Chapter I

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"Feminist Themes in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, Alice Munro's Who Do You Think You Are? and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things" aims at analyzing from a feminist perspective, the autobiographical fictions of three women writers born and brought up in three different nations and cultures. Feminism had its manifestations and impact on these cultures in general and the writers under discussion in particular. Feminists, to whichever school they belong, like Simone de Beauvoir, believe that the sphere where women belong "is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated by the male universe; high as she may raise herself, far as she may venture, there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that will block her way"(325).

Women face social challenges everyday, simply because they are women—challenges that men never have to worry about. As Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe have rightly said in Still Ain’t Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today, "Feminism is a consciousness of the oppression we have because we are women, the political expression of this consciousness, and a fundamental underpinning of our vision of a liberated society"(26).

Attempting to define patriarchy, K.K.Ruthven in Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction says that any mode of representation centred on men could be called "androcentric" (Greek andros = male) or "phallocratic" (Greek kratos = power). The social system which corresponds to such a phallocratic order—"a system which enables
men to dominate women in all social relations – is known in the feminist discourse as patriarchy. The oppressive effects of patriarchal domination manifest themselves as sexism. A passion for mastery results in the suffering of whatever it subordinates, whether it is practised by men who do it naturally or by women who are trained to do it in a patriarchal system.

Woman is always constructed negatively in an androcentric society, and has always been presented as a person to be subjugated and harassed by the male whose interests she serves. In the Aristotelian tradition, a woman is defined by what she lacks. According to Hebraic tradition, every woman enters history with a piece missing. Landmark feminists of the past such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir observed that women in Western culture are defined only in negative terms, by what they lack – status, independent income, education and qualities associated with masculinity. Virginia Woolf emphasized the resulting sense of alienation felt by women. Nature and Culture which Claude Levi-Strauss has made the most famous binary opposition in structuralist thought has been epitomized in Simone de Beauvoir’s aphorism, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (295). What makes a girl grow into a woman is not simply the physiological changes, but the socializing processes of the culture in which she is placed. Maggie Humm says in Feminisms: A Reader: “The emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding that, in all societies which divide the sexes into different cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men” (qtd Stuart Sim 41).
Urszula Nowakowska of Poland has recorded that in spite of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in practice, many violations of human rights that are specific to women have not been recognised as human rights violations. Many human rights violations are gender-based, and several kinds of discrimination or abuse occur only because the victim is a woman.

Women's human rights are violated in a variety of ways. Women are subjected to rape and sexual abuse by soldiers, police, employers and family members and other violent acts which infringe upon their rights to liberty and security and their right to life. They are often not free to decide about their marriage or how many children they would like to have and when to have them. As women's groups have pointed out, women's freedom, dignity and other human rights are persistently violated in a way that men's are not.<http://free.ngo.pl/temida/prevention.htm>

Literary theorists have tried to discover certain patterns in the antifeminist stance of different nations. In her essay “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”, Elaine Showalter identified three common modes of feminist literary theory, and placed them as modes belonging to different national groups. She wrote:

English Feminist Criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression;
French Feminist Criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression;
American Feminist Criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however, has become gynocentric. All are struggling to find a
terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority. (qtd. Ruth Robbins 12)

Deborah Cameron in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* defines feminism as "a movement for the full humanity of women"(4). She says, "Women must as a precondition to any wholesale change in values be liberated from their present subordinate position with its multiple restrictions, exclusions and oppressions. But the transformation that will result from this liberation is envisaged as a profound one, affecting the whole of humanity"(4).

As Miriam Schneir records in *The Vintage Book of Feminism*, the world's first organized movement on behalf of women was inaugurated in 1848 at a small chapel in the sleepy village of Seneca Falls, New York. There the 32-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared that the time had come for "the question of women's wrongs to be laid before the public" and "Woman herself must do this work, for woman alone can understand the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of her own degradation"(ix). Though Stanton's campaign encountered hostility initially, soon the cause of women was taken up in Western Europe too, and feminists on both sides of the Atlantic eventually formed international alliances.

The first wave of feminism was from about 1835 to 1920, when women struggled to win a major demand – the vote. When feminists obtained the right to vote, they hoped to make an equal place for women in this society. But sometime in the nineteen twenties feminism became dormant in the United States. But women everywhere read and discussed the French writer Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. It was only in the...
late 60s, a vigorous feminist movement arose in the US and rapidly spread to other countries.

President Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. But, many women who were dissatisfied with the lack of progress made on the Commission’s recommendations, joined with Betty Friedan in 1966 to found the National Organization for Women. These women have served as catalysts in the developing feminist movement. The time span of this “second wave” feminism is generally from the late 1960s to the 1990s, covering three decades of social change. Some of the landmark publications of this period were Doris Lessing’s The Golden Notebook (1962) with its frank discussion of taboo subjects, Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963) that highlighted the problem of identity that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique, and Beverly Jones’ essay “Toward a Female Liberation Movement” that advised women to accept their plight as a common plight. The contributions of men feminists, like John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Engels and Henrik Ibsen, too must be acknowledged. They are called “androgynists” in feminist terminology.

In 1968, 200 demonstrators at the annual Miss America beauty contest in Atlanta city, New Jersey, set up a “freedom trash can” and held banners: “We are people, not livestock! Can make-up cover the wounds of our oppression?” In 1969, Redstockings was founded in New York. Redstockings was dedicated to consciousness raising and its members were radical feminists. Some of their slogans were: “Sisterhood is powerful” and “Personal is political”.

