefs are scrutinized under the microscope. Our Epics, Vedas and Puranas envisage marriage not as a mere social instruct, but also as a moral weapon to both establish and elevate the moral statute of an individual” (150).

Unfortunately, it is an irony of fate that in a post-modernistic world, such esteemed institutions are currently subject to doubt, cynicism and erosion. Woman in the present century is in a state of moral dilemma. The increasing education has made her aware of her rights as an individual. Education has enlarged her psychological terrains thereby making her highly sensitive even to the slightest psychological ruptures that life offers. Ironically, she is, therefore, more fragile than her predecessors. The current Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee and Gita Hariharan have produced an interesting array of female protagonists
who suffer within the framework of relationships, marriage, love, sex and their search for self-identity and individuality.

Quite contrary to traditional attitude towards women, these novelists have presented a realistic appraisal of the feminine psyche. The characters created by them, like their creators, are torn apart by the conflicting forces of value adaptation and attachment with the family. The problems of marital adjustment and quest for and assertion of her identity further aggravated the plight of the working woman. The predicament of the new Indian woman has already been taken up for fuller treatment by novelists like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. They, however, have generally concentrated on the plight and problems of educated women mostly with an urban base. The self-vowed aim of writing fiction in the case of Indian novelists like Sobha de, and Namita Gokhle has been to portray the challenges of educated ‘socialite’ women with an urban base. They occupy a unique position among contemporary Indian novelists in English. B. D. Sharma and S. K. Sharma opine “Writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family” (74).

Anita Desai is the representative of the present trends in Indian English fiction. She represents the creative release of feminine sensibility. Her novels present an explanation to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, as projected through her characters Maya, Manisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul.

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly the most outstanding among the
second-generation women novelists. Her women protagonists are the repertoire of transitional Indian society. She presents a cross section of the Indian society wherein her women characters go in quest for autonomy. The irregularities in the social system confine her women to a time honoured and taboo-ridden path. The economic travails inherited in the Indian society further complicate their position adding to their inexperience, sickness, blind faith in their destiny, which they accept as their *Karma*. Thus her women, by and large, are conservative and traditional in outlook. However most of her women manage to be independent in thinking while performing their traditional roles.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala finds life in India to be an overwhelming burden to European women. Well aware of the changing values of the evolving Indian society, she portrays the predicament of the modern urban who face the challenges of the contrasting cultures between the traditional Indian ways of life and the western modernism. They are more concerned with their relationships with their partners than with women’s rights or changing traditions. Though a majority of her women begin their married lives as non-conformists, very soon they learn to conform to traditions.

Attia Hussain’s famous novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* creates an indelible stamp on the reader’s psyche. It is written in a strictly autobiographical and retrospective mode and its plot deals with Laila’s revolt against the joint family system. Hussain’s graphic description of scenes of college life, garden parties and receptions are vivid and informing. Her sharp
and pointed remarks on social facts and orthodox conventions that enslave a woman, especially a Muslim one, earn for her a secure niche in the field of feminist writing in Indian English literature.

Nayantara Sahgal delineates with keen perception and sensitivity, the problems and suffering of women in marriage, who feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, and shows her own reaction in her novels. Most of her women are aware of the injustice done to them in marriage. As they go out of their homes, they go in quest of their freedom. While some accept their fate unhesitatingly, most of them crave for freedom. Sahgal seeks to interpret the concepts of virtue and chastity through her women characters who have a kind of innocence and integrity. Sahgal’s women shield themselves with their virtuousness and courage and take risks. In a way, she shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man’s equal. According to Asarani M. Shyam in each of her novels, Sahgal pleads for “mutual trust, love, understanding, consideration, generosity, and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centredness in marital relationships” (66). Thus she is a champion of individual freedom with a penchant for the feminist cause.

