The New Woman Fiction

Introduction

The chapter endeavors to scrutinize the new woman genre as it is productive in giving voice to the cultural memory of the past. The novels testify the various relationships between feminists and the mainstream cultural politics; it stands in antithetical relation to dominant and literary ideologies. The chapter attempts to afford a reasonable comprehension about the advent of the genre, its themes, features and rationale, as these aspects provide a base to explain the arrival of the feminist from the feminine in the late Victorian era. Feminism sought to change human consciousness about male dominance; seeds of feminism that were sown in the 1860’s showed signs of sprouting in the 1890’s though the term was not in the usage. The portrayal of the new woman in fiction and the new woman defined by the punch cartoons vary this shows the confusion in the very understanding of the new woman. The rebellious woman was termed as a threat by the 19th century critics but modern critics commend her for her intellectual astute, for her rational and skeptical bent of mind which brings her closer to the woman of the contemporary times. Victorian moralist’s explication of the novels as polemical and topical in focus; lacking in universal appeal hampered the growth of the genre and its prospects to earn critical reception. Novelists’ began to represent the modern woman as a new type; whose demand for sexual equality replaced the pure woman. Scholarly interest in the new woman has grown since the 1980’s, initially considering her as a reaction to the old or true woman of the Victorian era. Why was it important for the novelists to show such transformations?
To comprehend the importance of the new woman genre; it’s necessary to delve into the past to know what circumstances saw its emergence. It arouses critical interest precisely, because the new woman contested the hegemonic Victorian definition of gender and sexual identities and fuelled the anxieties and fears among the middle class British population. Their expression of free love outside marriage, rejection of heterosexuality, and demand for sexual equality hoist surplus research questions. If new woman is read as a prelude to modernism and a continuation of Victorianism as Teresa Mangum suggests (1998) the complexity and innovative forms of the novel can be discerned.

**The New Woman- a Product of Discourse**

Modern readers may fail to reckon the new woman this invites one to debate about this phenomenon called the new woman. She was condemned as they felt she disrupted female dignity and female respectability that Victorians respected. Who assigns female dignity, the men or the woman? Is it worthy of emulation? Today we critique the very idea of femininity, surprisingly these were the queries that the Victorian new woman novelists stumbled upon. This answered the many doubts that the Victorians nurtured while considering her as a fictional entity that did not exist. The gender politics of the era made them resort to censure the genre ignoring the fact that the new woman novelists represented the new woman ideals. The acceptance of the new woman as a reality itself posed many doubts and queries which stimulate serious discussion on the genre, its character, its purpose and its reception in the past and the present. The Victorians analysed the new woman as an enigma this confirms the complexity that surrounds the term, verifies the confusions and ambiguities that troubled moralists and scholars. Sally Ledger records, “Ouida who extrapolated the now famous- and the then infamous –phrase the new woman
from Sarah Grand’s essay, [1894] *The New Aspect of The Women Question.*” (9) the term new indicates change, and a change is accepted with lot of confrontation. Lyn Pykett observes that the new woman in new woman fiction functioned as a figure of authorial ‘self reflexivity’: she terms her,

> As an intruder into the masculine sphere art, she was the cultural equivalent of the feminists, and also served as a vehicle for figuring a conflicted feminine interiority ...for exploring some of the contradictions involved in dominant definitions of femininity and for celebrating female desire. (“Portraits of The Artist” 128)

The era witnessed women actively participating to disrupt the hegemonic descriptions bestowed on them they sought to change human consciousness about male dominance. The writers began to present a new type of woman who was far removed from the traditional version of the angel in the house, and the popular notions conferred on the new woman by journals and magazines which went to distort the true purpose of the new woman. Why was there a divide in the understanding of the new woman?

The multiple meanings attached to the new woman arouse one’s curiosity to investigate why the new woman was an enigma. Well, analysing how the journals, conservative critics and fiction interpreted the new woman may give a fair reply and also comprehend the turmoil that the emergence of the new woman created in the fin-de-siècle era. The new woman myth constituted by the journals aids in understanding the fin-de-siècle reception of the new woman. Periodicals contributed to create a new myth of femininity, the cartoon described the new woman as the elegant, modernized woman adorned out in a charming
display of buttons and bowl, sedately intent on travels, such descriptions of the new woman were an indication of the woman’s assertion and dominance and the cartoon that showed man as effeminate clearly showed the decline of masculinity. “The spate of cartoon undersizes men endeavouring to support their portly girl friend that spouses on two wheelers.” (Marks 197) The satire was meant to subdue the feminist spirit and bring her back to the domestic sphere. The vituperative and witty comment did not stop the new woman from moving away from a stereotype that bound them to domestic assignments. The image of the new woman is exemplified by one of those punch cartoons entitled Donna Quixote.

She sits, plain and bespectacled in an arm chair, in her sensible, hygienic or rational dress, book in one hand and latch key in the other. She is surrounded by the images of the disorderly notions that crowd her imagination and the sources of these notion-the works of Mona Caird, Ibsen and the Yellow Wall Paper. (Fitzsimons vii)

Truth magazine dated 29th November (1890) notes, “She is no longer the ideal to be wooed and won.” (qtd Marks 198) The punch cartoon by Phil May editor of Punch Magazine (1894) shows the figure of the new woman in a bowler hat, cigarette in hand, knicker blocker legs, kneeling against the counter eyeing the effeminate bar keeper, which illustrates the decline of masculinity; the fear that bothered men at the turn of the century. 1893 New York Truth dated 21st January, column 7, entitled “The Mannish Girl” shows woman as emulating her brother’s manner, woman as losing her feminine traits and relegated to singlehood or women ending in the divorce court. The cartoons gave a significant identification of the new woman’s usurpation of patriarchal privilege. The first
pen sketch carried the caption ‘New Woman’ a cartoon of a woman clothed in man’s dress; her desire for masculine sport gives a physical definition of the new woman as the usurper of patriarchal dispensation. She threatened the popular preconceived notions about gender roles and punch notes in its September issue 1894, “What it will Soon Come to?” (qtd. Collins 90) “The Sterner Sex” dated September 26, 1896, portrays woman as athletic and masculine the agenda of the Punch magazine was to indicate the decline of traditional gender barriers. The 1885 cartoon tilted “Things One Would have Rather Said.” (qtd. Collins 86) invests the woman with feminine traits but indicates at other meanings suggesting woman’s desire to ape the traits of man. It’s important to note that the agenda behind the popular humor magazine (Punch and Truth.) was to portray the New Woman as a comic icon. Grand first made use of it in an article, The Bawling Brotherhood. (1894) in The North American Review in March. An article that attacks men for facilitating the ‘cow woman’ (the wife, mother) the ‘scum-woman’ (the whore) her article enunciates the need to free woman from household drudgery. Punch magazine (dated May 26th 1894) pictured her as existing only on paper; it was believed that the new woman “Lived up on nothing but Foolscap and Ink.” (Richardson and Willis 40) The ink which constituted the new woman was not just the stuff of journalism but she also resembled the magically mesmerizing ink of an added fin de siècle text wherein the gazer could perceive her own image by looking into the past and also the future. The cartoon titled “The Matrons Hiss” dated 13th October 1894 records woman’s desire to ride the bicycle because it is fashionable. 1894, punch cartoon depicting the female cyclist in rational dress provided visual emblem of the social, sexual, political aggression caused by woman in her demand for her equality. The Saturday Review (1899) had an article “Manly Woman” which stated the polemics of women who
intended to gain a share in the political life that was claimed as men’s territory. Such mockery was hurled to evince women’s thoughtlessness and also showed that rigid society ridiculed women throughout 1890’s for discarding the corset. Not all figures went to destabilize positive explorations of the new woman. The cartoon tilted “The Championers” -A female cyclist in rational dress, stylishly dressed, explicitly gendered figures in the background showed a synthesis of old and new. (Femininity and self confidence) Feminists and journalists felt such combinations would bring success. The response of the journals and magazines towards the new woman cartoons hint that controlling the tongue and manner of the new woman was tantamount to restraining her sexuality. The agenda might have been to glorify male authority which seemed to be shaken by the wild woman. Exercising her powers moving out of the patriarchal regime was unheard of and the hard core Victorian moralist digested this by calling her shrieking mad woman. A careful scrutiny of the titles and the pictures go to evince the male politics to undermine the intellectual and the challenging project of women. It also indicates the insecurity of the patriarchs who took up the assignment through writings, cartoon sketches, to silence woman. The image of the new woman created by the humour magazine popularized the new woman though one cannot ignore the damage it did to the new woman. It would therefore not be impudent to state that the new woman reminds us of challenging woman of the caricatures.