Robin Morgan’s spirited anthology Sisterhood is Powerful came out in 1970, and the anthology Sisterhood is Global came out in 1984. The British socialist feminist Juliet Mitchell’s book Women: The Longest Revolution (1966) suggests that the condition of women in any society is composed of 4 elements: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children, and successful revolutionary movement could begin by attacking the most vulnerable structure – sexuality. The thesis of Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics (1970) is that sex has a frequently neglected political aspect and in the patriarchal state men dominate women in sex. Shulamith Firestone’s The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution published in 1970 foresaw an ultimate revolution wherein women would be freed from the tyranny of their biology by technical advances. Mary Daly’s first book The Church and the Second Sex (1968) explores the long history of misogyny in the Catholic Church. Her book Gyn/Ecology: Metaethics of Radical Feminism (1978) suggests that women must develop a wide range of qualities and skills in themselves and become whole human beings and help affect the values of our society. Susan Brownmiller’s Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape sees the world without rapists as one in which women can move freely without fear of men.

Dorothy Dinnerstein in her only book The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (1978) argued that men and women should be partners in the responsibilities of parenting if human life has to prosper. Michele Wallace’s Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (1978) lashes out at the male chauvinism of the 60s. Adrienne Rich’s essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1978) encourages heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality
as a political institution. Anne Sexton’s poem “In Celebration of My Uterus” celebrates women’s physical nature — a note found in many a feminist writing. Anne Koedt’s statement “The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm”(1968) gave a call to women to organize and offer a vocal opposition to male interests. Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch too is a part of second wave feminism. Greer urges women to take possession of their body and refuse to marry or live in a monogamous relationship.

Bernice Sandler wrote Patterns of discrimination and Discouragement in Higher Education. Patricia Jones’ “Women in Household Employment” presents the plight of those who labour in other people’s kitchens. Gloria Steinem wrote The way we were — and will be to stress the idea of sisterhood. After Andrea Dworkin wrote Pornography: Men Possessing Women, pornography became a feminist issue. Carol Gilligan’s A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (1982) is hailed as a feminist classic. Riane Eisler’s The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future stresses that women could gain a new sense of dignity and self respect from the knowledge that our social structure once was matriarchal.

Though the basic proposition is, as Nora put it in Ibsen’s The Doll’s House a century ago: “Before everything else, I am a human being”, feminists today do not seem to speak in the same voice. There are different kinds of feminism. Amazon feminism is dedicated to the image of the female hero; Cultural feminism says that women’s differences are special and should be celebrated; Ecofeminism underscores that women were the centre in the matriarchal society; the focus of Individualist feminism is individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence and diversity; Marxian feminism
demands property rights and economic equality for women; the belief of Material feminism is that women can be liberated by improving their material condition; women who have not directly experienced discrimination talk of Moderate feminism; Gender Feminism or N.O.W feminism says that women must be granted some special privileges, and men should not be an issue in feminism; Pop feminism projects a negative man hating ideology; Radical feminism is directed towards change of revolutionary proportions; Separatists advocate separation from men and organize women-only events; and the New Scholars in feminism emerging from gender studies and women’s studies programmes in colleges all over the U.S. think that gender differences are a result of social and environmental influence and there are no personality differences between men and women.

Many contemporary young women including Susan Faludi and Anna Quindlen, are representatives of the young “third wave” of feminism. Susan Faludi in Backlash: the Undeclared War against American Women (1991) exposes the reasons behind an anti-feminist reaction in the 1980s. She says that the meaning of the word “feminist” has not changed since it first appeared in a book review in the Athenaeum of April 27, 1895, describing a woman who has the capacity to fight her way back to independence. In the “third wave” the number of women’s organizations is on the increase and there are many enlightened women all over the world who work with a vision of a society in which women are liberated and sex role stereotypes are obliterated.
While comparing the plight of the Taliban women in Afghanistan with the blessings American women enjoy today, Manon McKinnon points out what women are capable of when they experience human dignity and freedom.

American women set the world standard for education and workforce attainment. With a 97 percent literacy rate, our women outnumber men in higher education and earn the majority of associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Women make up close to half of the workforce; they start businesses at twice the rate of men and employ about 24 million others. We hold thousands of elected and appointed offices, serve in the military, go where we want, when we want, with whom we want, wearing what we want. <http://www.iwf.org/im2/cleanheader.map>.

In “Women’s Time”, French philosopher and critic Julia Kristeva in 1982 put forward a 3-stage model of feminism. She named the first stage “liberal”, the second “radical” and the third “utopian” (Cameron 39). In the beginning of the twenty first century there are determined women who have proved their worth and reached almost the third stage. Through world-wide-websites, today a new kind of feminism called “cyberfeminism” has evolved, and this is expected to pave the way for women empowerment all over the world. In “Beyond the screen: Film, Cyberpunk, and Cyberfeminism”, Sadie Plant has said, “Cyberfeminism is simply the acknowledgement that patriarchy is doomed” (qtd. Liza Tsaliki 83).

In the history of American feminism, Sylvia Plath has a very special place as she is an early feminist writer. She was born on October 27, 1932 in Boston to Otto Plath
and Aurelia Schober Plath. Sylvia Plath and her younger brother Warren had a happy childhood at Winthrop, a town near Boston, and this was instrumental in developing her as a writer. She wrote complete poems when she was hardly five. Her first publication was at the age of eight. In 1941, a short piece "Poem" was printed in the children's section of the Boston Herald.

Her father died on the night of November 5, 1940, and when the eight-year-old Sylvia Plath was informed of her father's death, she proclaimed "I'll never speak to God again." Her strong and conflicting emotions of love, hate, anger and grief at the loss of her father were to affect Sylvia for the rest of her life.

