Chapter 1

STIRRINGS OF FEMALE PSYCHE

Criticism, since the hoary past, has been an expression of male sensibility. Woman has been treated merely as an entity concerning man either in his real or fantasy life. "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree, the pen has been in their hands."1 Jane Austen's remark in Persuasion sums up not only the literary options open to female characters but also the claustrophobic ethos circumscribing the female authors. 'Hearth and heart' were the two extremes of female swing. Against this background, efforts of Fanny Burney, Jane Austen and George Eliot to project in their oeuvre female consciousness, striving to break apart the cordon of custom and redefine itself are noteworthy.

Feminism, according to Encyclopaedia Americana is a worldwide cultural movement," to secure the complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights—moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic."2 Defining feminism as 'an organized women's movement to change', their place in society, Olive Banks grants the title of feminists to "Any groups that have tried to change the position of women, or the ideas about women..."3 Feminism according to Dale Spender is woman's protest against their oppression.

Neither now nor in the has feminism been a monolith and while there is no question that
for as long as men have held power, women have protested, that protest has taken many different forms and for many different reasons. Part of women's tradition is the acknowledgement of authenticated differences within the shared framework of oppression.4

Mary Ritter Beard in *Woman as Force in History*(1946) reiterated that "the struggle to eradicate oppression is, a struggle for women's minds..."5 Naomi Black defines feminism in "both personal and organisational terms" as "It includes the desire not to have women judged inferior or lacking by male standards, and the insistence that women not be disadvantaged in comparison to men."6 As a concept, it has its genesis in Alexandre Dumas's pamphlet *L'Homme-Femme*, published in 1872.

However, the roots of feminism lie in distant antiquity, when woman was regarded inferior to man both physically and intellectually. The sheer struggle for survival in the face of physical dangers required exercise of brute force, which, in its turn, naturally gave rise to the convenient myth of male superiority. The idea of male superiority received religious sanction in such Biblical statements as the following:-

*The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man, neither was man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.* (I. Cor. xi. 8, 9)

Opposed to this ancient tradition of eternal social subordination of woman, was the moral tradition, which finds expression in the anti-feminist Pauline epistles and the Rig Vedas, labelling woman as the eternal temptress driving the male to the pleasures of the materialistic world. However, the superiority of woman on a moral basis was kept alive throughout by a belief in powerful female
deities leading to elevation in the status of women.

Consequently, the first great battles were fought in Egypt, Babylon, Crete and Phrygia between the feminists and fraternity of women. The humanism of the eighteenth century contributed to the emergence of society from a feudal aristocracy to an industrial democracy. But the social and political climate was not favourable for rehabilitating woman in her rightful place as man's equal. Nevertheless, woman continued to stride forward demanding equal rights and status.

Feminism may therefore, be described as that part of female psyche that recoils, protests and rebels against discrimination of any kind in this man-made religion, history, culture, myth, norms, mores and maxims of our society. Even passive resistance to conformism was a step forward and when this resistance took the form of dissent, it was a leap forward. Fanny Burney, Jane Austen and George Eliot could not, by modern standards be classified as feminists, but in bolstering the self-esteem of their heroines, investing them with 'active principle', in making them educated and allowing them to think of themselves as individuals, they were the pioneers.

Feminists believe and recognize "that the success of revolution, any revolution, depends on changed consciousness, on the ability to shatter what Emma Goldman called the inner tyrants, the ones we internalize." Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own contributed significantly in keeping the collective female consciousness on the right course.

Masterpieces are not single and solitary births, they are the outcome of many years of thinking in
Aphra Behn,(1640-1689) was the first woman to speak her own mind without being apologetic about it. She risked her reputation and courageously set out to become a professional writer and exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of men in sexual matters. Aphra Behn’s contemporary Mrs Hannah Wooley in her introduction to The Gentle Woman’s Companion scathingly attacked male hegemony.