The Punch Verse play, a parody of Shakespeare illustrated that woman’s education and entry into politics have drained her energy and she forfeits everything that is remarkable. The verse plays evidenced the gender politics of Punch Magazine to undermine new woman’s effort to gain supremacy. The ‘Valentines’ published by the
Punch instilled a doubt that gender reversal is perilous, new woman fashions were provocative and Truth magazine had a versifier, display the idea that the new woman is a Shakespearean shrew who needs to be tamed. Victorian critics like Hugh Stutfield (1897) considered women’s writing as intuitive and hence devoid of intellectual temper. Such male bias termed the new woman fiction as lacking in reason and in no terms could equal the explorations of men. To illustrate the true potential of the new woman, to correct the distorted image of the new woman, scrutiny of the new woman fiction is essential. It introduces us to a new kind of woman who resembles the modern woman demonstrating her capabilities at home and office. Teresa Mangum notes Grand’s response to conformist’s misuse of the figures;

Where is the new woman, this epicene creature, this gorgon set up by the snarly, who impute to her the faults of both sexes while denying her the charm of either-where is she to be found, if she exits at all? For my own part, until I make her acquaintance, I shall believe her to be the finest work of imagination which the newspapers have yet produced. (27)

The negative publicity propagated by the journals and magazine was underscored by new woman novelists who desired to correct the image portrayed by the journals and cartoons. A major development that disturbed the conservatives was the rejection of the corset. Women in corsets showed woman as delicate and feminine in corset. Novelists showed women in corsets whether they approved of such an attire or they were obliged to show their women characters in such attire is hard to decide. (Margaret Mitchell, George Eliot, Jane Austen.) What made the new woman abandon such an armour that earned her the respect? Was it a mark of respect or constraint? Grand makes (Ideala) Ideala remark “My
country women bind every organ in their bodies” (136) Ideala, in the late Victorian era feels that corsets were harmful, which shows the change in woman’s thinking. This rational analysis of woman’s dress and manner hints at woman’s review of the patriarchal dress culture which appeased the male interest. The change in dress clearly evinced the transition. The term Bluestocking was attached to the new woman, who signified her adept at writing and the emergence of an organized women’s circle Langham Place group showed women actively involved in countering her opponent. Bluestocking the name originates from the Bluestocking social circle of London intellectuals of the 18th and the 19th century. The original Blue stocking circle was an interlinked net work of literary “Saloons notable for encouraging intelligent conversation among woman and men.” (Baldick 40) Women held parties to argue about literary and scholarly interests following the instance of French saloons of the 17th century. The latter part of the 18th century saw the contradictory image of women as rebellious and virtuous that positioned towards the ideological stance of Bluestockling feminism. The new woman’s entry into university, the formation of woman’s union (suffrage movement) and women’s entry into the public domain signaled the recognition of women as writers, political activist and so on hence the labeling of Bluestocking. The burgeoning of woman’s movement made the emergence of the new woman possible, she was denounced because she replaced the feminine. The new woman did not emerge without inheritance, Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of The Rights of Women, and women activists of the early and mid Victorian era illustrate that she had predecessors who proved that she was not an imaginary figure seen only in words or caricatures. She was met with opposition not only by the men folk but also by women. Eliza Linton’s novel The One Too Many (1894) corresponded to the exemplary new
woman as “A mannish overeducated bore, as a bad mother, and as lacking … ideal Victorian womanhood” (Luckhurst 76) showed clear signs of protest by orthodox groups. The Strike of Sex published incognito in the Quarterly review (1894) by Reverend Barry attacked Grand’s novel The Heavenly Twins for its supposedly radical scrutiny, accusing the novel as aboriginal for displaying the uncouth element. He like the other conservative critics dismissed the ways of the new woman as jeopardizing the place of the English race. Hence the new woman and the new woman fiction struggled to erase these popular views which were also responsible for the new woman fiction losing its importance in the 20th century. Recent studies perceive the new woman as advanced and the benefit of education sets her apart from her predecessors. Sally Ledger says, “The new woman positioned herself in the modern vanguard” (5), and Gail Cunningham describes her as “Intelligent, individualistic and principled” (11) she affected emancipated habits like smoking, using bad language, and moving unescorted. The stereotypical new woman was educated, desired a companion not a controlling figure, preferred to remain single opting a career. The reviewers’ refusal to accept her as real led to confusions about her identity, because they believed she was just a caricature and did not exist in reality. Patricia Marks observes that the caricatures of the new woman were “Not so much an exaggeration of the new woman’s character but of the new woman as one who is the embodiment of multifold fears of change itself.” (205)

