Chapter-I

QUESTING FOR ORDER:
A PERSPECTIVE ON THE WOMEN’S FICTION
The present thesis aims at analysing the novels written by Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Tahmina Durrani as the discourses of marginality. These writers, basically, are concerned with the plights of women in the swiftly changing national and global context. The thematic patterns and linguistic dynamics employed by these authors, implicitly or explicitly, indicate their central concern with the problematic, this study has taken up, and, what W.B. Du Bois has pointed out in some other context as ‘double-bind’, the problematic of being doubly marginalized. It can be authentically pointed out that women, today, are doubly marginalized. They are discriminated primarily on the basis of gender, race, and also on the basis of patriarchal, cultural conscriptions. Placed in a cul-de-sac like situations, they keep desperately trying to get themselves free from the socio-cultural shackles. During the process these women are often confronted with insurmountable problems; they are tortured, dissipated and vanquished. They pay a very heavy price for their efforts to seek out their independence and identity. Invariably they are pushed into the corners of marginality. The dissertation, therefore, aims at analysing the selected fictional discourses of the authors chosen, as these discourses, essentially address marginality in different senses of the term. In order to pinpoint the distinguishing features that underscore gender-based marginalization of women, the study borrows extensively from the recent theory and other disciplines simultaneously.
In order to have a fuller view of the selected discourses, it seems necessary primarily to understand what marginality means in the recent global context and how it is appropriated by literary and other intellectual disciplines. It is a vital concept and has always been the central concern of humanities and social sciences.

Marginality, a socio-political concept, takes into account the power politics that aims at defining the social space of some individuals by the dominant group and also controlling the behavior pattern of the marginal. This definition has been confirmed and illustrated by a number of authentic sources like *Oxford English Dictionary* (Online ed.), *Webster Dictionary*, *Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective*, 'Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse' and a host of others. Marginality indicates a positionality that is best defined in terms of the limitations of an individual’s access to power. It can be observed that people are sidetracked by the mainstream on the basis of race, gender, age, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy. Hence marginality invariably is to be studied in societal and spatial context of the problematic. Bill Ashcroft in this regard makes a comment that deserves to be viewed in detail:

The perception and description of experience as “marginal” is a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourses, such as patriarchy, imperialism and
ethno-centrism, which imply that certain forms of experience are peripheral. Although the term carries a misleading geometric implication, marginal groups do not necessarily endorse the notion of a fixed center. Structures of power that are described in terms of “center” and “margin” operate, in reality in a complex, diffuse and multifaceted way. The marginal therefore indicates a positionality that is best defined in terms of the limitations of subject’s access to power.¹

The role of women in Indian society and the iconic image of the female in India have continuously passed through an evolutionary process, and, literature has always been the principal medium to create and articulate this feminine image. The image of Indian woman that appears to be as an activist, dissident and resistant, is surely not a sudden eruption; nor can it be called an instantaneous emergence consequential to sudden political transformations. It would, therefore, be wrong historically to consider that the great part women of India played in the non-cooperation movement and the position they achieved for themselves in modern Indian life was the result of a sudden transformation. The process of emergence of Indian feminist consciousness has been at work for over a century. The most significant difference between this evolutionary process in India and the revolutionary suffragette movement in the West is that, in the West the movement was directed for equality with men, in
India it was directed against social evils. Its intention and objective, however, was and remains the achievement of equal human rights for women.

The human urge to know - the quest for knowledge - a very innate urge - has not bypassed women. To know means to question, to think of yourself; it means turning your back on the unquestioning acceptance of any custom or practice. It is possible that the status of women and their subordination to men has made it possible for them to challenge any practice or custom openly. The women writers openly defy the social practices and cultural designs which, either quiet openly or in a surruptious way, are bent upon crushing women, their very notion of self-respect and independent identity.

Social reality in terms of space and time form an integral part of a work of art and is transmuted in the process of giving it a creative expression. The spectrum of the oppression of women in Indian society in particular, and, in Indian subcontinent in general, has always been central to the imagination of several women writers. The acts like suppression of women, domestic violence, female infanticide and the dowry deaths etc. provide a frame work for fiction. The social institutions like marriage and family play an important role in the society. Family is a platform to experience and analyse the gendered practices. Thus family is a parameter to
study the dynamics of marginalization and gender perception in the society.