She won a scholarship to Smith College, where she continued to excel academically and in her poetry. Throughout college she also dated with many boys, and the most serious relationship was with Dick Norton, a Wellesley neighbor. She also developed periodic bouts of depression, insomnia and thoughts of suicide, as evidenced in her Journals. Plath went to New York as part of a writing contest she had won through Mademoiselle. Contrary to expectations, Plath returned home very depressed and attempted suicide by swallowing a handful of pills and hiding under the stairs of her home.

Strange behaviour in the hotel at New York, discarding her clothes off the roof of the hotel, rejection from her desired course at Harvard Summer School, insomnia, hospitalization, electroshock therapy, consequent suicide attempt by consuming sleeping pills, financial and emotional help from a sponsor, another round of electroshock treatment from a female psychiatrist in a private hospital and even the frightening
incidents of rape and near-to-death haemorrhage are all incidents in her life which she has recorded in her autobiographical fiction *The Bell Jar*. Plath transcribes her private anguish into fiction, and *The Bell Jar* is a window into the author’s mind.

After graduating with a Fulbright scholarship, Plath went to Cambridge to study literature. In England, her meetings with Ted Hughes led to their marriage in 1956. They had a daughter Frieda and a son Nicholas. In 1960, a collection of Plath’s poems *The Colossus* was published. In the summer of 1962, Sylvia’s piece “Three Women” was set to air on the BBC. Though initially her married life was idyllic, the bliss did not last long. As Ted Hughes’ affinity for Assia Wevill strengthened, his bond with his wife loosened. Though Plath struggled single handedly, to balance her career and her household duties, and write feverishly, she was unable to bear the torment and the anguish. She put an end to her life prematurely in 1963. The same year her only novel was published, the sequel of which she herself had burnt. This manuscript is supposed to have told the story of a young American girl in England who fell in love and married.

*Colossus, Crossing the Water, Winter Trees, and Ariel* contain Plath’s poems. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* has her short stories, prose and diary excerpts. The intensity of the personal and literary struggles she underwent is rendered in *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*. *Letters Home* is a record of Sylvia Plath’s correspondence addressed chiefly to her mother, from her time at Smith College up to her suicide in London. To crown all the honours, awards and prizes she had received in her lifetime, came the rarely posthumously awarded Pulitzer Prize in 1982.
Sylvia Plath expressed feminist ideas in her poems, short stories, Journals, Letters Home and the only novel The Bell Jar. The Bell Jar that was first published in January 1963, under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas is considered to be the earliest feminist novel – a feminist novel that was written even before people realized that real feminism had bloomed in the US.

The Bell Jar is about a woman struggling to become whole. In this self-expressive novel, Plath's protagonist, Esther Greenwood, sinks into a profound depression, grows disenchanted with her traditional-minded boyfriend Buddy Willard, fails in her effort to relate with Eric and Constantine, fights against Marco in his attempt to rape her, strains her relationship with her mother, endeavours to kill herself by taking a bottle of sleeping pills, is hospitalized and treated in a private psychiatric institution. As Esther begins to recover, she loses her virginity to Irwin, and leaves the ward optimistically as a transformed individual.

To convey this story of the growth of a woman, Sylvia Plath has used a feminist idiom. She uses very special images to suit feminist themes and intense female experiences. Anne Cramny Francis in Feminist Fiction and Feminist Uses of Genric Fiction defines feminist genre fiction as “fiction written from a self consciously feminist perspective, consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the gender ideology of western society, patriarchal ideology”(1). In this sense, The Bell Jar is a feminist genre fiction written before feminism reached its peak, and before patriarchal ideas were openly debated in America. Sylvia Plath belongs to Elaine Showalter’s “female phase” when women writers advocate their own autonomous
female perspective, and we find Plath delving deep into her psyche and looking for her own independent female identity.

It is an interesting fact that women writers in Canadian literature have outnumbered men writers in all respects. These women writers are traditional or experimental, natives or immigrants, from the mainstream or from ethnic minorities. Their poetry and prose cover a wide range of situations - falling in love, marriage and pregnancy and divorce, mother-daughter relationship, growing old and dying - all seen from a woman's perspective. Women writers from Canada have made a name for themselves in the literary world, winning many prestigious awards and gaining international readers. Wendy J. Robbins has clearly presented the situation in Canada:

Canada is not a world power and has a relatively small population - roughly twenty-five million people, equivalent to that of the state of California - in a land of vast expanse; in fact, part of the national psyche is a typically postcolonial sense of national inferiority.... In the work of women writers, an analogy is often drawn between the colonization of the land and other forms of exploitation, between the submerged identity of a country sometimes depicted as a 'sleeping giant' - one that had no flag other than the Union Jack until 1965 - and the suppressed identity of woman - who was not considered a "person" before the law until 1929.

<http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/Poetry/WmWriters/overview.html>

Canadian literature in English began in the colonial era itself with the writing of a woman-novelist Frances Brooke (1723-1789) whose epistolary novel of manners The
History of Emily Montague, set in Quebec, was published in London in 1769. Many British gentlewomen contributed to early Canadian literature in the form of fiction, diaries, or letters. To cite a few examples, Elizabeth Simcoe (1766-1850); the early feminist Anna Jameson (1794-1860); Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899), author of the practical The Female Emigrant's Guide (1854); and her sister, Susanna Moodie (1803-1885), whose Roughing It in the Bush (1852) is a classic of pioneer writing. The first Canadian-born novelist to publish was also a woman: Julia Beckwith Hart (1796-1867), author of the romance St. Ursula's Convent (1824).