The New Woman fiction

New woman fiction endeavored to correct the long observed conservative beliefs about woman as the virgin or the whore. Novels that followed the Victorian conventions portrayed the deviant woman as the whore and subservient as the virgin. Women heard in
voices of tradition that their fortune rested in their own femininity. If this was the cultural scenario of Britain how did the new woman deviate? What was the focus of the new woman fiction? The new woman changed the emotional landscape of Britain, how did this get reflected in the text? What were the responses of the public and women? Sydney Grundy’s *The New Woman* (1894) an original play in four acts states that the new woman has invented a new genre which distances her from the conservative circle. What aspects distanced the new genre from the conservative circle? The question asks for critical probing of the features that go to designate it as the new woman fiction. The new woman novels can be read as a corrective, a revisionist strategy to present the new woman fiction as a new feminine-cum feminist poetics that transformed traditional literary and cultural paradigms. There is also a warning that despite these women novelists’ frenzy to stimulate confidence and free woman from constraints, complete freedom was still a myth. Hardy in *Candour in Fiction* debated that traditional notion about women should not intervene in the candid depiction of women. The candidness that Hardy talks about serves to show the range of feminine concerns as against feminine fulfillment that formed the core of the British culture. This honesty in the depiction of women engaged by the novelists shows a new set of feminine signs. The power of word helped to change what these novelists aspired to alter; their astute observation of their surroundings and their sense of reasoning presented a different ethics which confused women and men about their stance. They felt that their individual observations were a part of a greater world; they were women speaking to women. Post feminists may term the new woman novels as moderate and by the standards of 20th century feminism they may be radical. They made woman articulate at a time when society thought her to be voiceless.
Women’s inability to articulate is dubbed by Betty Friedan as The Problem That Has No Name. (in Feminine Mystique) Friedan wrote her book when she was unable to find a publisher; host of women saw themselves in it. Her problem echoes the problem of the new woman writers to find a publisher; for instance, Grand published her own book when publishers placed their dissent. The new woman fiction articulated or gave voice to the subaltern. This daring act had to be frustrated; the male regime administered its punitive measure by terming the fiction as merely popular lacking in universal appeal. The non canonical label attached to it was an affront which went to mar the true perspective of the fiction. Their novels stated a calmly reasoned call to help woman by liberating them from the demands of marriage, motherhood and domestic careers; they were ahead of the curve. The novelists knew that they were a focus of literary controversy with regard to what they wrote. She had to be shown as the thinking woman and one can decisively state that the picture of the female genius helped to counter the existing status reserved for the male writers. Presenting signs of creative genius she summoned herself as an innovator and leader in the society. The fictional creation is in some sense unusual as she has to accept her defeat or justify her place in the fictional world. She was the product of reader’s response which increased the sales of the fiction and also the popularity of the writers. New woman according to Angelique Richardson had become a marketable novelty figure,

Her positive attributes of physical and mental health, and alluring these with traditional heroines attributes of youth and beauty, authors were able to create an attractive heroine who was thoroughly modern and topical. (64)

It was believed that she was largely a literary creation, featuring in the fiction of the time and that she was a full of ideas and aspirations of radical feminists desiring freedom. It is
also true that the fictional illustration facilitated the readers to connect with the possibilities and challenge of the late 19th century feminist thought. The new woman fiction championed to present the real concerns of the new woman. Mangum records Hugh Stutfeld’s scrutiny of the new woman in his antifeminist article “Tommyrotics” (1895) as significant to hint at the male critics’ reception of the new woman,

With her head full of all the ‘ologies’ and ‘isms’ with sex-problems and heredity, and other gleanings from surgery and the lecture room there is no space left for humour, and her novels, are for the most part merely pamphlets, sermons or treasures in disguises. (Mangum 157)

He saw the new woman in fiction as an element of the pathological novel. He felt that it’s a symptom of the mental disorder where civilized mankind is made to suffer and calls the new woman novelist’s project as polemic. How did the novelists respond to such critical assessment? One can perceive the opposition from the male critics which clearly evince their insecurity. Such views smothered the novelists’ artistic pursuit; it would not be harsh to state that the condition of the women writers was as precarious as their heroines. They were condemned because they tackled the self abnegation and docile image of the ideal womanhood and its super structure. The new traits of the new woman extended the imagination of the 19th century world, for instance, Grand used the genre to extend the meaning of the new woman, her characters as observed by Mangum,

Cover the spectrum of the turn of the –century, middle class, independent women; adolescent-hoydens, gender switching heroines, free love advocates,
women of genius, novelists and orators, suffragists and social reformers, teachers and business women. (4)

In a nutshell Mangum defines the new woman which also suggests the manifold orientation of the new woman distinct from the fixed images prescribed by the fathers. One cannot deny that they were path breakers and their actions were hope to some and annoyance to others; the pendulum swings to and fro, further complicating the very understanding of the new woman. Novelists sought to revitalize the ideal of Victorian womanhood, (juxtaposition of the old and the new) it did not show them as women who were devoid of the feminine conduct but illustrated the revolutionary zeal in women aspiring to equal men, that comes closer to the first wave feminist aims and bears resemblance to what Showalter terms the feminine phase. All this demonstrates that the new woman debate was the centre of all discussions but failed to give a unified conception of the new woman. What makes the genre a phenomenon of the fin de siècle culture? The entanglement with decadence, socialism, imperialism, emergent homosexual identities were addressed which probably was a daring attempt that early women writers did not venture. These innovative strategies of the new woman were condemned by critics such acts indicate the failure to recognize the feminist consciousness that new woman writers Grand, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner articulated. Ann Ardis argues,

The new woman replaced the pure woman and the angel in the house with a heroine who is either sexually active outside of marriage or abstains for political rather than moral lesson. (3)
Ardis’s estimation of the genre as one that challenges essentialist thinking about class, gender, maternal instinct and sexual identity evince the revisionist strategy of the novelists. The genre by challenging the separate sphere ideology invited widespread agitation. The new woman novelists were committed to the social advancement of women and attempted to explode the binary opposition.

New woman fiction established a tradition of feminist political literature written for and consumed by a female mass market. The social function of popular literature was to stimulate and allay social anxieties. (Modleski 28)