Vain man is apt to think we were merely intended for the world’s propagation, and to keep its humane inhabitants sweet and clean; but by their leaves, had we the same Literature, he would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies. Hence I am induced to believe, we are debar’d from the knowledge of human learning lest our pregnant Wits should rival the towering conceits of our insulting Lords and Masters.9

Aphra Behn and Mrs Wooley were not alone in waging this ‘liberation war’ of their sex. In 1694, Mary Astell put forward A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest. All these challenges and protests, John K.Kinnaird points out, raise many questions:

First, there is the question of the origin of their ideas; by what means did they come to see through the prevailing ‘truths’ and to find grounds for the formulation of their own rebellious alternatives? Second, if there was ‘a large and well defined’ women’s movement during the
Restoration period, could it be that it was the 1600s and not the 1960s that was the era in which feminism was born? And third, what is the significance of this omission of women's protest from the mainstream historical records; what process of selection has been at work—and why—that we could have been led to believe that feminism is a fairly recent invention?10

Mary Astell championed the cause of women's education to liberate them from the shackles of ignorance, idleness, frivolity and sharpen their intellectual faculties, so that they could discharge their duties as wives, mothers and teachers of the young in a more meaningful manner.

The suppression of women's protest is part of the oppression unleashed on them. But the invincible human spirit, time and again spurts out in different forms within frames of varying endurance and performance. Olive Banks in *Faces of Feminism* distinguishes "three intellectual traditions" within feminism, originating in the eighteenth century, but continuing to operate even today as differentiating principles, though they sometimes overlap and are not mutually exclusive.11

The first tradition of Evangelical Christianity, missionary in intent, drew out women from domesticity and involved them in moral and social reforms. Reinforced by the halo of moral superiority of women, it finds its expression in the pro-woman sections of radical feminism.

The second tradition of Enlightenment philosophers propagated by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill appeals to human reason rather than convention. The tradition stresses the likely affinities between the sexes and
attributes the differences to environment rather than nature. 'Equal Rights Feminists' in their insistence on self-realization, freedom and anatomy draw their inspiration from this tradition.

The third tradition of Socialist feminism, owes more to the earlier 'tradition of communitarian socialism' and 'Saint-Simonian movement in France' than to Marxism. Its significance for the feminists lies in its attempt to take away the burden of child-rearing from the women and pass it on to the community. Marxism with its espousal of state control of the children and insistence on equal rights exercised considerable influence on feminism. However, because of its corollary of free love, the tradition does not find favour with a majority of the feminists.

The struggle for equal rights attained new heights with the publication in 1792 of Mary Wollstonecraft's epochal A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women which may be regarded as the seminal statement of modern-day feminism, although passing references to women's plight had been made earlier by Thomas Paine in his book The Rights of Man. The appearance of Mary Wollstonecraft's work had a deep impact on the thinking of men and women throughout the nineteenth century, both in England and in the United States. Her influence on feminists can be gauged by Janet Todd's statement in "Reading of Mary Wollstonecraft", in Feminist Literary History.

For the early feminist 'herstorians' Wollstonecraft was easily assimilable as the founding mother, the first feminist, the almost sacred progenitor towards whose sufferings and struggles we as her
children should take a stance of reverence. In some places in North America criticising her was as risky a business as deconstructing Virginia Woolf.12

In our times Mary Wollstonecraft's writings have been subjected to psycho-analysis and historical deconstructions. Some authors like Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham in Modern Woman: The Lost Sex have created out of her life,

a cautionary tale of penis envy and gender confusion, inevitably punctuated by suicide attempts; in this view it seems to have been both ironic and retributive that she died in the supremely feminine way of childbirth.13

Wollstonecraft in the Vindication is quite restrained with regard to description of sexual virtue. Nevertheless, she makes it clear that men and women are created alike in sexual feeling, as they are in rational capacity. According to her, without male virtue, female virtue is not possible. As Miriam Brody points out in Mary Wollstonecraft: Sexuality and Woman's Rights:

What Wollstonecraft comes to in the Vindication is a vision of reality which satisfies her Romantic sympathies, her training in Enlightenment philosophy and is consistent with the Puritan values that helped to define the anti-aristocratic ideology of the new middle class. The model of order which she creates is of an ideal family life, throwing into new perspective, as she does so, our notions of what constitutes her public and private spheres. It is the family which will channel feeling, without which life is soulless, diffuse passion, so feeling may be governable, and act as the foundation stone for moral order, such that reason may produce a perfectable society. Without the primacy of reason, there can be no emancipation for women.14
Unlike other fellow writers of her age and times, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that men had to reform themselves before women could be reformed. Elaborating on morality for sexual life which included women and men sharing responsibilities and arguing for a public definition of family life which could give women the inherent right to be educated as citizens, Mary Wollstonecraft constructed a model of personal and civic life, to advance the rights of women.