Women writers aim at probing deep into the causes of women inequality and social injustice and contend that inequality between the sexes is caused by the cultural constructions of gender differences. Women writers are constantly trying to transform the existing over-rigid division of gender as difference, searching new means of knowing themselves, and, to establish a new order of values and meaning. The fictional discourses of women writers advocate not only the larger space within the patriarchal structures of power but envisage a thorough dismantling of these structures in ways that will yield them greater power and control over their lives.

It may be stated that the women’s writings have emerged as the epitome of protest and received good acclaim for their proactive nature. Moreover, these discourses have foregrounded their feminist assertions with an existential search for identity that was denied by the male oriented society. These discourses have sensitized many women writers to raise their voice against marginalization in so called cultured global society. The prime aim of these discourses seems to redefine the notions of womanhood and attain a position per se. It also aims at changing the male psyche and their attitude towards women. The women writers and women readers have always had to work ‘against the grain’.
The feminist theories and gender theories, in spite of their generic differences, do agree on certain seminal issues pertaining to the existence and essences of women, their problems and plights, their trials and tribulations, their fears and frustrations, their dreams and the failure of their dreams. The concepts of gender studies and feminism therefore are not contradictory. The concept of feminism also takes into account the issues taken up by gender studies and sociological and cultural studies of the very idea of gender.

The concept of feminism has been revised from time to time and place to place. Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. Most of the attempts to define what it is to be a woman, assume a universal connotation as a woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms and restraints rather than as a creation of nature. Feminism proclaimed existence as a consequence of these conceptualizations. Mary Wollstonecraft’s revolutionary book, *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*, John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* and Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* convincingly articulate the case for women and pinpoint the cultural designs relegating them to subservient position and finally reducing them to Betty Friedan called ‘feminine mystique’.

The early phase of the twentieth century indicated clear signs of new and varied approaches in relation to women (as subject) and women (as writers) in literature. Consequently the notion of a
patriarchal society in which woman was the victim of economic and cultural disadvantages was reviewed by Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf. In fact *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf was considered as a classic document regarding the feminist critical movement. She discussed chiefly the issues as to why there were so few women writers and why it was difficult or impossible for a woman to write. Dorothy Richardson’s twelve volume stream of consciousness novel *Pilgrimage* persuaded Virginia Woolf to state that Dorothy Richardson had invented ‘the psychological sentence of the female gender.’ Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, in 1949, was indeed a seminal work investigating not only the position and role of women in society, but also scrutinizing how male writers have viewed and portrayed women in their writings, which were followed by a spurt of writings on feminism making frantic efforts to rethink and re-examine the entire gender issue. Most of these writers inferred that ‘gender’ was a construct of society, designed basically to facilitate the smooth functioning of society for validating the advantage of men.

Once accepted that inequality of the sexes is neither a biological phenomenon nor a divine mandate, rather a cultural construct women writers formulated two concerns in this regard. First of all they desired to demolish certain concepts related to women which were more or less universal in nature as they served vested interests. Secondly they contrived to restore a female
perspective by extending knowledge about the experiences of women and their contribution to culture. These writers observed that whatever power or status is accorded to women in a given culture only rates them down as the Second Sex still dominated by their male counterparts. Simone De Beauvoir, therefore, emphatically stated: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes a woman---it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature’.2

Literature has always been an effective tool in exploring the gender relations and sexual differences. Humanist–feminist criticism objects to the exclusion of women from these definitions because they tend towards an inaccurate account of the subjectivity of women rather than a historically reconstructed ideology. Hence today a re-reading of literature assumes an important aspect of any critical project for it would help in the reconstitution of the idea of female subjectivity. Thus a more meaningful subject for literary writings focuses on the idea of psychic fragmentation of the weaker sex rather than on the theme of a social oppression which obviously assumes a secondary position. The psychic rupture is perhaps the worst and the most regressive aspect of female subjectivity. The oppression of women is not only a material reality originating in economic conditions, but also psychological phenomenon – how men and women perceive each other. Feminist scholars undertake the task of deconstructing the social construction of gender and all the subsidiary cultural paradigms that support it. It is an effort to liberate
women from those structures that have marginalized them; it is also an attempt to re-interpret their status in the world. For this the entire social system requires a complete overhauling and serious rethinking. Thus, Marxist analysis and methods may be essential for the radical deconstruction of gender necessary to change woman’s position, for if:

Woman is defined as a sexual being that exists for another then she can be liberated only by redefinition of the very norms of gender identity – a process which requires a radical change in society that produced such norms.³

Obviously, while everything else in the world has transformed drastically and dramatically, the status and power of women relative to men is remaining more or less static. This sounds inexplicable suggesting a sort of ‘Male social cohesion’. Feminist consciousness has certainly given a fresh ardor and excitement to literary studies – a reasonably new perception of women in literature and the works by women writers have unveiled some of the prejudices at work in the traditional approaches to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine perspective. A woman’s experiences of life as a member of a gender biased society formulate her psyche. Moreover she is bound by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances, society’s expectations related to age, creed, class, race etc. Thus each woman’s experience of life is different and therefore unique. Elaine Showalter has rightly concluded that ‘the female literary tradition
comes from the still evolving relationship between women writers and their society. She adds further:

I am intentionally working not at an innate sexual attitude, but at the ways in which the self-awareness of a woman writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time span.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar agree with Elaine Showalter that women authors have a tendency to react in a collective way to a common social reality. This also explains the recurrence of topics, themes, images and metaphors in the literature produced by women writers. Feminist critics have attempted to understand how social restrictions influence lives of women and how it has affected their relationship to art and literature. This has helped in establishing a corpus of a female literary tradition emphasizing the relationship between women’s writing and women’s culture. This kind of literature assumes the shape of a psycho-biography of the writer for she records her personal experiences in particular social set up.

Judith Kegan Gardiner opines that psychoanalysis is useful in defining gender that is how persons become psychologically feminine or masculine. Lillian Rubin observes an interdependency between economic and psychological factors since the woman is economically dependent on the man her psyche moves towards subservience. As time changed woman became economically
independent but the tendency of subordination in a male dominated society continued without apparent changes. Thus the psychology of women living in a patriarchy tends to be the psychology of oppression. This is what women writers have portrayed their female characters in two ways – the women characters who are docile and women who are wild, sexy and crazy.

Historically the women writers have been denied opportunities. The excessive dominance of male dominated culture and patriarchal designs women have never been able to perceive the reality independently. In fact their sense of perception was also controlled and governed by patriarchy with all its intricacies. Not only this but what is more shaking is the fact that the woman’s existence and her existential anguish also remained unperceived. They were so much under the spell of male dominance that she could not comprehend herself on her own. Connected to this lack of opportunity is the fact that they have been denied judicious objective critical climate speaking of the pervasive presence of the male critical and cutistic norms that confront the female writer, Andrienna Rich ironically notes:

The specter of male judgment along with the active discouragement and thwarting of her need by a culture controlled by males has created problems for the woman writers, problem of contact with herself, problem of language and style, problems of energy and survival.6
Interrelated with the inhibitions and misinterpretations, women have lacked a wealth of subject matter based on the viability of their lives. A woman writer has to deal with the realization that men write out of experience that is ‘universal’ but that a woman’s experience is likely to be regarded as trivial and private. The highest praise is the proverbial accolade “She writes like a man,” it becomes necessary for a woman to overcome her sex. Gilbert and Gubar argue:

Patriarchal ideology in the 19th century thought of the writer as one who is the image of the Divine Creator, fathers his work, the pen they demonstrate, is invariably imaged as phallic. Women therefore could not remain both writer and feminine without transgressing the norms set by patriarchal authority.  

Thus, the woman writer is faced with a double burden, she has to confront this myth of creativity and also past work, the ideal of the “eternal feminine” that was set up as inspiration and complement to men. This idea was a combination of angelic beauty and sweetness, passive, docile and selfless. Women by virtue of their sex are defined as angles or monsters, been denied the authority to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen. For a woman to attain knowledge and self-realization is necessarily to find herself outside a society that ritually and actually enacts loss of self for woman.