Recent interpretations of the new woman fiction show how the new woman in fiction positioned herself as the precursor of the modern woman. The genre in general concentrates on civic constitutional issues (social, political, educational, economic freedom) rather than the debates surrounding gender and sexuality. This proves that the women asked for greater autonomy in everything. Diana of Dobson by Cicely Hamilton (1908) is known as a popular work which gives a realistic picture of woman’s work in a drapery store and its examination of the economic motives for marriage. Elizabeth Robin and Florence Bell’s, Alan’s Wife, (1893) are labeled as new woman plays for their exposition of the oppression of family, life and labour in their works. Agnes Grove’s, Ubiquitous Woman, (1909) a short story that exhibits the oratory skills of a vivacious woman throws the male chauvinist narrator into a state of confusion because she is described as intensely feminine looking woman but her actions are unwomanly. Such moves probably hint the transition from the feminine to the feminist. (Not a wholesale rejection of the feminine attribute.) It’s hard not to reckon the fact that Grand’s Ideala The Beth Book Mona Caird’s The Morality of Marriage, (1897) Olive Schreiner, The Story of
An African Farm (1883) served as a theoretical framework for modern feminism. The novelists not only identified the need to rethink about the stance and identity of woman but also showed variation in their depiction of woman. Schreiner and Grand upheld the notion of self-sacrifice of the motherhood and affirmed motherly instinct as innate in woman which women could not shun. Caird, rejected the image of a woman with the baby as she perceived it as woman’s subjugation. Such assortment in the representation of the new woman speaks for the contemporary relevance. The unprecedented candour about female sexuality, marital failures, rejection of heterosexuality evidenced decadence of male dominance. The era witnessed heterosexuality and its associations with molestations and contagious diseases that might have been one of the prominent reasons for the decline in heterosexuality which the new woman writers illustrate. (Grand’s novel, The Heavenly Twins.) Their novels encourage utopian idea of egalitarian sisterhood and the power dynamics of female friendship. They voiced their disregard for heterosexuality which encourages them to regard each other as rivals and discourage female bonding. The genre if analyzed considering what critics (Showalter to Joseph Boone) have observed that fiction responded to conservative challenge and male opposition with forces of deft logic can be read as writings that estimated modernist formal experiments to articulate problems (The new woman writers imploded the cultural and literary framework constructed by the patriarchs to bear out female artists as genius.) They used fiction to refigure female desire as divergent and innate, venturing their own representational claim and dissecting the cultural milieu which shapes their female characters. The novelists also reflected their own identities as they provided an insider’s commentary. They combined the individual with the collective to present a problem and also provide solutions and individualised woman’s
oppression (Beth in *The Beth Book*, Ideala in *Ideala*, Evadene, and Angelica in *The Heavenly Twins*) and the readers could identify it as their suffering. The novelists feminized contemporary scientific discourses by linking feminism to evolution. Darwinism helped to see men not as divine creation but as normal men. His definition survival of the fittest undermines the dominant evolutionist discourse of the fin-de-siècle. Women demanded revolution than gradual change which emphasized men as vulnerable. Women writers’ emphasized female friendship and sisterly affection as more important than sexual love; she contested the gender codes such manner earned her the title incipient lesbian.

The female sisterhood and their protégées and the social hierarchies of women’s literature of that time largely remain unchallenged. Friendships developed only between new women characters themselves who often came from the same upper–middle–upper class background. (Heilmann 21)

Lesbianism in the new woman fiction offered a counter plot to the conventional marriage; these aspects mark the novels radical purpose. One can see them as visionaries who championed sexual freedom; Grand makes Ideala remark, (*Ideala*)

A woman is made to swear to love a man who will probably is unlovable, to honour a man who is likely as not to be undeserving of honour, and to obey a man who may be incapable of judging what is best either for himself or her. I have no respect for the ages that uphold such nonsense. (75)

They mark a clear shift from the works of the early 19th century women writers, who could not articulate realistically. They were not obliged to preface the works with disclaimers and apologies as the earlier women writers. Yet their surrogates within the fiction offer fervent
appeal for social and artistic freedom. The utopian impulses of woman artists were largely responsible to construct stories which re-imagined the roles of artist and muse. (Women writers had to become muses themselves) Olive Schreiner The Buddhist Priest’s Wife (1892) Charlotte Perkins Gilman The Yellow Wall Paper Grand’s Ideala Mona Caird’s Daughters of Danus (1894) are instances to show the crucial differences between male and female experiences. Women in these novels tap a wide range of feminine anxieties about the confinement of marriage, the burden of motherhood, and the demands of the body. The novels provide the space and climate for women’s personal growth, such presentations make Sally Ledger comment, “The new woman novelist was herself regarded as ‘advanced’ and very much associated with the modern world, fiction.” (27) The striking feature of the novel is that female characters are endowed with creative ability, feminist’s beliefs articulated gives an idea about the responses of women at the fin-de-siècle. Grand’s Beth and Ideala, Hester Gresham in Mary Chomondeley (Red Pottage 1879) is learned, and shrewd she challenges to explode patriarchal ideology. Ideala’s strong disavowal about adherence to obsolete beliefs signifies Grand’s astute and rational estimation of the 19th century beliefs. (Ideala)

Don’t you think it absurd to cling to old customs that are dying a natural death?...make your laws to meet its needs… We should try more experiments…what we want… must be found eventually. (75)

Traces of the new woman find its place in Ibsen’s writing. The banging of the door in A Doll’s House created vibrations in the female minds and also signaled either the end of the world or the advent of a new world for women. The 1880’s was a decade of socialist organization for the intellectual woman. Doll’s house was not just about woman’s revolt
about the old order but also about revolutionary call for the redefinition of marriage. Did the banging signal women’s downfall? “They can fail, and if they do we should still have learnt something from them.” (Ideala 75) this was the hope of the new woman.

The varied depictions of the new woman by periodicals and fiction resulted in doubts about the clear identification of the new woman. The refusal to accept the new woman as real was largely due to their perception of her as a caricature. The parodic images signified the emerging types of women suffragists, novelists and educated women. The journalistic image was met with strong opposition by the suffragists terming it as reactionary. The new woman novels depict the lived experience of the women writers; they used the genre to recast the woman as assertive rather than strident, intelligent and discriminating. Their writings were condemned as boisterous, perverse and decadent artists (Huysmans and Jean Baudelaire) showed their contempt for it declaimed male supremacy. But they failed to see that their fiction does not portray woman as Venus fly traps but represent female desire as creative force in artistic imagination and as Schaffer asserts “Fictionalizing the new woman does not seem to relegate her to a safely marginal space.” (44) A survey of the new woman evince that they were involved in the debates on gender and reproduction. Grand and Schreiner were committed to social advancement of women with a belief in eugenics. Eugenic ideas found expression in Grand and Schreiner’s novels. Francis Galton (1883) coined the term ‘Eugenics’ meaning ‘good in stock’ meaning it is not confined to questions of judicious mating, and takes into account all influences that would enable a better chance of prevailing. Eugenics as rational reproduction in the 19th century has been ignored but the most sustained expressions are found in the new woman fiction. Novelists have upheld the contribution of women in regenerating the British imperial race. Eugenics appealed to
women because of their subordination; while Grand and Schreiner approved of it, Caird attacked the apostles of eugenics and termed eugenic love as crude biological determinism. (Today eugenics is read as a brutal movement which inflicts violations on people; various eugenic policies, birth control, marriage restriction, genetic screening, were coercive.) Such diversity arouses interest to learn more of the new woman novelist’s strategies, their style, and creativity. The eugenic concerns are touched upon in Grand’s last two novels Adams Orchard (1912) and The Winged Victory (1916), they evince Grand’s retribution but as critics like Teresa magnum (1998) observe that Grand finds it difficult to free herself from the ideological maze of conflicting ideas hence could not complete her work. Grand’s confusion reflects the confusion of women in transition. Such confusions does not seem to appear in her earlier novels by contrast they offer subversive revisions of authoritative discourse, (Ideala, and The Beth Book) Conflicting debates surrounded the very understanding of the new woman; she was at once too sexual and not sexual enough, desiring single status and also advocating eugenic procreation. Such variations can be distinguished in the depiction of the woman and motherhood in the fiction of the new woman. Motherhood was regarded by Grand and Schriener while Mona Caird opposed the ties of maternity. Hadria Fullerton the heroine of Caird’s Daughter of Danus is filled with averse at the sight of a woman with her new born child.