The newly evolved and liberated women in the contemporary society really bloom and blossom in Raji Narasimhan’s novels. In her three novels, *The Heart of Standing is You Cannot Fly*, *Forever Free* and *The Sky Changes*, liberated women characters who are educated and able to live individually, are portrayed. They live in working women’s hostels where they are free from
domestic responsibilities. However, women who are away from parental restrictions are exposed to societal pressures and other exploitations.

Bharathi Mukherjee, an Indian-American immigrant writer, liberates her women protagonists for a “New World Order” (Agrawal 49). Her portrayal of women is inspired by her experience in India as well as abroad. Her protagonists are sensitive and they lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity. They are victimized by racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression. Mukherjee is concerned with characters that strain and struggle for the articulation of their repressed and stunted voices. As a writer she likes to put much stress on the fact that her characters, whether they are uniquely Indian or superficially western, are basically human. Her women characters vent their feminine sensibility in their frantic desire for an authentic communication with their own selves as well as with the society.

Gita Hariharan, the distinguished recipient of the prestigious commonwealth award for her maiden novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, for the year 1993, portrays women who battle in their relationship with men and society. Her protagonist passes through a lacerating process of identity crisis. There is effective communication between the characters and that keep her works flowing. Hariharan relates the relevance of Indian epic stories in the context of the contemporary Indian scenario. Her women protagonists are the representatives of the present-day intellectual women, and she does not confront them with problems like loneliness and alienation. At the end, they
feel that they have but an ephemeral existence. Her characters are not only interesting to read, but are also thought provoking.

The world of Shobha De is a minuscule one. To her, the elitist section of Bombay seems to constitute India. Most of her characters are Bombay groomed women by birth. Even though she feels very strong about the feminist flag, she deals only with empathy towards women and their situations and does not like being branded as a feminist.

Shashi Deshpande has earnestly been accepted as a significant literary figure on the contemporary literary scene. She was born in a famous, educated Brahmin family in 1938 at Dharwad in Karnataka. She acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for learning from her father, Adya Rangachar, a dramatist and Sanskrit scholar. At the age of fifteen she went to Mumbai, graduated in Economics, and moved to Bangalore where she also got degrees in Law, English and Diploma in Journalism. During her stay in London, she had both sweet and sour experiences of life and literature. When she returned from London she recorded everything in the form of articles.

Deshpande started her literary career in 1970 with the publication of a collection of short stories. She has published nine novels—*The Dark Holds No Terrors, If I Die Today, Come up and Be Dead, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies* and *Moving On*. She also wrote some significant books of short stories among which *The Legacy* and *The Intrusion and the Other Stories* are of great significance.
Deshpande’s novels represent the contemporary modern women’s struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying traditional constraints. The social and cultural change in the post-independence India has made the women conscious of the need to define themselves, their place in society, and their relationship with their surroundings. Deshpande’s concern is to explore the root-cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of characters and to find out what happens in the psyche of these heroines in the process of individuation. She has created authentic female characters — flesh and blood characters with recognizable credentials. She has successfully delineated their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles, dreams and disillusionments.

A woman occupies a central place in Deshpande’s novels. The novelist presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phases underlying reason, and to some extent, suggests a way out of it. Her earnest aim is to analyze the image of women in her novels and also in her short stories. Woman, today, plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. Consequently she faces the fact of tossing between tradition and modernity.

Female quest for identity has been a pet theme for many a woman novelist. Deshpande is also such a writer and she makes an earnest effort to understand the inner dimension of the female characters. She portrays the predicament of middle-class educated Indian women, their inner conflict and
quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and
sex, and their exploitation, Deshpande has been called a feminist and the
publication of That Long Silence made its own contribution to this belief.
Deshpande’s apparently contradictory remarks to her interviewers lent further
support to it. Asked whether she would like to call herself a feminist, she
replied to Geeta Gangadharan:

Yes I would, I’m a feminist, in the sense that, I think we need to
know a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us
human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two
halves of one species, I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir
that the fact that we are human is much more important than our
being men or women. I think that’s my idea of feminism. (231)