Women in Canada have made a mark in playwriting too. Eliza Lanesford Cushing (1794-1886) published numerous prose and dramatic works on historical and Biblical themes in The Literary Garland between 1839 and 1845. The volume Women Pioneers: Canada's Lost Plays (1979) proves that a number of other women also wrote and had plays published in this era. Griselda Tonge, Margaret Blennerhasset, Halifax sisters - Sarah and Mary E. Herbert, Clotilda Jennings, Mary Jane Katzmann and Rosanna Leprohon are women poets with feminist leanings who have contributed to the corpus of Canadian literature.

By 1893, The National Council of Women of Canada was formed and in 1900, it compiled a report entitled “Women in Canada”, intended as a handbook of information. During this period, two internationally acclaimed Canadian women writers emerged: Sara Jeannette Duncan (1861-1922), who was the first woman to work in the editorial department of a leading Canadian newspaper, and Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) who authored one of the world's best-loved children's novels Anne of Green
Gables (1908). Another very popular writer for children is Margaret Marshall Saunders, whose sentimental Beautiful Joe (1894), one of her many animal tales, has kept her name alive.

Many novels by women of the time contain portraits of traditional women although some present new images of women who emerge in the social changes taking place. Writers worth mentioning are Carrie Jenkins Harris (d. 1903); Alice Jones (1853-1933); Jones' sister, Susan Carleton Jones (1864-1926); Maria Amelia Fytche (1844-1927), author of Kerchiefs to Hunt Souls (1896) a novel highly critical of the situation of women, especially as governesses; Lily Dougall (1858-1923), author of a dozen novels, and May Agnes Fleming (1840-1880), one of the first Canadians to have a career as a writer of popular fiction.

While the Anglo-Canadian novel tradition stretches back to more than 200 years, and drama to nearly 150 years, poetry tradition is scarcely 100 years old. Here again the beginning is made by a woman- Valancy Crawford (1850-1887). Despite the fact that powerfully influential women writers dominate the contemporary literary scene, the 200-year-old tradition of female authorship in Canada has received relatively scant critical attention.

Nellie McClung (1873-1951) a popular novelist is the personification of Canadian feminism in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Mazo de la Roche's (1879-1961) major triumph was a series of sixteen novels called Jalna books. It is so popular that eleven million copies have been sold worldwide. Other fiction writers of note are Martha Ostenso (1900 - 1963); Laura Goodman Salverson (1890 - 1970);
Emily Carr (1871 - 1945), Canada's most famous woman painter; Irene Baird (1901-1981); Elizabeth Smart (b. 1914); and, especially, Ethel Wilson (1888 - 980), whose short stories began to appear in the late 1930s and whose best work, Swamp Angel (1954) sets the pattern for several later Canadian women's sagas of self-discovery in the wilderness.

The nationalist and feminist movements of the late 1950s and 1960s produced some good literature in English in Canada. At present, many new directions are being explored by an increasingly large number of women writers. In prose fiction, the most outstanding work has been done by Mavis Gallant (b. 1922), Margaret Laurence (1926 - 1987), Alice Munro (b. 1931), and Margaret Atwood (b. 1939). Other important novelists and short-story writers are Adele Wiseman (b. 1928), who wrote The Sacrifice (1956); Sheila Watson (b. 1919), author of The Double Hook (1959), Sylvia Fraser (b. 1935), whose career begins with Pandora (1972); and Marian Engel (1933 - 1985), with whom an overtly feminist fiction begins in No Clouds of Glory (1968) and reprinted as Sara Bastard's Notebook in 1974. Two American-born writers, Audrey Thomas (b. 1935) and Jane Rule (b. 1931), who settled permanently in Canada, deserve special mention. Thomas's autobiographical trilogy - Mrs. Blood (1970), Songs My Mother Taught Me, (1973), and Blown Figures (1974) - and her twin novellas Munchmeyer and Prospero on the Island (1971), all written in experimental, discontinuous prose, introduce new themes such as pregnancy, abortion, and miscarriage. Rule's novels - Desert of the Heart (1964), This Is Not For You (1970), and Against the Season (1971) - and her stories collected in Theme for Diverse Instruments (1975) introduce the subject
of lesbian love. Rule has also written a book about other lesbian writers, *Lesbian Images* (1975). But the best writing by both authors comes in the post-1975 period. Elaine Showalter’s “feminine”, “feminist”, and “female” phases in women’s writing have relevance to Canadian writing by women too. But, as Wendy J. Robbin says, “The process of ‘rethinking’ Canadian history and ‘revisioning’ the canon of Canadian literature” are important tasks that remain undone - “waiting the releasing yeast” <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/Poetry/WmWriters/overview.html>.

In Canadian literature, Alice Munro (b 1931) has carved a niche for herself. She is better known as a short story writer than as a novelist. Her childhood and girlhood were spent in western Ontario where she met her first husband, James Munro. Her father Robert Laidlaw, like Del Jordan’s father in “The Flats Road” section of *Lives of Girls and Women* found little success as a breeder of silver foxes. Her mother, previously a schoolteacher, at one time sold furs at a Muskoka resort to help the family survive. As presented in “The Flats Road” the Laidlaw house was away from the town. Alice attended a primary school much like the school in the ”Privilege” of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Munro’s tales are often set in southwestern Ontario, and are written from the point of view of a young or adolescent girl and address themes of particular interest to women. Her relationship with her mother was a deep one. Mrs. Laidlaw had contracted Parkinson’s disease when Alice was twelve, and many of her stories reflect the perplexing relationship she had with her mother. In *Who do You Think You are?* she deals with the daughter’s response to the old mother who is sick.
She married James Munro in 1951, and in 1963 she moved to Victoria with James Munro and started Munro's Books, which remains one of the best bookstores on Vancouver Island. She has three daughters: Sheila, Jenny, and Andrea. After living with James Munro for a few years in Vancouver, in 1972, she returned to Ontario where she married Gerald Fremlin in 1976. Alice Munro and her husband divide their time between Clinton, Ontario, near Lake Huron, and Comox, British Columbia.