The eugenic writers Grand, Schreiner worked to present a more able bodied and social minded mother who would improve the human race. They understood motherhood as a great responsibility rather than a form of bondage but it did not stop them from exposing the hidden realities of marital bondage. They show how their women characters choose to be feminine by evading servility to man. Most feminists of the era Josephine Butler and
Emily Davies celebrated motherhood as a sign of moral superiority, Caird discussed patriarchy and marriage prior to Charlotte Gilman’s *Women and Economics* (1898)

Cicely Hamilton in *Marriage as Trade* (1909) and Elizabeth Robins in *Ancilla* (1924) critique marriage and motherhood which is similar to Betty Friedan who believes, “Motherhood like a suburban wasteland is a trap…the comfortable concentration camp.” (16) a frequently repeated image in Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* is the station wagon full of children in itself which is used to epitomize this new image which insists that she is not a person but ‘a woman’ (16) This reminds us of Caird’s critique of mother with a baby image in her essays *Morality of Marriage* like Friedan she voiced her radical views; this speaks of the relevance of the new woman thoughts. Writers in the past and the present through their assessment of motherhood show that women are still in an unsatisfactory situation. How can one talk of woman attaining advancement? How does one assess woman as advanced? Who takes the onus to assess, the woman or the man? Such assessment does it put an end to the debates about women? New woman novels were progressive for designing women centric novels covering the growth and changes in the life of female protagonists. Both male and female writers concentrated to fulfill this norm. The novels may also be seen as the confession novels as it aimed to articulate what women experienced as a woman, giving room for the questioner and the questioned. The scope of the new woman novels rested not only on hinting at what was hidden from oneself but also illustrate how incapable it was to reveal. Their observations are bold but true; Ideala’s critique of the marriage laws throws much light on the arbitrary laws that went to define it, her language, her articulation are ‘gynocentric.’ (Ideala) “Man thinks he may marry, never cares to be the nobler or better of it, … the most sacred bond of man woman union is
everywhere considered lightly.” (50) The novels articulated feelings of free love, desiring sexual love outside marriage, lesbianism, heterosexuality, (Schriener’s, The Story of An South African Farm) such strategies of the novelists aimed at contradicting the limitations of the Victorian society. Sensational and new woman novelist’s desired change, sparks of rebellion that the sensational novelists had hinted by subtly touching on controversial subjects had probably given vent to new woman novelists’ to discuss it more candidly. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argued that the 19th century woman novelists’ fear of being alienated stopped them from contravening the norm and this resulted in the fear of authorship such anxieties trapped them in male script with stereotypical female characters. Hence the unruly woman is tamed and subdued; the assertion is transitory. Does this illustrate gender politics?

Showalter argued that women’s writing has evolved through historical stages: from the feminine to the feminist to the female, she has also added the fourth stage where women writers have the freedom to choose any subject in any form. Her book Jury of her Peers (2009) argues that one woman’s freedom of choice is another woman’s post-feminism. Female tradition, Showalter, opines comes from woman to mind the private lives. The conflict between the urge to articulate oneself and the meagerness of the accessible, saleable form, made writers follow a new path. Sensational and the new woman novelists in choosing woman as their subject and formulating a genre which was until then not used by the main stream novelists or canonical writers come under the fourth category free. The women novelists left an indelible mark but sadly they were women writers, hence did not come to prominence. Their fame was transitory when compared to male writers, women writers in the past and the present complain that their fiction is undervalued because they
did not enjoy the license to display licentious subject as the male writers enjoyed, (Rushdie, Tolstoy, Norman Mailer) Tolstoy is praised for he dealt with manly subjects (War and Peace 1869) While Hardy and Henry James (Tess of d’Urbervilles, Portrait of A Lady 1891) are reckoned as less ambitious writers because they like the women writers concentrated on domestic subjects. The changes in the perception of women and new images bestowed on women show the transition from the feminine to the feminist. They also expound the narrowness of women’s lives and offer a series of vignettes about what their resistance consisted of and how arduous it was for women writers to counterfeit a professional identity as a writer. New woman and the feminist movement showed committee of activists voicing women’s rights, 1890’s according to Showalter was the “Starting point of the wider modern movement…still in the process of becoming worldwide and all inclusive.” (66) The novelists wrote to alert readers; Ella Hepworth’s The Story of Modern Woman (1894) was a plea to form a union among women to oppose the specific abuses by man. Lucas Mallet’s The Wages of Sin (1891) and Annie Holdsworth & Joanna Trial’s, Spinster (1894) hint at the solidarity of wife and mistress or unity of virgin and whore, as a crucial element in the struggle against the standard sexual morality. Such works were interrupted as a political act of sexual solidarity and unification and was observed by reviewers as having the leanings of an organized school. Eliza Linton’s The Wild Woman (1891) and Mrs. Crackenthorpe’s The Revolt of Daughters (1868) developed a definition of the new woman denouncing her as authoritative and dictatorial and affirmed that the wild woman contributed to the decline of civilization. Mona Caird defended the wild woman suggesting that the political and social freedom served to free all women and all workers. Such arguments strengthen the fact that the new
woman showing signs of rebellion and assertion emerged out of the feminine. The acceptance of the new woman was hindrance to some, boon to radical thinkers. Their fiction reflects the tension between modernity and traditional values. Grand’s *The Beth Book*, *Ideala*, created a being that existed but had been buried alive by Victorian mores. Schreiner’s letters explore the intellectual, political, and scientific controversies of the day. She demonstrates in her *Woman and Labor* (1920) that motherhood is a unique trait that all women share and this trait binds women together. This shows that the blue stocking image of the new woman was not consistent in all new woman fiction. Schreiner’s *Lyndall* (The *Story of An South African Farm*) resembles a ‘princess’ she exhibits Victorian beauty. Grand shows how Beth’s eyes attract the public eye; such diversity showed body as central to new woman debates, they claim their bodies as their own. But such depictions of women were misinterpreted by conservative critics who called the image developed by the new woman as vulgar. Grant Allen in *Woman Who Did* (1895) warned woman of the repercussions that would accompany resistance and defiance. Millicent Fawcett’s review on “The Woman Who Did”, (in Contemporary Review, 1898) attacks Grant Allen for presenting women’s freedom in terms of sexual issue rather than social issue.