Deshpande’s novels contain so much that can be regarded as the staple material
of feminist thought; women’s sexuality in Small Remedies, the gender roles
in The Dark Holds No Terrors, self-discovery in The Long Silence, dreams
and disillusionment in Moving On and so on. Her interview with Lakshmi
Holmstrom throws significant light on her stand:

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my
own life I mean. But not consciously as a novelist. I must also
say my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually
and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and
feelings. I started my feminism. And it was much later that I
actually read books about it. (26)
According to Deshpande, no account of theorizing will solve women’s problems especially in the Indian context. Elucidating her viewpoint she further remarks in the same interview:

But to me feminism isn’t a matter of theory, it is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not and to say that we have to discover what it is in our lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it. (13-14)

Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer is her women characters, their plight, their sufferings, and their own solutions to the problems created by the world where they flourished with their desires and dreams but face disillusionment that emboldens them enough to face the fact of compromise.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle. Saru undergoes great humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child. After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manu’s, all begins to fall apart. Her husband’s sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society’s reaction to Saru’s superior position
develops sadism in him. Manu vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, and this is vividly portrayed by Deshpande.

*If I Die Today* (1982) highlights man’s fear to face death. It reveals a woman’s trauma of man when he is at the verge of life. He does not want to face the fact that he is going to lose everything one day. On the day of his death he knows that he cannot control life and its course of events despite his best efforts. To Deshpande, life is real but it is corrupted by want of self-assessment.

*Roots and Shadows* (1983) depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She undergoes great mental trauma when she refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon her by society. The man she marries after her heart, to her great disappointment, is no different from the less educated and conservative Indian men. She is even more pained to realise that she herself has all along been unconsciously aping the role of the ideal Indian wife. In her quest for identity, she even develops an extra-marital affair to finally realise that it is possible to exercise autonomy within the parameters of marriage. Deshpande thus exposes the gross gender discrimination and its fallout in a male-dominated society.

*Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) deals with the suicide of a schoolgirl in an exclusive school. The head mistress is unable to deal with the situation and especially when it is followed by rumours pointing at her brother. Two more deaths follow, making the school a place of fear and suspicion. The story is
full of suspense with lots of variety in thoughts. The author makes it interesting with wonderful storytelling. This is a unique attempt by Deshpande in English with deep human philosophy.

*That Long Silence* (1989) is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realises that she has been unjust to herself and to her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man.

*The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993) is a haunting new collection of nineteen short stories. In these stories, Deshpande explores a world darkened by the despair and unhappiness of women trying to break out of predefined roles.

In *A Matter of Time* (1999) Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it’s about three women from three generations, from the same family and how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Though, deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, but tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Her mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends her back to her parent’s house. On her mother Manorama’s request, when Kalyani returns Shripati maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani’s mother Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and
fears lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to other family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande brings to light the fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations from the same family.

*Small Remedies* (2000) is about Savitribai Indorekar, a aging doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practices double standards — one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross gender discrimination. Besides, Madhu narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai’s daughter, Munni.

*The Binding Vine* (2002) deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmila and other victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmila narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape in marriage. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmila. Urmila also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of her tale is that of her elder daughter Kalpana who is brutally raped by her sister Sulu’s husband, Prabhakar. Urmila takes up cudgels on Kalpana’s behalf and brings the culprit to book.
Narayanpur Incident (2003) deals with the movement on 8 August 1942 — Quit India! in which Gandhiji warns the British. As he and most leaders are put in jail the very next day, the people rise in protest and so begins the Quit India Movement of 1942. Babu and Manju suddenly find themselves part of all this as their schools close down and their father is put behind bars. Their daring brother Mohan goes underground and the rest of the family moves to Narayanpur, a sleepy little village seemingly untouched by the turbulence in the country.

Moving On (2004) narrates the tales of Indian middle class families. Neatly concealed within the narrative, the novelist projects the view that faith is an adhesive that holds the family together. Therefore it is essential to have confidence that the family as a unit of society is an enduring institution. Jiji Ahuja is visualised as a complex character juggling frantically between conflicting demands and the roles of her life. While trying to reach herself, Jiji also attempts to break from the past and move on.