The contradictions and ambiguities in feminism are highlighted when Ray Strachey in classic history of the nineteenth century feminism *The Cause*, combines Mary Wollstonecraft with Hannah More, who had described the former as a 'hyena in petticoats'.

Hannah More had a part to play in the general redefinition of women's sphere; Mary Wollstonecraft articulated women's claims, needs and desires at a deeper level. By harnessing the two a neat schema can be constructed. There is theory (Mary Wollstonecraft) and practice (Hannah More), consciousness of the rights of women and lack of consciousness, Mary and Martha coinciding. One is radical, the other conservative; they responded differently to the same social phenomena, yet both had contributions to make.15

The legacy of human rights bequeathed by the Enlightenment was the main plank on which the suffragists fought for vote. Dr Richard Pankhurst pursued the same argument in 1867.

The basis of political freedom is expressed in the great maxim of the equality of all men, of humanity, of all human beings, before the law. The unit of modern society is not the family but the individual. Therefore every individual is prima facie entitled to all the franchises and freedoms of the constitution.
The political position of women ought, and finally, must be, determined by reference to that large principle... Any individual who enjoys the electoral right is not, in the eye of the constitution, invested with it in virtue of being of a certain rank, station or sex. Each individual receives the right to vote in the character of human being, possessing intelligence and adequate reasoning power. To be human and to be sane are the essential conditions...it is not on the grounds of any difference of sex that the electoral right is in principle either granted or denied.7

While Dr Pankhurst emphasised human rights, the feminists had shifted the focus from human rights to women's rights. The shift in focus from human rights to women's rights and the concomitant exclusion of men from the ambit of feminism were mainly responsible for male/female antithesis. Any discussion pertaining to mental or emotional patterns characteristic of female psyche invariably gets mired in the reiteration of feminine and masculine stereotypes rationalised by Freud's doctrine of femininity. Freud portrayed woman as the "other", the "sex", and characterized her as "masochistic, passive and narcissistic."17 Rosalind Miles exhorts women to beware of such belittling reductive generalization: "Despite Freud's sincerity there is an inevitable contraction and belittlement in this unconscious synecdoche, in the reduction of the entire sex to one type."18 Patricia Spacks dismisses this male-female opposition:-

Of course it is by no means true that books by women necessarily differ vividly from books by men. Male writers are often 'sensitive,' women frequently knowledgeable: the stereotypes don't apply. Writing novels, women deal with the problems that have always concerned novelists: relationship, personal identity, the interchange between individual and society .... Still, there appears to be something that we might call a women's point of view... a vague
enough phenomenon, doubtless the result mainly of social conditioning, but an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries. 

Jean-Paul Sartre endorses the same point of view. A woman according to Sartre, "has a certain type of feelings, and a way of being." Doris Lessing declared in her preface to The Golden Notebook, "that filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as the filter which is a man's way..."

Freud's doctrine that for women 'anatomy is destiny' sparked off vociferous protestations from feminists. Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1953), Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1965), Kate Millet's Sexual Politics (1969), Germaine Greer's Female Eunuch (1971), Elain Morgan's The Descent of Woman (1972), and Patricia Meyer Spacks The Female Imagination (1975) are some of the rejoinders to Freud's concept of femininity. Betty Friedan decried Freud's theory as "obsolescent, an obstacle to truth for women... and a major cause of the pervasive problem that has no name." Simone in her classic analysis exhorts women to transcend the status of this alterity or otherness imposed on them. The overwhelming nature of the 'conditioning' and the resulting helplessness, frustration, anger, and rancour imbued in women is succinctly expressed by Jean Rhys: "But no one can go against the spirit of a country with impunity and propaganda from the cradle to the grave can do a lot."