The woman that Grant Allen condemned went to exemplify the journalistic stereotype, labeling her as morbid and neurotic. The novels gave a genuine picture of the thinking woman who was misunderstood by the Victorians. Elizabeth Chapman emphasized the need to distinguish between the social reformer and the phantom he calls her “The real reformer and a friend of humanity, whom I call the best woman” (xiii). A careful scrutiny of the novels shows that they fulfill the task propounded by Elizabeth Chapman. (We see Ideala and Beth as reformers they endeavor to serve the need of the
society more than the self.) We see the absence of the neurotic and the frigid woman, we see a woman who is sane enough to rationalize the ills of society, her purpose as Ideala states, “You can’t sweep a room that requires it without raising a dust; the thing is let the dust settle than remove it.” (135.) the novels had to discuss femininity to a wider audience it is this agenda of the novelists that make critics of today consider new woman novels as a manifesto for change. The new woman novelists present woman as neither the shrieking woman nor the club woman in monocle. She is refined, feminine, but not docile she intends to make the most of her “intellectual capabilities” (Marks 205) The femininity she displays is eager to find a means of supporting herself without violating her traditional roles but her demands for education her creative urge was new to the society. The women in their novels (Ideala, Beth, Evadene,) display the sobriety and moral character that the Victorian standards prescribed but they also critique the dual standards. Such depiction of woman in fiction illustrates that she is not surmised as the asexual or the sycophant but as rational beings with a radical verve. Various perception of the new woman by the Victorian and modern critics as the daughter of decadence, mother of modernism, a feminist harbinger, a shrieking woman, complicate the very understanding of the new woman it served to generate. Active rewriting of culture and literature also served to correlate the artifice of resistance. The avant-garde in new woman fiction that critics (Ann Heilmann) observe is the appliance of the mythical method. Myth is used as a means to manipulate incessant parallels between current and past construal. Schreiner considers biblical allegory as pure symbols which helped her to convey intensely felt thoughts. Like Cixous, Schreiner draws on allegory in order to sanctify the creative process. Cixous speculates the writer as a creator who is endowed with divine proclivities. She opines that the writers can canonize,
transform, the Bible, paint it in another way. Ladder in Cixous’s *School of Dreams*,
passage (*In Three Steps in the Ladder* 1993) the stairs in Schreiner’s *The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed*, (1890) and hunter allegories in *The Story of An African Farm* symbolize
androgyny, a world that transcends binaried hegemonies. Caird’s use of myth, Grand’s
manipulation of the feminine mystique, illustrates the enterprise of the new woman writers
in the fin de siècle art and culture. Grand rebuked the women activists for their callous
appearance and brazen manner but she was also concerned with deconstructing and
subverting the multiple feminine faces of the new woman.

Once captured by the spell of the feminine mystique, even the most
resistant of opponents were likely to lend an ear to feminist arguments. If
cultivated, this strategy constituted a powerful means of ‘kicking against the
pricks,’ (Grand 25,26)

Grand’s new woman is interpreted as the arbiter of sophistication; her article “The Age of
Marriage” (1888) illustrates the discursive strategy, initiating moderately feminist ideas to
married, non-militant, middle class women. This strategy gives her an identity as a middle
brow writer as Teresa magnum states. Ann Heilmann appraises

Grand’s strategic focus on a middle-class readership found a recent echo
in Elaine Showalter’s remark that if she were to start all over again. ‘I would write
more for the general public rather than an academic audience… [A]cademic
feminism much too quickly cut off from the mainstream.’ (16.)

The strategy may have been a premeditated display of the feminine role with an intention to
convert a form of subordination into an assertion. Hugh Stutfield otherwise known for his
critique of the new woman technique (His attack on women writers who were eager to survey the sexual emotions of woman) commends the “Sarah Grandian School for its modern incarnation of the feminine spirit.” (“The Psychology of Feminism”, 107) Caird used the Victorian context to demystify motherhood Heilmann observes,

Caird ‘re-visioned’ the law, language and literature of the ‘fathers’ in multiple and intersecting ways: historically by tracing the emergence and impact of patriarchy on the condition of women in the family and society; discursively, by challenging dominant scientific taxonomies and models of interpretation; and intertextually, by re-writing classical and modern myth in order to dismantle the foundation stories which defined women as objects of exchange. (158)

Her essays the Morality of Marriage presented women as willing martyrs, in The Path Ways to God (1898) the new woman figure is presented in diverse guises- a narcissist, a Christian martyr, a victim of male myth making, and a theosophist aesthete. Caird used myth to deconstruct each of the guises presented, (In Path Way to Gods) Anna is constantly constructed as a Christian martyr but she fails to live upto the heroic dimensions) Caird presented feminist critique of the patriarchal plan to embrace the new woman through myth. She critiqued the social purist kind spearheaded by Grand’s Ideala. Her novels present female identity crisis through the lens of male subjectivity that serves a dual function. It reflects the feminist discourses at the turn of the century and also highlights neo-patriarchal views among the promoters of rational and advanced thinking. The names Ideala, The Beth Book, Daughters of Danus, reveal the symbolic meanings, she is continually returned to her sex and made to explain herself on the basis of difference. Critics term Grand s definition of womanhood as narrow and confined to the traditional
image of woman though she propagated woman’s education as significant to mold woman to be a rational.

Grand, Schreiner and Caird conceived of the new woman’s struggle for self-realisation and social regeneration as the new epic which would ring in the new age of women’s liberation in which to be born a woman will not be to be born branded. (Heilmann 233)

Heilmann’s observation is significant as it presents the agenda of the new woman’s purport. The new woman novelist’s critique of the Madonna / whore image show their contempt but not wholesale disapproval of marriage. They systematically engage in deconstructing the misogynist mythologies that Barthes postulates, “When myth reaches the entire community, it is from the latter that the misogynist must become estranged if he wants to liberate the myth.” (Barthes 22) The new woman by exposing the wrongs of the patriarchal mythology provides a niche for the emergence of the new mythologies where female desire is presented as a creative force that goes to probably enunciate the term new. New woman novels invoked traditional arguments of sexual differences, integrating them into new nomenclatures of masculinist science in order to reverse the dominant hegemonies, this could be one of the performative methods which is evidenced by illustrations accompanying Jane Stoddart’s interview,

Promoting the new woman as a feminine superstar, while advising aspiring feminists to refine their seduction skills, Grand constructed femininity at one and the same time as an innate quality and a performative act, as both an
essential feature of evolution’s show piece, modern womanhood and as ‘a part of
art’. (“Woman at Home” 261)