Alice Munro’s fiction includes Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), Lives of Girls and Women (1971), Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You (1976), Who Do You Think You Are? (1978), The Moons of Jupiter (1982), The Progress of Love (1986), Friend of My Youth (1990), Open Secrets (1994), The Love of a Good Woman (1998), and Hateship, Friendship, Loveship, Courtship, Marriage (2001). Three of her collections, Dance of the Happy Shades, Who Do You Think You Are?, and The Progress of Love have won the Governor General's Award for fiction, and Who Do You Think You Are? was short listed for the Booker Prize. Other honours she has received include the Canadian Booksellers Association International Book Year Award for Lives of Girls and Women, the Canada-Australia Literary Prize (1977). In 1986, Alice Munro was the first winner of the Marian Engel Award, a $10,000 presented by the Writers' Development Trust to a Canadian woman author for outstanding prose writing. In 1995, Open Secrets received the W.H. Smith Award for the best book published in Britain throughout the previous year. Hateship, Friendship, Loveship, Courtship, Marriage won the Upper Canada Writer's Craft Award. This book also won the best book category for the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize in the Carribean & Canadian region. Regarding
her last book, there was a write-up “Breaking the Mould” in *The New India Express*. It stated,

With her 9 stories in *Hateship, Friendship, Loveship, Courtship, Marriage* Munro breaks the mould to prove that she is a writer worth every letter. Her unfussy, restrained and intelligent work has also been widely appreciated for the unsentimental vein she brings to her writing. A style that has made critics sit up and take note.

Munro has a new short story “What is Remembered” in the Feb 19/26, 2001 *New Yorker*.

*Lives of Girls and Women* a collection of interlinked stories is the only book Munro calls a novel. In many ways, *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be considered a mature sequel to *Lives of Girls and Women*. *Lives of Girls and Women* is a *kunstelroman* that traces the growth of Del who passes through some of the basic experiences of life in religion and sex before she blooms into an artist. *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a *bildungsroman* that traces the growth of Rose who passes through several experiences with various men before she evolves into a woman. Even insignificant incidents like "Half a Grapefruit" contribute in shaping the personality of Rose. Both the books revolve around women protagonists, and are self-expressive with many incidents drawn from the writer’s life. Both have qualities of a novel. They treat the dilemmas of an adolescent girl who struggles to come to terms with life, and trace the progress of their heroines from childhood to womanhood.
Many critics and reviewers have debated whether *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a collection of linked short stories or a novel. The thread that binds the stories together is so strong and the structure intact, that it reads like an organized novel. With one protagonist linking all the sections, unless told, one would take this only as a novel. When *Lives of Girls and Women* is also autobiographical, as one written early, the protagonist does not share the experiences of the author in its wholeness. Especially she does not reach the stage of marriage and divorce. Many of the agonies the author experienced are expressed in full only in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Alice Munro wrote *Who Do You Think You Are?* after her marriage with James Munro failed and she moved back to Western Ontario with her second husband Gerald Fremlin. Utilizing autobiography as feminist expression, Alice Munro has incorporated many realities in the emotions and experiences of women, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* through her protagonist Rose.

Rose grows up in rural West Hanratty, Ontario. Her puzzling and complex relationship with her stepmother Flo dominates the first section of the book. Flo’s fondness for imitation and story telling are soon picked up by Rose. Rose endures violence at the hands of her father who is the “king of royal beatings”.

In a country school, Rose becomes aware of class distinctions, and gender differentiation. She has been advised to be cautious of older boys, but she develops infatuation for an older girl, Cora. She brings for Flo stories from school, and Flo narrates the story of her own youth. Teenage Rose leaves her parents and brother and travels to Toronto by herself on a train. During her first journey to the city, she
encounters a minister who molests her, and this trip symbolizes various liberations including a sexual one.

Soon Rose is in the university. There she meets the rich, urban Patrick Blatchford, and eventually marries him. Together, they live in Vancouver, but she starts rebelling against Patrick treating her as a passive maiden. In the maternity ward where she delivers her daughter Anna, she develops friendship with Jocelyn. This friendship followed by exchanging visits leads Rose to fall in love with Jocelyn's husband Clifford. After ten years of marriage, Patrick and Rose are separated, and her affair with Clifford is consummated in the presence of Jocelyn.

When Rose lives with her daughter Anna in the British Columbian interior, she finds herself trapped, and is frustrated as a career woman and single mother. She struggles against alienation and isolation and fails in her desperate attempts to meet with lovers - Tom and Simon. As an actress she has caused minor scandals with her bare breasted performances on television. When she comes back to Hanratty, Flo is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The final scene has Flo confined to an old age home, and Rose attending on her.