The compulsive niceness, and the cause of female socialization, is the perennial enemy of female writers. The
conspiracy of silence about women’s experience becomes entrenched when women artists, to accept ironically, reinforce female shame by not discussing women’s deviation from the cultural myths of what is supposed to be feminine. This isolation from the subject matter, from a sense of importance and legitimacy of their lives, is perhaps the most insidious constraint women and women writers face. Louise Bernikow notes:

A woman poet constantly pits against cultural expectation of “womanhood” and “women’s writing.” She gives her imagination and courage to that struggle, pours energy in it, is always that do not exist for men. Anger is approached backed away from, returned to, woman-ness is sometimes seen as authenticity, the essence to be distilled in the poem, sometimes it appears as a blemish, the things to be covered by the poem.⁸

In this concern for the phenomenon of womanhood Susan Koppelman Comillon puts herself on record and adds:

The result is women frequently go self-crippling, self-denying, and self-distorting tending to force themselves into the male sanctioned mould.⁹

Women are engaged in assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature, the paradigmatic polarities of angel and monster and a common impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinition of the self-art and society.
The task of interpretation of women’s experiences cannot be left to male writers alone, however, sympathetic they may be. The female perspective, expressed through women’s writings of all kinds, is more than a valuable corrective to an all-male view of universe. For women readers it is a lifeline.

Literature is one of the most important fields to which women, over a long stretch of time, have made an indispensable contribution. The novel has been the only literary form in which women have participated in numbers large enough to make their presence felt, or to which they have contributed on anything like equal terms with men.

In recent years, as it is given to understand that writing was the only form of preference made by women. Though this medium of expressing themselves in writing, women have investigated and published those aspects of their lives as sexual beings that have not previously been acknowledged by society. Despite late twenty first century, women are still very far from attaining the required level of socio-cultural, educational and economic advantages usually enjoyed by men. They, in many societies, are still under the pressure to conform to traditional concepts of womanly behavior, to be self-effacing, supporting and un-judging and to invest all their efforts in their man’s success rather their own.

In recent years, sustained struggle is being made by women to retain their rights as writers. The struggle they make for their voices
to be made heard is apparently an unending process; to make their voices heard ‘Novel’ became a primary site for waging conflicts taking place in the society. It is observed by Elaine Showalter:

It is important to see the female literary tradition in relation to the wider evolution of women’s self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expressions relative to the dominant society.¹⁰

It was this perennial issue like ‘Male Domination’ which for many good reasons have always been reinvented in every age, enlivened at points like the need for recognition of woman as human being and as an autonomous individual initiated. It is also felt that women writer’s hold bold, wide ranging and convincing deployment of the form of the novel to rehearse issues that they can work out in their own way. This constituted as a path that can brighten up to lead them, to specify their appropriateness in enhancing their potential towards their creative and cultural needs. To quote Virginia Woolf:

Woman as a writer, her experience is inevitably dissociated from that of a ‘member of the dominant culture’. When women began to write they never had any tradition behind them. We think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to men writers for help, however, much one way. ¹¹

Men have attained the status of colonizers and women the colonized. According to Simon de Beauvoir:
The position that women occupy in the society is comparable in many respects to that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race.¹²

Women’s writing at the moment appears to have acquired an importance. More than ever before women have started questioning the age old oppression and colonization. More and more women writers have been coming forward to give vent to their feelings especially in the area of fiction. Even when it can be admitted that all women’s writing need not be feminist there has been a sustained interest to listen to what women want to say especially in a context where one is made to read more and more of men’s writing. Thus women’s writing with all its variety, timidity and marginality has been gradually moving to a dimension where we find them asserting and some of them has already received international recognition.

Women are defined not by the struggling development of their brain or their will or their spirit, but rather by their child bearing properties, and their status as comparison to men who make, and do and rule the world. It is little wonder that when women come to the task of rendering their experience, they come with a profound sense of their marginality and distance from having a meaningful impact or self-defined role in the world.

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The actual impetus to the women’s liberation movement as literary expression was provided by Elaine Showalter who established indisputably that idea of “feminine” projected a system of “cultural conduct”. She stipulated daringly:

First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant traditions and the internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward free from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.¹³

Thus, the critic supplemented the traditional definition of feminism especially in literature by a new paradigm for manifesting the evolutionary aspect of woman’s consciousness as reflected in
literature specially in the British novel through there stages of progression – the feminine, the feminist and the female.

The feminist criticism says that women are not only biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectiveness of ethnic or national groups. It is their reproductive abilities that are necessary for the elaboration of stature and culture. The female infanticide has remained a widespread problem even in today’s date is a red dent to the fact that women are still devalued as non-entities as marginalized in Indian Society. Women, be they Hindu or Muslim, have the same fate. Both Hinduism and Islam restrict woman’s freedom.