Their purpose was didactic that aimed to induce feminist ideas among female middle class
readers and also offering suitable suggestions to feminists on how to market their cause. If
Grand voiced her views with scientific authority, radical feminists like Mona Caird
observed that male-centered ideological constructs even when purloined for feminist
rationale were bound to reinforce patriarchal patterns in the family. These instances show
how the new woman fiction presents woman as one whose composed gaze signifies
strength of mind and self-confidence in the knowledge of public success. Serene to the new
woman novelists did not mean docility or unquestioning submission to the will of
patriarchal paradigm but to show slight variance in their manner and action which cannot
be termed virile from the modern feminist perception but a blend of both the feminine and
feminist virtues. The interpolation of feminine and feminist stance, code of conduct and
linguistic awareness makes Grand engage in building a Bakhtinian dialogic principle on
hybridization. “Mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an
encounter, within the arena of an utterance between two different linguistic
consciousnesses.” (Bakhtin 117) one may arrive at an understanding that reading Grand
dialogically, it helps to clarify. The conflict between conformist rhetoric written to appease
the domestic market and the politically sizzling tone of Grand’s fiction that focus on
advanced readership that is involved in scholarly debates. This makes one rethink on
Victorian popular views on women’s writing as intuitive and lacking in intellect. Her
article Modern Girl, (1894) challenged the idea that all women are born mothers, and its
counter piece in Temple Magazine (1898) rebuked the readers for being nonchalant to their
responsibilities as mothers. Such confusions show novelists caught between tradition and modernity. Novelists make an attempt to entrap the new woman within the web of influential dialogue of femininity (The Beth Book) they brought about the process which Bakhtin describes as “Coming to know One’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own belief system in someone else’s system.” (118) This illustrates that the inclusion of femininity was essential to promote feminism.

**Realism in New woman fiction**

The latter part of the century show novelists depicting streaks of realism in their fiction (Hardy, Gissing) did the new woman novelists adhere to the Victorian realistic tradition? The new woman fiction had streaks of melodrama, adventure, the idyll and the sensational elements invoked, which resulted in labeling the genre as popular, an affront that hampered the prospects of the genre. The Yellow book (magazine) condemned the new literature for evoking a ‘sensation’ which served to disintegrate into effeminacy. “New woman writers of the fin de siècle appropriated an avowedly masculine aesthetic for feminist end when they affiliated themselves with the new realist school.” (Ledger 180) They wrote sexually frank fiction in doing so they sought to redefine ‘Realism’-they meant to expose the ‘relation of the sexes’ (Candour in Fiction,) their fiction intended to question the traditional assumption about realism. Non linear qualities and the post modernist narratives contributed to the transition from Victorianism to Modernism. The novelists use of the stream of consciousness technique to unravel the interior thoughts of their woman, (George Egerton’s short stories, Grand’s The Beth Book) Their novels present a different form of reality which differs from the realist writers of the era to some extent even Hardy though he shows similarities in his earnest depiction of the woman’s trauma. Why should domestic
reality be muted? The depiction of domestic life as it truly existed might have been the purpose of the novelists which was termed as unreal by the hard core Victorians. What is realism in fiction to new woman novelists? Their emphasis on aestheticism than realism was a feature that was condemned by the Victorian critics. Pykett evaluates Mona Caird’s novels as a “self conscious aesthete.” (Improper Feminine 140) psychological introspection that Lyndall in Daughter of Danus undergoes evinces Caird’s use of realist strategy this according to Pykett is significant factor to mark the transition from “Victorianism to Modernism.” (Improper Feminine 18) New woman novels pushed the boundaries of realism to represent woman as the outsider who gave different perspective of woman, it exemplifies how the interest of the new realists was to use the new woman genre to comment on wider social issues from a feminist perspective. Jane Elridge Millers, in Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel (1999) observes, a common trait in their realistic portrayal of human life and in their frank discussion of sexuality. Realistic depiction to them meant they question the atrocity of the male regime without the tag of tradition attached. They ignored the realists practice because such a procedure aimed to mask the unjust ways in so doing they probably aimed to depict women’s problem as women experienced

**Gender and Imperialism**

The turn of the century saw massive territorial expansion and orderly imperial promotion. Economists like Karl Marks and J.S. Mill emulated Adam Smith in fostering overseas expansion which also meant subduing the natives. The colonial settlement was a way of reducing economic stagnation at home. The social and economic scenario of Brittan prompted many critics (Elisa Linton The Wild Women and The Insurgent, 1891) to
consider the new woman as cultural degeneration of the English imperial race, and as an awkward colonialist. Hugh Stutfield calls her “a product of mentally disturbed minds” (“The Psychology of Feminism” 107) it was believed that the new woman of the press threatened the future of the empire; such labels weakened the purpose of the novel. Angelique and Richardson (2001) state that gender and imperialism is ideologically complimentary, prompts one to see if the new woman defied or adhered to the belief of the British Empire which upheld the traditional ideals of femininity. Fears about social degeneration meant laying emphasis on motherhood; but the new woman’s rejection of motherhood and heterosexuality shook the stability of the empire. Imperialism was a highly gendered phenomenon, words like, manly, effeminate, was frequently used by the imperial masters. The new woman novelists challenged the former role of men and woman and also exposed the social limitations of the society. Cultural concerns about gender and empire converge in new woman fiction; it proclaims male superiority and the right to dominate. It revolves around the ‘other’ which works under the spell of ideological constellations. Empire builders speak of territorial expansion and create a broader sphere of action; new woman fiction uses the same metaphors to move out of the domestic sphere to enter a larger domain that is proclaimed as man’s territory. They like the imperial masters cross the boundaries to claim their right. Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm and Mona Caird’s Daughter of Danus. The new woman concentrated on material imperialism (faith in the empire and belief in rational production) Grand was subject to censure for discussing immoral topics like antivivisection, venereal disease (Heavenly Twins, Ideala) as it uncovered the defects of man and urged women to defy heterosexual relationship. But it is also observed by critics that it aligned with imperialistic project, it struggled to free woman
from the private domain by jingoistically sustaining the throng overseas. Her acceptance of 
the racist colonial policy might have been due to limitations that these kinds of choices 
placed on women, the most obvious one, rejecting the feminine. Their narratives were the 
products of their time; they were conditioned by the racial biased structure. Fiction that 
calls for woman’s emancipation from the imperial and patriarchal regime was perceived as 
detrimental as it marked the decline of masculinity; conservative beliefs went to enunciate 
that the future of the British society lay in reckoning the importance of women’s role as 
mothers of the empire. Nevertheless some novelists presented the new woman as an 
Amazonian figure who exhibits masculine tastes; (Marie Corelli, My Wonderful Wife, 
1899) represented a threat to all that was feminine. Susan Meyer (Imperialism at Home and 
Race and Victorian Women’s fiction, 1996) observes that novelists were cautious; hence 
adhered to Victorian notions which probably impeded them from making their women 
challenge the dominant structures. . Eliza Linton’s article the Girl of the Period took new 
woman theme but the 1880’s periodicals rallied the debates’ surrounding the new woman 
and they are assessed by scholars as “The humble, self-sacrificing and socially oppressed 
or the unsexed terrifying violent Amazon ready to overturn the world.” (Schaffer 13). But 
critics also observe the new woman novelists Grand in particular; sharing the experience of 
imperialism and feminism. Her fiction centers on the ideal of a white English upper middle 
class woman, (Heavenly Twins) her new woman is cautious enough to retain the traditional 
role of Victorian woman but one cannot admit her writing as wholly conservative even if 
one finds streaks of it. Schreiner’s fiction evinces sparks of anti- imperialist feminist views 
and unyielding stance that resulted due to her social and political isolation. Her 
condemnation of the colonist’s policies of Britain against South Africans (Anglo Boer war)
clearly shows her anti imperialistic view. Her fiction gave voice to the ‘other’ but one can also perceive that she wrote from the white man’s perspective. Schereiner unconditionally challenged British colonial policies, what prompted her to adopt such a technique? If the new woman is perceived as the oppressed then the novelists have done justice to show the limited options that woman writers had to challenge the dominant structures. Gender and imperialism practiced at home might have crippled the woman novelists to look beyond such prejudices. Nevertheless an attempt to cross the boundaries of gender and imperialism has been made. Iveta Jusova observes,