Simone de Beauvoir inveighs against this conditioning: "As soon as a girl is born, she is given the vocation of motherhood because society really wants her washing dishes which is not really a vocation. In order to get her to wash the dishes, she is given the vocation of maternity."

Feminists, influenced by Marxism, dared to challenge the entire social
order that "no longer meets the newly aroused hopes of the people who live within it." Taking this class analogy further, Mary Ellman observes:

Feminine passivity is closely related to negro apathy. In both cases having restricted the participation of the group, the observer finds that inactivity is an innate group characteristic ... Women and negroes are also linked in the stereotypes of frivolity and fecklessness respectively.

Despite such strong sentiments, feminist movements failed to take an overt class character. Sartre brings home to us the simple fact that "Relations between men and women are very different. No doubt there are some very important implications from the economic point of view, but women are not a class, nor are men a class in relation to them." A mellowed Betty Friedan in the The Second Stage endeavours to transcend female/male polarization, "to achieve the human wholeness that is the promise of feminism." Elain Morgan in The Descent of Woman cautions women against whipping up this hatred: "What we mustn't do...is to try to found a Women's movement on a kind of pseudo-male bonding, alleging the whole male sex to be a ferocious leopard, and whipping up hatred against it." She adduces four good reasons: "To hate is foolish. We (men and women) are all disenchanted. It won't do as bonding mechanism. It will cause fissures among women."

The shift in focus from 'sex' to 'self' in women, was the most positive aspect of the feminist movement. The increasing emphasis on 'self-knowledge', 'identity', and 'psychic integrity', as reflected by women writers was identified by Showalter as the 'female phase'. She points out that,

Female imagination cannot be treated by literary
historians as a romantic or Freudian abstraction. It is the product of a delicate network of influence operating in time, and it must be analyzed, as it expresses itself, in language and in a fixed arrangement of words on a page, a form that itself is subject to a network of influences and conventions, including the operations of the market place.30

Showalter distinguishes three major phases — Feminine, Feminist and Female. In the Feminine phase (1840-1880) women wrote mainly to equal the intellectual gains of the male culture. The distinguishing sign is the male pseudonym (George Eliot, Currer Bell) introduced in England in the 1840s. During the Feminist phase (1880-1920) literature was used to politicize and dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. In the Female phase, women reject imitation and protest, fear and anger and turn to female experience.

Emancipation of women in literature was directly related to freedom of women in real life. The right to vote had been won by women in 1920. In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady Henry James had said: "Millions of presumptuous girls, intelligent or not intelligent daily affront their destiny, and what is it open to their destiny to be, at the most, that we should make an ado about it?" 31 But as the twentieth century progressed a number of changes took place that helped in the elevation of women's role and status.

Feminism with its militant, virulent, subversive and strident notes played an extremely significant role in getting women the vote and making available to them the boundless vistas — from hearth to horizon and beyond. But its extreme postures were repugnant to aesthetic or creative sensibility, least of all to female psyche. Simone de Beauvoir and other leftist feminists were more concerned in
destroying the system than ameliorating the lot of common women. "The comforts of the family, the decoration of one's own home, fashion, marriage, motherhood — all these are women's enemy, she says. It is not even a question of giving women a choice — anything that encourages them to want to be mothers or gives them that choice is wrong. The family must be abolished, she says with absolute authority. How then will we perpetuate the human race? There are too many people already, she says. "Am I supposed to take this seriously?" wonders Betty Friedan at this "cold" and "sterile" attitude.32

Anger and militancy of the feminists seemed anachronistic in the wake of considerable changes that had taken place in the status of women. The "regions full of life' in which she might discover a field for her efforts' ... other than custom has pronounced necessary for her sex"33 were boundless for those women who were willing to undergo the vicissitudes immanent in them. Virginia Woolf was not wrong to suggest that Jane Eyre would have been a very different novel if Charlotte Bronte had herself reached the "busy world."34 This re-definition and expansion of the nature of 'private sphere' pioneered by Mary Wollstonecraft results in the image of a total life infinitely more richly conceived by novelists who are not so much concerned with a causal relationship between public event and private movement as with the way in which each is at once part of and illuminates the other.35 Satisfied with women's fiction, Virginia Woolf wrote in 1929:

It is courageous, it is sincere, it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman's book is not written as a man would write it.36

A Room of One's Own acclaims the superiority of the
"highly developed" and "infinitely intricate" creative power of women over that of men. In the light of pro-family and conservative feminism of Betty Friedan's *The Second Stage*, Germaine Greer's *Sex and Destiny*, Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman*, Virginia Woolf's observation, "Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities?" is very pertinent.

Doris Lessing in *The Four Gated City* identifies "creativity, memory, vision and love" as the four 'gates' to human consciousness, and makes her heroines have an edge over men in communication, because of their readiness to pay attention to these unconventional signals. She presents women as being more practiced in interpreting inner space, though in *The Descent into Hell*, to Lessing's credit, the protagonist is a man. Such a creative power found man-made maxims inadequate to express its complexity. Such chafing against unsatisfactory reality is perennial to women's fiction as is manifest in Maggie Tulliver's lament: "The mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims."

This re-definition of reality coincided with the emphasis on 'inner reality' in fiction at large, thus authenticating the feminine point of view all the more. This could also be sub-conscious endeavour to keep at bay the feminist consciousness. Female novelists like Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, who portray the quotidian toil of ordinary women in our times, betray the tyranny of the intensely personal, of the non-material... Stubbs rightly cautions the women writers,

*because the internal consciousness is now seen as the 'true reality' for men as well as women, it does not make the tyranny of the private world any the less oppressive for those who are actually denied full*
participation in the 'world outside'.

The fight against oppression has been the common denominator of feminist movements. According to Caroline Ramazanoglu in *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, feminism; "started from assertions of women's common sisterhood in oppression... that in general women have interests opposed to those of men, that men generally dominate women, and generally benefit from this domination." It is only when conservative feminists try to gloss over this aspect or rationalize it, their recantation ushers in, 'The Great leap Backwards'.

An attack on sexual politics is an attack on the radical core of feminist thought and practice — the recognition that the subordination of women to men is systemic and structural. Friedan, Elshtain, and Greer seek to avoid direct struggles to end this subordination. Despite a few rather vague affirmations of sexual equalities, none identify male domination as a problem requiring political, or any other, attention. Friedan wants us to shift to a concern for 'human' problems; Elshtain asks us to evaluate female-identified virtues. Greer's new preoccupation with the imperialism of global population planners totally displaces concern for women's subordination. None of them support direct efforts to confront the domination of women by men.

Women's subordination to men both in the family and society is strongly condemned by modern-day feminists. This pro-woman feminist thought seeks to destroy masculine hierarchy. Modern day feminists like Bety Friedan, Susan Sontag, Germaine Greer etc. have often expressed the view that feminist studies should only deal with women's world, its culture and values. Greater attention must be paid to questions of intimacy, child-rearing, economic production, childlessness
It would not be incorrect to point out that the present-day feminism is deeply rooted in the French Enlightenment thought and in British liberalism (John Stuart Mill). The co-relation of these two thoughts is easily discernible in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and the American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* clearly pointed the women's role and responsibilities as a mother. Cady Stanton in 1869 insisted on women's right nay her birth-right to self-sovereignty.

The challenge for feminism is to embrace the diversity of human experience. Women must guard against propagating, inculcating and internalizing either 'feminist mystique' or 'feminine mystique'. Our quest should be gender justice and not merely woman justice. The present work attempts to explore the inchoate attempts in that direction by Fanny Burney, Jane Austen and George Eliot and to show to what extent they succeeded in furthering the cause of feminism.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


13. Ibid., p.103.


31. Henry James, Preface to the *Portrait of a Lady*.


34. Ibid., p. 240.

35. Ibid., pp. 238-39.


38. Ibid., p. 132.


42. Ibid., p. 234