Several of the sections in Who Do You Think You Are? were first published as independent stories with two different protagonists, Rose and Janet, but Munro made substantial changes and re-formed the book into a single narrative. Who Do You Think You Are? that won the Governor General's Award in Canada was also successful in the United States, where it was called The Beggar Maid. The themes of shaming and of questioning identity are implicit in the title Who Do You Think You Are? Like her
earlier *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), this book too depicts the life of a woman maturing from girlhood through adolescence in a small town, offers a picture of adult life away from home, and projects the challenges that women faced in the middle of the twentieth century as they balanced traditional gender roles with new professional and sexual possibilities. So, it can be termed a feminist novel.


Ancient history of India records the glorious treatment of women in society. People who worshipped goddesses celebrated womanhood by calling the earth and the rivers reverentially with feminine names. In the course of time, with Aryan invasion, the status of women declined and they became victims of social evils. Child marriage, torture heaped on widows and widow immolation became prevalent. As a part of the "civilizing mission" of colonial rule, in the early decades of the twentieth century, *sati* was abolished, widow remarriage was encouraged and child marriage was prohibited. The middle-class women were exposed to modern ideas and education. The anticolonial
nationalism, which followed the reform movements, drew women into the campaigns for rights of speech, education, and emancipation.

History boasts of the participation of women activists in various campaigns and struggles in India. Today there are Women’s Organizations, and in many Universities there are Women’s Study Courses, and many Colleges have Women’s Cells functioning in the campus, and students are exposed to the status of women in India today. In the media, there are many programmes that offer opportunities to affected women to express their problems. In spite of all these, the fact remains that only a few voices are heard and many voices are silenced. In practice, many Indian women are relegated to a secondary status and their lot in general is far from satisfactory.

In India, class, caste, and gender issues are interconnected. In this multi-ethnic and multi-religious country there are variations in the issues and agendas according to regions, religions, castes and communities. The anguish of women may vary from family to family, but the basic social attitude towards woman is the same. Unjust systems like dowry make her life miserable, and discrimination against her starts from the womb and lasts till the tomb. As Alka Kurian comments, “The dominance of patriarchal attitudes and the complexity of caste, class and religious identities in India have been responsible for subjecting women to stereotypical roles”(77).

Alka Kurian further records that feminism started in India during the country’s struggle for freedom, and the onset of the “second wave” was in the seventies, when there was a mass participation of women from the lower sections of the society. Educated women with critical thinking emphasized the need for empowerment in society
and involvement in politics. Women’s organizations are demanding a 33% reservation in
the Parliament and State Assemblies. Talking of the “third wave” of the Indian
Women’s Movement, she states that it is

... an indication of the onset of independent issue-based responses by
feminist groups, who began to tackle urban and rural women’s dilemmas
and conflicts as a part of the larger struggle to assert the personal, social
and cultural implications of a feminist consciousness.(78)

Regarding women’s place in Indian literature, Aune Ritvas has recorded,
“Women entered modern literature at approximately the same time as men, although in
the last century woman as a writer sometimes had to overcome almost insuperable
difficulties”<http://www.helsinki.fi/erill/kris/india.html>. India’s contribution to world
literature has been chiefly through Indian Writing in English. Rabindranath Tagore,
Bankim Chandra Chaterjee, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie,
and V.S. Naipaul are some of the most notable men writers of Indian fiction in English.
Like them, women writers too have considerably widened and deepened the areas of
human experience, and they have transmuted into creative literature their sharp, feminine
perception of life. They have no doubt enriched the body of Indian Writing in English,
and their contribution is significant. Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala,
Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Despande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy
are names worth mentioning. Among the younger generation of women writers today,
mention can be made of Kiran Desai one of the four daughters of Anita Desai, Gita
Mehta and Gita Hariharan.
Even with the very first novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy joined the long list of the Indian Writers in English. Her reputation as a novelist was made known to the entire world through the coveted Booker Prize, the Britain’s premier book prize. Roy is the only non-expatriate Indian to win this prize for her excellently written work with well-executed themes, plots and characterization in an unmatched style. Her narrative technique is so profound that the *New York Times Book Review* describes it as “... so morally strenuous and so imaginatively supple – that the reader remains enthralled all the way through” (www.aroy.miena.com). The *Publisher’s Weekly* (1998) comments, “Roy’s clarity of vision is remarkable, her voice original, her story beautifully constructed and masterfully told” (www.aroy.miena.com). Today, Roy is known all over the world as a creative writer of genius, a political journalist and a social activist. She has been honoured with the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize, and the PTI reported on May 29, 2004: "Arundhati Roy has been recognised for her courage in campaigns for human rights and for her advocacy of non-violence, as expressed in her demands for justice for the poor, for the victims of communal violence, for the millions displaced by the Narmada dam projects and for her opposition to nuclear weapons", the jury’s citation read.

It is essential to note down Roy’s biography, as most of the incidents in the story part of her debut novel are similar to those of her own life. Facts from Roy’s life like Syrian Christian background, the anglophilia in the family, the ancestral Ayemenem house, her mother's separation from her Hindu Bengali father, her unpleasant experiences with her uncle, aunt and grandmother, Communist politics and caste
consciousness in Kerala and several other details appear in her novel to make it a fictional autobiography

Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on 24th November 1961 in Kerala. Her mother Mary Roy was a Christian from Kerala and her father was a Bengali Hindu tea planter. It was not a happy marriage. Roy spent her childhood days in Ayemenem. She had her education in the Corpus Christi School run by her mother Mary Roy. At the age of sixteen she left her home and lived in a Squatter's Camp, in a small hut in New Delhi. She made her living by selling empty beer bottles. The training she received as an architect at Delhi School of Architecture proved instrumental in moulding her as a writer. In the Salon Interview she says: “In buildings, there are design motifs that occur again and again, that repeat -- patterns, curves. These motifs help us feel comfortable in a physical space. And the same works in writing, I've found. For me, the way words, punctuation and paragraphs fall on the page is important as well – the graphic design of the language” (www.haverford.edu). Her marriage with an architect, Gerard Da Cunha lasted for four years.