Grand’s new woman characters are crippled due to the available gender prescribed choices and experiences of perfunctory education, stifling environment, and limited career options that…even the best equipped among them had, (16)

The new woman fiction show how imperialism is a phallocentric ideology that subjugates woman and an escape from the clutches of such power was tricky. The woman like the colonized subject is defined by the intrusive dominant gaze, though attempts to break the influences have been made by the novelists in making their women question the male centered ideas. In feminist discourse the vulnerable female body suggests woman as fertile, a productive body who has the power to produce. Caird, (Morality of Marriage,) Schriener, (Story of an African Farm) criticized imperialism as a form of patriarchy that diminishes any opportunity for identity formation in its subjects. Grand in Idea makes her heroine comment about English woman’s stance “her own sphere is a very indefinite phrase” (138 ) hence the urge to conquer when a woman realizes how the nation has denied her an identity. “Fate itself is no match for one woman with will… they will fight to arms.”(138) it suggests that it is better to provoke and live in agony than to submit.
New woman fiction perceived as popular fiction.

New woman fiction if treated as popular fiction may be interpreted as fiction that is written to be marketed and consumed generically, meaning the writers use a single genre and the generic identification is assumed to be candid. The new woman fiction description of the situation and issues that surround the novels are stated frankly. Probably such frankness shocked the readers and conservative critics, which resulted in the wholesale rejection of the genre as low and vulgar that went to appease the interest of the masses. Popular novel writers are identified with the genres they use, for instance Agatha Christie a crime writer, Barbara Cartland a Romance writer, Bram Stoker, a Gothic writer, Mary Braddon, a Sensational writer, Grand, a New Woman novelist. What then separates them from literary novelists? Aren’t these writers narrating similar issues? Why are their novels termed as best sellers or popular fiction? A literary work is believed to have transcended the genre whereas a popular fiction is limited to its genre and so termed by conservative critics as lower literary level. Popular fiction announces its identities loudly and this belief helps one to recognize it as a romance or a sensational or a new woman novel. David Morley talks about the mechanisms of genre- based theory interpretation in his study The ‘Nation’ wide Audience (1980) he observes how audience research might be more successful if it turned to a genre -based interpretation than the encoding-decoding model. Genre based interpretation theorises the process of reading as a complex interrelated series of actions. Janice Radway following the suggestions of Morley, states, “A genre framework would thus focus attention on the kinds of cultural competencies that are learned as a consequence of social formation.” (69) His assessment helps one to understand that social conditions are largely responsible for the changes in style and mode of writing and also its
reception. The emergence of the new woman fiction played a significant cultural role in the fin de siècle era. It was a period which saw cultural transformation; which affirms that modern society starts in the Victorian period. Entertainment and production became industrialized; fiction not only entertained the readers but also awakened them to newer possibilities. The new woman seized the anxieties of the era and rendered a faithful depiction of the same. Commodification of woman’s issues in both the sensational and the new woman novels increased the circulation rates. Writing for the popular press enabled the feminists to make their oppression known and also preach new ideals of womanhood. Reading helped them to participate in a large, exclusively female community served to disassociate themselves from their roles as wives and mothers. New woman fiction served as a way of securing privacy, as a medium to escape from drudgery. Female cyclist is used as a paradigm of the popular new woman and this literary bicyclist alleged full right to partake in intellectual as well as in physical endeavors. Popular culture portrayed her as ugly and single or an unattractive blue stocking. Grant Allen’s Woman Who Did a detective story, features a detective heroine who undertakes daring adventures evidencing her physical and intellectual energy. It concludes with the strong vivacious heroines getting her man, hence the detective and the conventional romance plot blends showing the bicyclist who is intelligent and bold loses out to the womanly woman. The proponents of the new woman inspired crucial, social and political condition, because she does not exhibit diffidence or physical or mental collapse. Serotype image of the new woman (riding a bicycle, smoking, woman with a bow) attracted public attention resulting in the rejection of the feminine role. Canonical structures subjected woman to corroborate the traditional image of woman but the new woman novels as a popular genre opened up new spaces, new
point of view signaling the transition from the feminine to the feminist. The novelists like modern feminists allow their woman characters to talk for themselves, so that submerged knowledge and hidden alternative can be brought to the surface. Critics differed in their opinion about popular fiction with the rise of cultural studies popular genres are regarded not as low or vulgar but a fiction that serves a purpose.

**Conclusion**

It’s hard to find new woman novels as they are forgotten or available in small pieces. The mistaken notion is that their views are outdated no longer germane to the modern readers. The conservative press limited the feminist drive of the new woman debate to a discussion of fiction (Ardis 1990) this pushed the new woman to the margins. Having elaborated on the various aspects it is now a decisive affirmation that visiting the new woman novels is like being aware of the critical wealth of the Victorian literary world. Feminist and cultural criticism foreground notions of gender and race as crucial issues, this opened up new interest to study women’s work as agents in cultural production. The lacuna of the readers is the lacuna of the women writers both are struggling with gender definitions and sexual politics. What they may need most from those of us struggling in other arena is support rather than criticism. Present understanding of the new woman fiction by Mark critics have denuded more textual analysis of the new woman fiction which convinces that the new woman fiction does not exist in a vacuum. Today new woman novels are not perceived as stuffy sensually repressive, and intellectually regressive, but they are studied for the feminist strategy of invoking high morality, Grand, Schreiner, feminized the artist as genius and Caird illustrated the artist as a misunderstood genius. Though the new woman novels disappeared with the fall of the first wave feminists they laid the foundation for the
resurgence of popular fiction in 1960 & 1970’s. New woman fiction steers the complex vibrations between imitation and ridicule of the hegemonic structures in culture and literature, Ledger, (1997) affirms that the new woman is a legacy to any number of 20th century feminist thinkers and writers.
Works Cited.


Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle.* UK: Manchester UP, 1997


Pykett, Lyn. “Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: A representation of the female artist in the new woman fiction of the 1890’s” in Nicola Diane Thompson (Ed) *Victorian Women Writers and the Women Question.* UK: Cambridge UP,