Today many versions of feminism as liberal, Radical, Marxist, Socialist, and Post-colonial and so on, have cropped up, making a body of literature worthy of research and enquiry. A Feminist ideology stems from ‘individualism’ which stormed the west, but in India its impact was silent. The Indian women novelists have addressed themselves to various complex problems of modern life. They are in a position to look to their batter-placed counterparts in the West where ‘feminism’ is polythematic and polysynthetic. It requires an indigenous way of decoding gender (roles, relations and identities) probing into the very structure of the text and foregrounding the feminine. It is an onion like creation the more we peel of the better it leads us to understand the matrix and meaning of it.
Women are defined not by their struggling development of their brain or their will or their spirit, but either by their child bearing properties and their status as comparison to men who make, do and rule the world. It is little wonder that when women come to the task of rendering their experience they come with a profound sense of their marginality and distance from having a meaningful impact or self-defined role in the world. It is commonly agreed that the novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying experiences and corresponds in our civilization to the epic in the primitive stages of some races. Indian creative writers in English have been attracted to adopt this form generously and skillfully.

Fiction by women writers contributes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. It provides insights, an understanding, meaning and a basis of discussion. From women writer’s perspective, we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement.

One of the reasons that women have, in such large number, taken up their pen because it has been allowed them to create their own world. It has allowed them to set the conditions of existence, free from the direct interference of men. Similarly many women have taken to reading women’s writing because they can explore a wide range of experience of the world from which they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existence. That’s why women’s
writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women’s lives. Therefore they received a national and international recognition. They often deviate from the traditional pattern of Indian womanhood and revolt against the conventional role of woman in the society. Their struggle for new identity and their conscious participation in life around has given a new turn to their writing. Thus they mark the evolution of the Indian feminine psyche from tradition to modernity. Social-discrimination, male-oppression, self-realization and consequent evolution of feminine consciousness are the recurring themes in their identity and their conscious participation in turn to their writing. Thus they mark the evolution of the Indian feminine psyche from tradition to modernity. Their concerns are not only feminine but also human. Women’s writing with all its variety, intellectual authority and passionate intensity has created space for itself.

During an almost six decades of postcolonial history of Indian English fiction a wide variety of novelists have emerged focusing attention on a multitude of social, economic, political, religious and spiritual issues faced by three coinciding periods of human experience. Interestingly the woman novelists have been at the core of all literary writings of this phase and with the turn of the century the Indian English women novelists have surpassed their male counterparts outnumbering them quantitatively as well as by maintaining a high standard of literary writing equally
applauded in India and abroad experimenting boldly with not only techniques but also by incorporating tabooed subject matters in their novels and short stories. The result is that Indian women of all categories- rural, Dalit or women of lower economic or social statuses and even sex workers have found a noticeable place in Indian English fiction.

Some Indian English women novelists have favorably responded to the drastically changed psychological realities of Indian life especially after Independence. To this group belong writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Nergis Dalal, Shobha De and Bharati Mukharjee, all being well equipped both emotionally and intellectually to treat the situation appropriately. These women have global awareness. Their high education and intellectual standard have sharpened their observations of life and have attributed a psychological depth to their writings.

While the post-colonial enigma gradually changes into a neo-colonial consciousness in India, the creative writers especially woman fiction writers, restored to examine and re-examine the role of the modern Indian woman vis-a-vis family and society differently and more positively. The Indian women novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukharjee and Shobha De specially exhibit a steady progression in the context of the three stages advocated by Elaine Showalter. Their female protagonists display a
psychic transformation traversing and evolving gradually but firmly through the respective stages of imitation of tradition, protest and advocacy of rights, and eventually introspection, leading to self-discovery which metamorphoses them into strong, independent, expeditious women willing to encounter the onslaughts of life not merely as a minority group but with the cognizance of being a powerful sustaining force for society as a whole.

Consequently these women novelists have been able to create interesting personages who successfully expose the oppression inflicted on women in society. They have also prevailed in driving home the fact that society requires a massive change to avert the suffering of women while dealing with the inner lives of the characters. The postmodern women novelists have simultaneously taken up several cultural, political and social issues. Their women characters evoke a continuous discussion on social values and they also become the focal point of contact between the novelist’s consciousness and the world outside. Placed against this backdrop the women characters symbolize life and growth as well as regression and withdrawal, decay and death. The Novel of dissent comes into existence when these women characters react against the social discrimination meted out to them. The awakening of the woman’s consciousness and her resultant protests may not always resolve her problems but they certainly provide her with inner
enrichment and a sense of satisfaction that at least she has successfully battled against the harsh varieties of life.