As a writer, she linked up with the film director Pradeep Krishen who later became her husband. They planned a twenty six-episode television epic, The Banyan Tree, for Doordarshan. But unfortunately they were not able to telecast it. Due to the encouragement and financial support of Bhaskar Ghose, the then Director-General of Doordarshan, she wrote the film script In which Annie Gives it Those Ones. Then she wrote Electric Moon. Roy’s next work The Great Indian Rape was a criticism of Shekar Kapur’s most celebrated film Bandit Queen.
Her only novel The God of Small Things commences with the return of Rahel to her Ayemenem home in Kerala and the reunion with her twin brother Estha after twenty-five years. As Rahel rediscovers the land, the Meenachal river and the surroundings she had left, the story of the few weeks that changed her life and led to her separation from her mother Ammu and her brother emerge in her memory.

As young children the twins are inseparable and are bound to their remarkable mother Ammu. They have a mysterious relationship with the mother. The story focuses on two tragic events in 1969 - the drowning of the twins' nine-year-old cousin from England - Sophie Mol, and the murder of Velutha, the untouchable carpenter who is loved by the twins during the day and by their divorced mother Ammu during night. Moving back and forth through time, through a free wheeling technique, Roy ingeniously reveals the details, the "small things" that fill the lives of her characters and the big things that lurk behind. Within its 340 pages the novel packs such beauty and such pain that prompted tremendous response from its readers all over the world.

In the years following the success of her novel, Roy started to analyse the important issues facing India today. Her article "The End of Imagination" published in September 1998 was a blistering critique about India's celebration of its nuclear tests at Pokharan, which she described as “folly”. Roy's fame as a social activist soared through "The Greater Common Good". According to Roy, the dam is a medieval nightmare and it affects millions of people displaced from that area. Her next writing "The Algebra of Infinite Justice", is about the consequences of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. She is against any nation attacking another. In "War is Peace" she
says that nothing can excuse or justify an act of terrorism. The bombing of Afghanistan is yet another act of terror against humanity. She tells that it is right to hunt down the terrorists, but war is not the means to track them down.

Roy’s essays “Power Politics” and “the ladies have feelings, so…” are also her contributions to political journalism. In all these, as in her novel, her heart moves for the oppressed and the marginalized. In the case of the shootings of the Adivasis in Kerala, she was with the victims of violence and her article “They have blood in their hands” published in The New Indian Express was an eye-opener to many a political thinker.

Her essay written as an introduction for the new edition of Noam Chomsky’s For Reasons of State, was published in the Magazine section of The Hindu, Sunday, August 24, 2003. The essay “The Loneliness of Noam Chomsky” upholds Chomsky the media analyst for “He has unmasked the ugly, manipulative, ruthless American universe that exists behind the word ‘freedom’.” In the Magazine section of The Hindu of Sunday, August 31, 2003 appeared a write-up that she wrote as a text for a 15-minute radio essay broadcast by Radio 4, BBC. “The Strange fate of Martin, Mohandas and Mandela: When the saints go marching out” examines how the elites of the societies in whose name the battles for freedom were waged use great icons as mascots to entice new masters. Her latest book is a collection of interviews with David Barsamian, The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004). In all her interviews and political writings, as in her fiction, Roy takes sides with the exploited, and daringly attacks those who use power wrongly. Her novel The God of Small Things is no less political than any of her essays as it examines the relationship between
power and powerlessness. The exotic nature of the narrative, the absorbing style, the technical innovations and the serious social and political issues that surface make the reading of this novel a literary experience.

The three fictional writings chosen for analysis of feminist themes – the only novel of Sylvia Plath *The Bell Jar*, the interlinked stories of Alice Munro *Who Do You think You Are?* that can be considered a novel, and *The God of Small Things* the debut novel of Arundhati Roy – revolve around the female protagonists – Esther Greenwood, Rose and Rahel respectively. They are female *bildungsroman* dealing with the struggles of girls who pass through adolescence before reaching independent womanhood. As these characters grow from childhood to womanhood, the complexities of feminine psyche are revealed to the readers. In their attempt to find their identity, they undergo several experiences – physical, emotional, intellectual, and psychological. They come into conflict with their own family, their companions, their boyfriends and the elders they come across in the society. As all the three protagonists are from societies dominated by patriarchy, they face hardships peculiar to women subjugated by male chauvinism. As children they experience discrimination, as adolescent girls they fear molestation, and as young ladies they suffer suppression in various forms. Hence Chapter II “Misogynistic Patriarchy” will reveal the social injustice meted out to women in societies that are predominantly androcentric, and see how the artistic skill of the writers transform the personal into universal and change the ordinary into extraordinary, and strive to find ways and means to restore human dignity to women, and make them realize their self.
Men often use sex as a tool to subjugate women. Men tease and molest women anywhere – in private libraries, or public transport system, or in work places. Rape is the most heinous offense against women where the victims undergo more shame than the perpetrators of the crime. Moreover, society in the West or in the East – if it is male chauvinistic – exercises double standards in matters of sex and sexuality. Those who give too much of importance to virginity and chastity for women never consider them as qualities required for men. Similarly, those who look at sex as man’s need do not think that women too have feelings and emotions and that sex is a woman’s need too. In the novels of Plath, Munro and Roy we see assertion of woman’s sexual freedom, and revolt against stereotypical sex roles assigned to women. They celebrate female sexuality as a means of liberating womanhood from patriarchal oppressions. Seeing woman as a sexual participant helps to shatter power relations that have so far remained exploitative. The Bell Jar shows how male domination persists even in matters of sex, and exposes the hypocrisy of man. Plath connects female sexuality with empowerment. As a feminist, Alice Munro sees with deep concern the sexual crimes against women, like molestation and rape. Who Do You Think You Are? is a typical feminist novel in that it asserts the right of women in sexual union. Arundhati Roy’s novel discusses sex and sexuality, either within marriage, or with reference to the code of conduct prescribed to a married woman or a divorcee. It is replete with suggestions that it is a hypocritical society that prescribes hard and inhuman laws to women alone. A revolution in thought has made Roy describe female sexual experience without subordinating woman to man. Hence Chapter III “Female Sexuality” will see how Plath, Munro and Roy view sex and
sexuality through the spectacle of their respective societies. It will unravel many an area of women’s suffering, and open up new vistas of thinking. It will also help to assert the place and role of women in sex so that they are not looked at as mere objects.

