In the context of the ancient Indian classics, social and familial structures and customs, and cultural images and concepts, what is imperative today is a de-mythologising, demystifying, deromanticising and in short, a radical overhauling of the understanding of Indian women. The conventional images to typify women are those of Sita and Savitri as perpetuated by the ancient Indian classics and the one that equates her with "Sakthi", the goddess Durga and Kali. The male-dominated, male-defined Indian society has laid down rules and norms, customs and rituals that make women inferior to men, forced to live in self-exile and self-imprisonment, subjected to life-long servitude and self-sacrificing sub-ordination to man. She is conceived both as a goddess and property to be sold and bought. Both these concepts successfully continue to keep her out of the mainstream.

In Childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent.

(Quoted in Krishnaswamy, 1984: 9)
This has been the traditional attitude to women in India as embodied in the epics and vedas and other ancient classics, given the official seal of approbation by Manu, the Hindu law-giver. As several scholars and social commentators have pointed out, the worst tragedy of the Indian woman is the fact of the women acquiescing in the conceptual framework, conforming to these self-defeating and self-demeaning norms and images and internalising them. In other words, the woman is a perfect foil to the chauvinist Indian male who wants her to be a paragon of the virtues traditionally associated with her. She has to be patience, love, purity, docility and gracefulness personified.

Nevertheless, there is a silver lining in this dismal scenario and that is the voice of protest or revolt that is being raised by groups of women in India as elsewhere in the world. The women of pre-independence India or of Gandhi's struggle for freedom sought to break out of their solitary confinement by making their presence felt in public life. Just as in the Western hemisphere, in India too, women's education, franchise and participation in public life and national self-determination, promoted and passionately advocated by Gandhiji, paved the way for the resurgence of Indian women. It should further be noted that women's liberation movements and feminist approaches in art and literature have gained ground in the post-independence India.
Of course Western ideals and practices that were disseminated through Western education played a crucial role in preparing the ground for such a revolutionary point of departure.

The women's liberation movements or the feminists worked, or rather clamoured for the emancipation of women, not on sufferance but by right. The extent and the nature of the freedom or emancipation demanded were the same as those of the men. In other words, they condemned subjugation and discrimination of women based on sex and demanded equality of the sexes. Both the early and contemporary feminists have engaged in a radical re-appraisal of the role of women in all spheres of life and in the area of relationships between man and woman in all national institutions. While one should admit the political and often polemical slant of the women's liberation movements of the West and even those of India, we need not be too apologetic about it. The extreme shades assumed by the feminist phenomenon are common knowledge. Nevertheless, one should be able to critically probe the historical and sociological reasons for such extreme developments, and appreciate the balance or equilibrium that is being achieved today by most exponents or spokespersons of feminism. The stigma attached to the label of "feminism" is slowly being given the go-by, even as male chauvinism and the macho ideal are being frowned upon by writers.
It is very gratifying to note the emergence and ascendancy of a host of women novelists in India over the last four decades. Nay, what is more, a number of men writers have espoused the cause of women and have voiced their aspirations and yearnings for freedom and equality. While novelists like Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand manifest the sensibility towards women, they cannot be labelled as feminists. The women characters in their novels, at least some of them, have been drawn with such great care and tremendous sympathy, that one cannot fail to perceive the author's deliberate intent behind such portrayals.

The image of the new Indian woman, a by-product of a modern civilization began to exercise the minds of Indian writers. The traditional or mythic images such as Sita and Savitri or pativrata disappeared giving place to more enlightened and liberated types of women. The roles of women have changed in the family, in public life and in society at large. The novelists in India and Africa have been influenced by such developments and changes and therefore they have tried to project either women in their modern roles or educated or enlightened girls facing a traditional or conservative household or husband or society. It is this latter dilemma that is frequently encountered in novels by Indian writers in recent times.
Mulk Raj Anand himself has successfully portrayed the conflict arising out of the incompatibility between a woman's individuality and self-awareness and the traditional views of her husband and her kinsfolks in his novel Gauri. The protagonist of this novel, Gauri, the first and probably the only female protagonist of Anand, is a welcome and revolutionary departure from the novelistic tradition for him, as for many other contemporary novelists. For S.C. Harrex, Gauri is "the modern Mother India".