Their writings reflect a variety of shades, colors and visions. The assertion of identity in their writings deserves a better treatment at the hands of their male counterpart. They protested against the cruelty perpetrated on the women by portraying their responses and reactions. The spirit of revolt against mechanical life, mismatched marriages and wayward ways of their life partners was obvious in their writings. The protagonists of their novel are women of a typical Indian society. The plot of their story is woven around the women who negotiate the oppression of patriarchal society. The modern novels of 80s paid attention to the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman. They attempted to reconstruct Indian womanhood, which has been characterized as ideally warm, gentle and submissive and the view that women deserved only to be kept in subordination to the male members of the family. Many of the Indian women novelists focus on women’s issues; they have a women’s perspective on the world. The prominent women writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Anita Kumar, Meera Syal, Meena Alexander, Manju Kapur and others have distinguished themselves for their boldness in presenting the status of woman in Indian society and for depicting man-woman
relationship in fictional form. It is only after the emergence of women writers that we have been able to have a deep insight into the psyche of the Indian female.

Quality and liberation are two words, the Indian woman is well acquainted with but she is also aware of the reality of her life realizing the absence of easy solution or smooth exit yet refuses to escape meekly from the seemingly bleak scenario. Even those women who are more fortunate in so far as class, race, wealth, education and opportunity, cannot come to terms with the idea of a male dominated society while those women who are less fortunate are contented when their survival needs are met; yet behind the mask they are victims of loneliness and isolation. In both the cases women remain the weaker sexes, the marginalized struggling to grapple with the conflicting situations. They fail in most cases to assert their individuality, to overcome the sense of loss in rebellion, and to resolve the identity crisis. Nevertheless the woman, as presented marginalized through various novels, stands a resilient creature prepared to endure and prevail with the help of her inner strength and integrity.

However fact to be remembered is that there is a difference of issues among women of developed nations and developing or undeveloped nations. In the former women’s issues are mostly those of identity, job equality and sexual roles while in the latter the major question is that of survival. In underdeveloped nations there are a
handful of women who are economically better placed but they too are victims of age old traditions. Incidentally the common factor inspiring all women searching for alternatives centralized around a serious quest for some sort of emancipation irrespective of consequences.

Most postmodern Indian women novelists indulge in exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in male dominated society. Self-introspection and self-discovery helped them to realize their veiled inner strength. Now the woman emerges as the ultimate redeemer as mother, wife, sister or daughter for she contains the power of sustaining the family. The women in these novels are portrayed as the cultural backbone of the family due to their capability of providing physical, emotional and cultural vitality to their respective families and there by the comprehensive family of mankind. However when the women characters indulge in self-introspection leading to self-discovery the results is varying.

In the novels of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Anita Kumar, Meera Syal, Meena Alexander, Manju Kapur and other women writers, three different types of characters are seen. The first group portrays hypersensitive females
who after self-introspection plunge into dark dismal depths of neurosis. The second group portrays women characters who silently suffer the strain of life and become the idealist while the third group discloses women who discern new and important and discover less about themselves resulting in a sobering effect on them and they find a sense of fulfillment in their relation to the world. Even in a male dominated, tradition oriented society. Such women characters adjust well; they are able to felicitously establish their own value system, and, the inner potentiality enables them to resist the unjust social pressures.

Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Bharati Mukharjee have written about women in a varied cultural perspective. Interesting they have probed the psyche of their creations and thereby have analyzed their relationship with society at large. Thus, the postmodern Indian women writers in English created a pattern of new study because they have dared to shutter the myth of a male dominated social system. Markandaya, Desai, De, Namita Gokhale, Deshpande, Mukharjee have laid a firm foundation in the realm of female study in Indian literature in English. Each one of them has daringly and realistically portrayed the feminist issues in the post-independence Indian parameter while studying these novelists one can get a complete but unprejudiced picture of what an Indian woman faces in social setup which is continuously struggling to maintain a plenum between the traditions and modernity. Thus
these writers have created a new canvas for the future generation of Indian English women novelists.