In the Country of Deceit (2008) scrutinizes the Indian society - the stereotypes of the lonely Bollywood actress, the witty old aunt and the street child-turned-governess of two adorable, cherubic children. The book goes on and presents the intersection of varying lifestyles, presenting at the end their common condemnation of a universal crime beyond redemption.

Writing from the Margin and Other Essays (2000) holds a universal appeal, as it is firmly entrenched in the social realities of everyday life and grapples with issues that are particularly Indian. Some of the finest pieces
included in *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* deal with language and writing: the prickly and often acrimonious issues of English, the deep and unfortunate divide between English and the regional languages, the importance and necessity of translations, the compulsions of the global market on literature, a writer’s obligation to self-censorship, the moral vision that underscores all good writing, the unshakable worth of readers and much more.

Deshpande’s works have received critical attention worldwide and have been analysed from various points of view.

Siddhartha Sharma in his dissertation *Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: A Feminist Study* mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. The thesis also analyses how the traditional outlook on women has not changed much through the centuries and it also aims at evaluating Deshpande’s potential as a serious writer genuinely concerned with women’s issues.

Akther Banu in her thesis *Shashi Deshpande and Women’s World* attempts to explore the women’s world in her novels. She also exhibits how her protagonists raise their voice against the role-model of daughter, sister, wife and mother and refuse to be objects of cultural and social oppressions of age-old patriarchal society. She also exposes how Deshpande in her novels has advocated feminism and how her concerns are not only feminist but also humanistic.

S. Prasanna Sree in her thesis *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study* portrays the women protagonists with a view to
understand their trails of tradition and modernity and critically analyses their response to the present situation so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society.

S. K. Mishra in her thesis *Life and Works of Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Study* views Deshpande’s English in the Indian context. The researcher says that most people use the English language as their own. This enables Deshpande to express the realities of life comfortably. Deshpande’s language has penetrated deep into the Indian society and brings to light varied classes and kinds of people.

Vincent Aerathu in his article “Girl Children in Deshpande’s Novels - *The Dark Holds No Terrors, A Matter of Time, Roots and Shadows, and That Long Silence*”, writes that Deshpande looks into the childhood of her female characters and shows how childhood experiences go a long way in determining or influencing their adult lives. She believes that childhood experiences are lasting and that they have a crucial role to play in the formation of a healthy personality. The protagonists of Deshpande are deprived of childhood, in one way or another, and these deprivations equip them with the power to fight and survive till the end.

Asha Susan Jacob in her article “The Voice of the Silenced in Deshpande’s Novels” opines that in Deshpande, each of the marriages is marked by silence. In the evolution of the protagonists’ character, their decision to break the silence is the first sign of liberation. From a state of passive acceptance they move to active assertion.
In the article “Changing Image of Woman in the Novels *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *That Long Silence*”, Dalvir Singh discusses that for the predicament of women, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation, and lack of expectation, Deshpande has been labelled ‘feminist’. She is not completely in favour of overthrowing the patriarchy and establishing the matriarchal system. She has made her utmost efforts to balance the relationship between man and woman.

C. G. Shyamala in her article, “Interpretations on Masculinities in *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*”, while defining the concept of masculinity says that traditional masculinity is associated with assertiveness, virility, aggression, competitiveness, ambition, courage, physical strength and vitality, while femininity bears traits as submission, meekness, tolerance, endurance, softness and delicacy.

L. V. Padmarani Rao in her research article, “Women in the Literary Corpus of Shashi Deshpande”, opines that the heroines of Deshpande strive for and obtain certain autonomy. Their return home is not defeatism but the triumph of the independence of women. Rao further says that they learn to live in the modern society with self-identity and self-realization.

Amitab Roy in his article “Widows in Shashi Deshpande’s novels” pictures the plight of widows in the Hindu society and also the evil of the caste system prevailing in India.