Shantha Krishnaswamy in her comprehensive study titled The Woman in Indian English Fiction has the following to say about this novel:

Gauri breaks away from the established pattern of saved males and doomed females. At novel's end she had been rejected by Panchi her husband, on the standard Hindu charges of inauspiciousness and impropriety. She acquires enough self-assertion to take the road to the town towards the hospital of the humanistic Dr. Mahindra. It is Panchi who now stands doomed in the slough of rejection and existential loneliness. (Krishnaswamy 1984: 26)
Anand has, in his novel taken a bold stand on behalf of millions of Indian women tortured and hounded by unsympathetic husbands, crafty in-laws, fault-finding and censorious kith and kin and above all, by deepseated guilt-feeling and self-accusing remorsefulness on the part of the woman, born out of centuries of psychological subjugation and bombardment. Gauri by her attitude of mature revolt and defiance when the chips are down, delivers a lethal blow to the machismo ideals of a male-dominated society. Gauri’s experiences as a daughter, a wife and an employee are all marked, by a shattering sense of the futility of expecting her husband or the other males and females around her to vibrate with her predicament. Although Anand draws a parallel between the cow of the story and the meek cow that Gauri is he nonetheless presents her as a modern day Sita, who is undaunted in the face of traumatic and humiliating experiences at the hands of an unsympathetic and money-minded Lakshmi, her mother. Her anger and resentment, although unexpressed, keep swelling to a point when Gauri can no longer bear it. She has the courage to walk out of her husband and his egocentred world, into an uncertain future, but with a gritty determination to shape her future and that of her child to be born.

Anand focuses his attention and the reader’s, on the fortunes, the stress and strain and the psychological and
emotional respones of Gauri. There is a very slow progression in her self-awareness. The Gauri of the first half of the novel is a perfect replica of her mythic counterparts. She is tolerant, self-suffering, self-sacrificing even to the extent of allowing herself to be sold as a concubine to a rich old merchant. She suffers enormous injustices and exploitation at the domestic level. She almost allows herself meekly to be manipulated by her mother, uncle and others. Nevertheless, Anand has shown uncanny and keen interest in Gauri’s inner development, growth as a person from being a near non-person. It is on this growth process that Anand focuses his attention and ensures that she develops into a strong person endowed with moral courage, intellectual clarity and awareness of the reality around.

Marlene Fisher has this to say about Anand’s effective manner of expressing Gauri’s growth juxtaposed to Panchi’s lack of it:

The fullest fictional expression of Anand’s advocacy of freedom for women is his novel, The Old Woman and the Cow, published in 1960. This narrative is convincing and effective, in part, because, the sympathy Anand evokes for young Gauri is not at the complete expense of her husband Panchi. The latter’s inability to keep up
with his wife in her growth into selfhood is due to his own immaturity, his blind, orthodox Hindu views governing the relationship between husband and wife and the pressures of earning a livelihood in a period of drought and famine. An orphan brought up by his aunt Kesaro, Panchi is hard put to deal with Kesaro’s jealousy of Gauri or with an effort to retain her own hold over her nephew. (Fisher 1985: 99-100)

Thus Gauri becomes a fascinating study of a woman in travail and despair, of how she faces the challenge of a moronic and sadistic husband and comes out of this crucible, chastened, purified, enlightened and emboldened. The weight of meaningless traditions and values that bends her down for years is cast off by Gauri, the moment she realizes her own inner potential and reserves. Her final act of departure from her household is the death-knell she rings, for all the customs, rituals and structures, legitimised by religion and glorified by ancient literature as absolute values, while they always militated against basic human dignity, personhood and sanctity that inhere in the woman as a human being. Anand questions the values of female inferiority, subjugation and dependence underpinning some of the gruesome traditional practices such as sati and dowry,
outmoded marriage and family laws, inheritance rights and atrocities such as abortion, rape and many other. If Dr. Mahindra is his mouthpiece for proclaiming his revolutionary counter-ideology, Gauri is his objective correlative, a symbol of his protest against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination. The following words of Shantha Krishnaswamy seem to mirror exactly what happens in the action of this novel, specially in the elaboration of the theme in and through the life of the central character:

The awakening of the woman's consciousness establishes a new set of values in the fictive system. The typological experiences of these women have constant elements like an abrupt awakening, intense introspection, a stasis in time and action, and an abrupt ending with a conscious decision. The ending does not lead to a resolution of her problems, but the fictional shaping of a very specific kind of crisis seen through her eyes is rewarding, for it leads to inner enrichment, a sense of exhilaration and vicarious achievement as we see her battling through harsh reality.  (Krishnaswamy 1984 vii)
Anand has successfully resolved the binary opposition, of woman as subject versus woman as object in this novel. While most of the women characters, including Gauri of the earlier phase, function as objects, passive participants, it is only Gauri who emerges as a subject of her own life and destiny. She is unable to stand the injustices heaped on her for too long. Therefore she decided for herself and becomes her own saviour without depending on or expecting her husband or other male champions to defend her cause. She conducts her own defence and doesn’t allow anyone else to interfere with or intervene in her life. Although Dr. Mahindra has played a conscientizing and ennobling role in her life, he is no more than a mentor or guide. It is Gauri who makes the decision to quit her legitimately-wedded husband.

Thus Anand emphatically portrays Gauri as a subject of her own destiny. Anand’s intention of making the woman a subject is very clearly observed in Gauri’s arbitrary and almost non-chalant exit from her husband’s abode. Indirectly Anand has denounced male dominance, as a value that should be eschewed by Indian society. Anand richly deserves the encomium paid to this work by Meenakshi Mukherjee in these words.

This novel is unique among Indian novels, in rejecting rather than extolling, the time honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission.  

(Mukherjee 1974: 159)
In point of fact Anand has done much more by creating a character like Gauri and making her a fictive prototype of a modern Indian woman of the village, whose institution as a woman, more than her education, had led her to a stand that changes the face of the women's situation in India and signals the changed roles of women, not only in fiction but in reality.

Anand, being a social realist and a committed artist, is able to perceive Gauri as, not just an individual radical or revolutionary, but as a focal point between the growing and expanding human consciousness and the fundamentalist and obscurantist walls and blocks that prevent human solidarity or stall progress. Anand believes in universal human solidarity and salvation or liberation in which the woman has a crucial role to play. As an intelligent student of social dynamics, societal change and transformation Anand knows that such a process sans the enlightened and self-determined woman is bound to be lopsided and abortive. The woman can be and is a potent rallying point for all the forces of liberation. If continuous on-going struggle on all sides and at different levels is the only answer to today's multifarious societal problems and questions, the woman can never be ruled out as an active agent and catalyst of social transformation. She represents an oppressed section of humanity endowed with remarkable qualities of endurance,
acceptance and compassion, so very essential for human liberation. Anand's *Gauri* constitutes a singular impetus to the liberationist zest and trends found in the Indian sub-continent and its literature, and is a boon to activists and literary men/women committed to the cause of liberation of all oppressed peoples and of women in particular. While it cannot be labelled as a handbook for liberation activists, it is without doubt a magnificent clarion call of a committed novelist to his contemporaries not to ignore the silent half of India, the women, without whom the process of liberation can never succeed. It is a superfine novelistic affirmation of the crucial role that women can play in actualising the dream of visionaries like Anand for the total emancipation and real freedom of the teeming millions of India.

The situation of the women in African societies has been an altogether different story. As the colonial encounter upset the applecart of the traditional harmony and egalitarian political, and social structure, the reality of women did undergo considerable change. The woman in the tribal society did not suffer much discrimination or exploitation although her role was more confined to the domestic world. With the advent of western education and western political and other structures, women had greater access to modern values and ideas. A reawakening of a sort must have taken place among African women,
a new awareness of their capabilities and potential. What is of importance or relevance to us here is the perception of Achebe relating to women’s role in his society. Achebe’s women, specially in the precolonial or colonial society are quite independent and mature, of course within the limited sphere of the home or the household or clan. Equality of the sexes among the tribals was never questioned or jeopardised. Functionally or occupationally they are subordinate to the man, the husband or the father. Nevertheless, none of the ugly forms of repression and subjugation still extant in India or elsewhere is found prevalent in any African society. In Achebe’s novels we are presented with a picture of African womanhood that is quite liberated, uninhibited, assertive and dignified. It is in his novels about independent Nigeria and her indigenous leaders that Achebe has tried to portray some full-blooded women characters.