Every girl has to find her identity if she is to blossom into an emancipated woman. In this process she comes into conflict with many others, and the most complex of all these is her relationship with her own mother. Mother-daughter dilemma is an area much investigated by psychologists. It has been revealed that it is not an ideal relationship as it has been projected by popular culture. As daughters are expected to be submissive and obedient to their mothers, they often stifle their natural emotions and whenever they are not able to be respectful they feel guilty. An analysis of the experiences of adolescent daughters in the chosen novels will open up universal truths, and show that daughters everywhere are the same. Motherhood is usually glorified and by doing so the mother is exploited. She is made to bear the entire burden at home, and if she is a working mother she has to bear double burden, and compromise between her career and domestic labour. The three writers have presented the experiences of mothers and daughters and the dilemma in their relationship. The struggle in The Bell Jar is between the daughter who tries to grow and be free, and the mother who refuses to accept that her daughter is grown up and can think and act independently. Alice Munro’s Who Do You Think You Are? also presents the complexities of mother-daughter relationship. Much of Mrs. Laidlaw – Alice relationship has its shadow on Flo–Rose relationship. The daughter loves the mother, and also hates her. Such an emotional tension continues until Rose discovers herself and finds her identity. In Roy's
novel, the mother daughter relationship - be it that of Mammachi and Ammu, or Ammu and Rahel, is set against a caste ridden central Kerala social background notorious for male domination. The tension that prevails between a middle-aged mother and an adolescent girl is clearly brought out in The God of Small Things. Chapter IV is “Mother Daughter Conflict” and an analysis of this theme as presented by an American, a Canadian and an Indian novelist will bring about new revelations, and help to understand women’s experiences as daughters and mothers from a fresh perspective.

If a society is blinded by patriarchal thinking, sexism is reflected even in the language it uses. Men and women caught in the ideologies of a misogynistic society use sexist and repressive language. Moreover, phallocentric world has been causing damage to the female world by describing her body and also by misrepresenting intimate female experiences. It is women writers who fight against what Muriel Schultz calls the “semantic derogation of women” (Cameron ed. 134). Feminists raise their voice against sexist language and they search for a new idiom that is neither oppressive nor prejudiced, and very sharply react to discriminatory use of language. Plath is critical of the linguistic features that give rise to sexual double standard. She makes Esther use a plain and tough language that the misogynist society thinks is the monopoly of the male. Feminist ideology is so strong in the author that she uses unique imagery as part of her stylistic device. Plath has been successful in finding a language that is suitable for expressing the female experience without any interference from the dictates of the misogynist linguistic mould. Alice Munro has created a writing that is subversive by bringing her language close to the body. Relying on new aesthetics, new idiom and non-
traditional expression, she deals with unconventional themes and unsettling male-oriented sensibilities. Satire and sarcasm are the stylistic features used by Alice Munro to explode the myth of male superiority. Arundhati Roy uses the English language—words, expressions, sentences, and various stylistic features—with nonchalant daring and mastery. She ensures that at no point her language gives the least suggestion that sex is male domain. In highly evocative terms the novelist expresses the intensity of emotions experienced by women. Her language quite artistically and aesthetically weaves a cultural background into the novel. To achieve this, she makes use of apt and ingenious images. The narrative technique of the novel helps the novelist peel the multiple layers of a woman's consciousness. With innovative use of punctuation, ingenious wordplay, descriptions of typical Indian situations, and a language infused with sensual elements and dense metaphors and similes, Arundhati Roy creates a new style and structure of discourse which truly reveals the female experience and deconstructs stereotypes. Chapter V "In Search of Feminist Idiom" will study the language and images used by Plath, Munro and Roy, and see how the intimate experiences of women have their impact on the use of language. A scrutiny into the feminist idiom of these three writers will reveal how they have discarded conventional images and challenged existing power relations in order to reassure the status of women.

Now that women's movements have found roots in the United States of America, Canada and India, effective strategies can be worked out to improve the condition of women. Hating men was only a stage of feminism—not an end. Now, women must think of working with men transcending gender discrimination. If women are
subjugated today, it testifies not to the frailty of women but to the strength of sexism. If sexism is to be conquered, women should fight their way back to independence. Consciousness raising and group participation are very important to change women's feelings of isolation and loneliness. In order to attain power, women must demythify the misogynistic myths and deconstruct anti-woman writings and do a re-reading of patriarchal writings. The concluding chapter “Summing Up”, besides summing up the study, will make a few suggestions to feminists and future researchers.