N. Sharma Iyer in his article “Socialisation and Gender Constructions in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” says that Deshpande traces the pattern of
socialisation and the internationalism of patriarchal norms and values. Her fiction is an example of the ways in which a girlchild’s particular position, social reality and psychological growth determine her personality.

P. Madhurima Reddy in her article “Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows: Articulation of Feminine Voice” discusses the struggle of the protagonist, Indu, an educated middle-class woman, in a male-dominated tradition bound society. According to her, the novel tells the story not of an individual but of the institution of marriage, which is threatened by the forces of change and faces dissolution.

In the article, “From Despair to Hope: Shashi Deshpande’s A Matter of Time”, Mukesh Yadav and Shalini Yadav state that Deshpande does not give her female protagonists a readymade solution for their problems but she makes them develop a faith in hope so that they can change their circumstances from despair to hope through a route of self-searching and self-examination.

S. Ambika and M.Vaijo Latha in their article, “Tradition Vs Transition: A Psychological Study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine”, examine the position of woman in the Indian society. They further elucidate the fact that in a patriarchal society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, and above all an excellent homemaker.

Chandra Holm in his article “Potent Remedies: Themes and Techniques in Shashi Deshpande’s Small Remedies” opines that Small Remedies is a complex novel. It is a novel about myriad feelings — love,
courage, honesty, truth, death the pain associated with death, about music, about the power exerted by time and by words. It is a novel in which past and present are intermingled.

This dissertation “Gynocentrism in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” aims at showing how the heroines of Deshpande, trapped by family and society, suffer from an acute sense of emptiness in life, how they struggle to abolish gender discrimination and seek reciprocity and harmony in life but ultimately realise that the safest place for them is their own family and get accommodated to the society in which they live. The study makes it clear that though the Indian woman, makes several attempts to liberate herself, she ultimately realises that the safest place for her is her family.

This dissertation focuses upon Deshpande’s novels Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies and Moving On. Though Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, and Small Remedies are found specially suited for the focus of this study, the remaining three novels are referred to wherever found fitted for the study.

This dissertation has six chapters including “Introduction” and “Summation”. In the first chapter “Introduction”, Deshpande is studied against her historical and literary contexts, after a brief discussion of some of the works of her predecessors which have exercised a profound influence on her. This chapter surveys some of the works already done on Deshpande,
discusses the scope of the study and presents summaries of the successive chapters.

The second chapter entitled “Women in Trap” aims at analysing the various factors that contribute to the suppression of women. This chapter will show how Deshpande’s women characters are subservient to male patriarchy and thus are reduced to the status of mere slaves and fawning creatures.

The third chapter “To Be or Not to Be”, the Hamletian state, will depict the dilemma in the woman protagonists of Deshpande — to be traditional or modern. They are found to be in pains, not being able to decide which road they ought to take. They are torn between salvaging their own honour and the presumptive family honour. This chapter projects the protagonists’ state of being confused and indecisive.

The fourth chapter “The Quest for the Self” will explain the quest motif in literary works and how in modern times, writers have changed it into the quest for the self. Though Deshpande’s heroines at some points in their life put an end to their dilemma and return to life to find an anchorage in education, marriage, profession and even in extra-marital relationships, they remain in a state of mental helplessness.

The fifth chapter “Accommodation” will show that though the Indian women struggle to emancipate themselves, at a particular stage they return to their normal self and accommodate themselves to their surroundings. This chapter brings to light how and why the protagonists of Deshpande, return to life realising their responsibility and committed to others. Through their
search for their lost selves, they understand that they can redeem themselves only through their responsibilities in their life.

The last chapter “Summation” will recount the major findings made in the various areas of research. Though Deshpande’s women characters do not quite seem to fit into the traditional established accepted societal mode, there is in them a kind of compromise which enables them to endure a pleasant world.

Thus, Deshpande is a writer par excellence as she deals with human issues which are of interest to all humanity. She is known for her courageous and sensitive handling of significant themes affecting the lives of women. Her works, therefore, constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.