If at all there is a feminist strand in Achebe’s works, it is evident only in his latest novel Anthills of the Savannah. Here Achebe has created women, who are intelligent, reflective, radical and bold. The part played by Beatrice in the plot and action of the novel is quite significant, specially viewed from the context of Africa’s post-independent history and from the perspective of feminism in African creative writings.
Achebe is quite critical of the inferior status accorded to women in Nigeria’s present scheme of things. Through subtle portrayals of the attitudes of the male characters to women and by employing the ironic and satiric mode in delineating the chauvinistic postures taken by the sycophantic group around the dictator, Achebe has laid bare the hidden sentiments of the dominant male vis-a-vis their female companions. Achebe doesn’t hesitate to expose the hypocrisy of even the highly educated, enlightened and motivated characters like Chris and Ikem, where it concerns their attitudes to or relationships with women. Chris, in spite of his loudly-asserted passion for cleaning the augean stables of the body politic of Kangan, is guilty of a condescending attitude to his fiancée Beatrice. The latter time and again points to this weakness in his personality as also his generalised reluctance to listen to others’ opinions or to be open to other alternatives, alternative subjects, alternative motives or alternative audiences. In fact, it is only when Chris is declared an enemy of the leader that he will begin to listen to his fiancée Beatrice, to Braimoh and his fellow taxi drivers, and to Emmanuel the student leader. Thus the reeducation of Chris, incorporates his outgrowing the unwillingness to accept and appreciate women’s role in liberation.
There are many other instances of male chauvinist attitudes displayed by the chief characters of the novel. The President-turned dictator, Sam’s smug celebration of a cynical reference to ‘African Polygamy’, the invasion of the Women’s Hostel by soldiers quelling a student protest and the attempted rape of a girl by a police-officer even as Chris was fleeing Basso for safety, are all so many cases in point to underscore the prevalent attitude of scorn and condescension towards the womankind.

Beatrice is an ambivalent symbol of female oppression on the one hand and female resurgence and resilience on the other. She pensively recalls some of her childhood memories, such as, her given name Nwanyibuife meaning, "A female is also something", her mother’s painful narratives of her father’s ill-treatment and beatings, and her father’s angry out-burst whenever she behaved as a "soldier-girl". Beatrice’s past childhood experiences are replete with images of male-superiority and male-dominance. Nevertheless, in the final stages of the novel she becomes the concrete embodiment of Achebe’s views on women’s specific role in Africa’s reconstruction and the indispensable and unique part that women should and can play in Africa’s and Nigeria’s search for a better political alternative. Beatrice becomes a lone warrior for the rights of women and refuses to admit that she is
ambitious. She holds a brief for Ikem and Chris and defends their activities and posture. She champions their cause not always for egotistic reasons. However, a streak of the feminine fear psychosis is not altogether absent. Innes C.L. has made a very perceptive assessment of Beatrice's character and typological role in this novel:

She too has changed by the novel's end, so that she has become the focus of a new nucleus of hope, providing a place and an intellectual testing ground for the discussions of Emmanuel. Captain Abdul, Braimoh, Elewa and even Agatha a group significantly more varied in class and ethnic origin than the gatherings to which, she, Chris and Ikem had formerly been accustomed. In a metaphor carefully chosen to subvert its usual connotations of gender role, Beatrice is described as "a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company".

(Innes 1990: 158) (AS, P.229)

The last chapter wherein the naming ritual of Elewa's daughter takes place is certainly a masterpiece of Achebe's creative imagination and artistic verve. Beatrice becomes the
village priestess combining in herself the mythological past and role of a modern prophetess. After the death of the triumvirate, it is her responsibility to symbolically enact the eschatological times in apocalyptic terms. Achebe skilfully weaves this fantastic climax by introducing the female myth of Idemili and the male myth or the prose-poem of Ikem, the "Hymn to the Sun", the mythical version of the realistic aspects of the political situation. The destructive and creative dimensions converge in Beatrice as she performs the naming ritual, assuming the traditionally male prerogative and making the entire ceremony a colourful, collective, symbolic and effective sign of the birth of a new awakening, new hope, a new generation, a regeneration and reincarnation.

Elewa's daughter is given a male name, Amaechina, which means, "may-the-path-never-close". This group becomes the biblical remnant in effect, anticipating the eschatological regeneration after death and destruction. Ikem and Chris become part of the process, a necessary and inevitable, vicarious sacrifice in the cause of the nation's metamorphosis. The whole ritual, the language, the conversation, the dialectics, the spirit and the people, are shot through with an extraordinary sense of solidarity, vibrancy, and above all hope. It is an amalgam, nay, a fusion, of the past and the present, the mythical and the
realistic, the male and the female, the Christian and the Mohammedan creeds, a rare intimation of the eschatological reality.