Feminism, as a concept, is opposed to the idea of subordination of women in both family as well as society. It challenges the domination of patriarchal thought in which men claim to define what is good for women or what is not without consulting them. Feminism may appear in various forms such as radical socialist, Marxist, Lesbian soon and so forth but at the root it is basically a concept concerned with the question of identity among women who share similar experiences in life. Traditionally, feminism was of mass movement in the sense that women clamored for political equality civil rights, job opportunities etc. Today the movement has assumed an individualistic nature where women demand human rights and personal independence dismissing the erstwhile socially defined roles. However this does not imply that women today wish to disturb the existing social and economic parameter. They are partially aware of their marginalization, exploitation; they are conscious of their rights and willingly though assertively compromise with situations. Contemporary feminist thoughts are necessarily pro-woman but not entirely anti-man; it is a concrete step towards better human relationships.

Women writers in post-colonial India have created a life of their own, so to say, placing women in the context of the changing social scenario specially concentrating upon the psyche of such
woman. It’s true that the Indian women have consciously accepted the supremacy of the patriarchal value system by surrendering meekly to their traditionally assigned roles and allowing themselves to be marginalized. But education, better job opportunities and awareness of rights and privileges of women have forced her to contemplate. Today Indian women are exposed to a new set of values with education and economic independence. This leads them to rather conflicting state where they desire equality and freedom while they dread their traditional role but are still not courageous enough to walk out of the situation. At this juncture the woman has to redefine her status, certainly not an easy task. Women writers have caught the Indian women in this flux and have portrayed them realistically both psychologically as well as physically in their novels. Such literature has certainly contributed to a fresh exploration of the role and status of women in the coetaneous Indian society.

In the novels of 1960’s women in Indian fiction were depicted as ideal creatures possessing various virtues with no concept of revolt while the later novels portray women as educated and conscious of their rights and privileges demanding their proper place in society. Undeniably recent years have witnessed the impact of western feminist theories put forward by writers like Simon de Beauvoir (*The second sex*, 1952), Betty Friedan (*The feminine mystique*, 1963) and Kate Millet (*sexual politics*, 1970) and many
others including the radical thinkers and critics. Under these influences, the Indian women writers have successfully attempted to break the literary and social norms of the past. They delve deep into the psyche of their characters and also herald new concept of morality. These characters, not unlike their creators, refuse to silently succumb themselves to the exploitative socio-cultural engineering of the male oriented society. Unlike their Western counterparts they may not put forth subversive proposition. However, they do desire and demand transformation and alteration of the institutions, systems and cultural code of conduct imposed upon them.

The more recent women writers may not be as prolific as their predecessors yet they mainly deal with the themes related to woman and society or more specifically the man-woman relationship in their novels. Arundhati Roy in “The God of Small Things” (1997) visualizes the whole cultural scenario from a focus on isolation, oppression, depression and amalgamation. Roy presents three generations of doubly marginalized women: first by their binding native culture and secondly by the dominant forces of particularity and thirdly emotional victimsation.

The new generation of Indian women novelists like Gita Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Anita Nayar and Manju Kapur have invited much critical attention. All have written about the plight of contemporary women especially in their endeavor for emancipation
and liberation from the patrilineal social system. However, it is difficult to assess their position as feminist writers especially because they have ignored the existing models of feminist writing either western or Indian. Nevertheless, scrutinizing their novelistic adventure provides an interesting study.

Indian fiction in English produced by women emphatically highlights the issues or problematic of the positions of women in post-independence India, especially, in the past two to three decades. However, male dominated Indian literature consciously ignored their sustaining role and portrayed them invariably as a subaltern ‘marginalized’. However beginning with Kamala Markandaya right up to now, in the first decade of the new millennium so to say we have witnessed a spurt of women writers who have shunned all inhibitions accepting bravely the challenge of projecting and discussing the real status and factual roles of contemporary Indian women.

Thematically these writers have concentrated on the female issues but they are not prejudicial, on the other hand, the women characters in these works are drawn from a wide variety of Indian female population placing them in their proper context and background revealing how they suffer or prosper, win or lose, get mentally disoriented or overpower their neurosis, and desperately try to get themselves attuned to the disconcerting positions and conditions they are placed in. The women novelists chosen for the
study, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Tehmina Durrani delineate a wide range of marginalised women from different socio-economic and cultural spheres with limited options and shrewdly monitored freedom granted to them.
References:


4. Ibid. P-50.

5. Ibid. P-51.