In this vision, the role of women is emphasised and Beatrice, Elewa, Agatha and the elders together form the remnant which has its links with the past through Chris and Ikem and look forward to the future as if in a continuum. The birth of a child and the presence of the young and the old, the men and women of different creeds and socio-economic and educational backgrounds unite to create a new myth or image of human solidarity and ongoing struggle with the women in the vanguard. The creative rondo, encapsulated in Achebe's line "Stories create people create stories" has been passed on by Ikem, the male story-teller to Beatrice, the female story-teller. The torch of hope is being handed on to the people. The triumvirate is dead. The remnant represents not just one section of people, but all peoples who are engaged in the struggle. The struggle is important; equally important is the story-telling. Both must go hand in hand. In this process the role of the enlightened and committed women like Beatrice becomes electrifying, imperative and crucial.

Both Anand and Achebe lay great store by the liberational potential of the women, committed to the cause of social and political emancipation. While neither specifies or explicitates the nature or dynamics of the would be struggle, they are both
positive about the direction it will take, its outcome, above all about the role of women in the struggle. Anand focuses on the agony and the injustices experienced by a vast majority of women in India and voices their protest and demand for justice, redressal and rehabilitation. Most of his characters are silent sufferers, symbolic of the masses of women in India, who suffer ignominy, humiliation, violence and marginalisation simply because they belong to the feminine gender. The gender-bias in Indian culture, religion, society, politics and even in law has been imbibed by both men and women as a matter of course. Anand portrays it, in its naked reality, in the poignant tragedy of Gauri. Gauri triumphs in her moment of discomfiture and ostensible rebellion against the accepted norms of religion and society. Anand has given a superb artistic expression to his vision of a free, liberated and self-determining womankind. It is not only Anand's dream but he projects it as the unarticulated aspiration of millions of the oppressed and exploited women. Gauri stands for these awakening and questioning women, who evoke sympathetic responses from creative artists like Anand, who declare themselves as committed to a new society where all discrimination and exploitation based on sex, race, caste, class or creed will be rooted out.
Achebe, when compared with Anand, appears to be a champion of total emancipation of the African society in which the role of women is crucial and strategic. Achebe stresses the irreplaceable service that women, specially educated women, can render to the cause of social transformation. Achebe's women, particularly in Anthills of the Savannah do appear to be victims of a male-dominated political structure. Nevertheless, they are in the thick of the battle, as confidantes and one, a topnotch official with a measure of independence. The marginalisation occurs notwithstanding the fact that the elite group at the top goes through a process of disaffection, disillusion and eventual rebellion in the context of the president of the state metamorphosing into a tyrant. Beatrice, for example, observes the political trends and events, comments on the course or direction that the country is taking and, in fact, critiques every move, plan and idea of Ikem and Chris who are the top two ideologues reflecting and reflecting on the sad plight of the masses resulting from Sam's despotic rule.

While Anand's Gauri enacts a revolutionary and symbolic protest against all conventions, Achebe's Beatrice gathers around her a remnant group and performs an apocalyptic ritual replete with gestures, symbols, words, myths and responses all indicative of a nationwide movement for the emancipation of women from the
man-made yoke of obscurantism, and culture of silence and subordination. While Anand expects individual women to revolt and express their indignation and frustration, Achebe welds the enlightened and battered women and galvanizes them into a collective force to make a dent in the male-citadel, nay, to rock the ship of the state and cleanse it of all undesirable people and ideas.

Both these aspects are important. Individual realisation and conversion of the kind portrayed by Anand are necessary however difficult it may be. The collective act of struggling on a political platform with a well-thought out programme of strategies so admirably depicted by Achebe, is the other side of the coin of liberation. In short, liberation is a process that has to be commenced both at the personal and collective levels. In other words, it is a process of re-education and regeneration, initiated and operated by the people with the intellectual elite playing the key role of giving the movement, the thrust forward, the intellectual stamina and dynamism without which it may not survive till the last. Achebe's accent on the story-telling aspect of the struggle supplies the latter dimension. It is the collective consciousness, historic memory that uphold the sagging morale and spirit of the people.

Anand and Achebe have touched reality in the raw, each in his own inimitable way and in the context of his own peculiar
national situation and cultural heritage. From a feminist angle, both Anand and Achebe have scored remarkable victories, as their portrayals can serve as potent starting points for further elaborations in creative par lance, of a social reality, which is still very depressing, mind-boggling and defying solutions.