Chapter 1

Introduction

The Big Question: Truth, Consciousness, Reality

The reason it is so difficult to fight with stereotypes is that each one contains a kernel of truth. (Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita. In Search of Answers: Indian Women’s voices from Manushi)

The question of being a woman is more difficult than it perhaps originally appeared, for we refer to women not only as a social category but also a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity. Culturally she is viewed as a man with a lack or a difference, nothing in her own right, a modification of or a deviation from the ‘norm’. This subjective center of socially dominant discourses has been a ‘universal’ subject, which has established its identity through the invisible marginalization or exclusion of what has been defined as ‘Femininity’. “Differences between men and women are in some tangible sense derived from evolution,” says Lionel Tiger in his The Decline of Males. Clues to their disparate nature are best found in biology, a basic science too often scorned by proponents of “a broad and general antimale ideology.” Feminist theory emphasized the ideological production of ‘femininity’ as the ‘other’ of the patriarchy and the need, thereof, for women to become ‘real’ subjects and to discover their ‘true’ selves. Thus, with a search for coherent and unified feminine subjects, began the deconstruction of the myth of women as the absolute ‘other’.

Thus began the writing of fiction by women and on women. Describing the writer’s dilemma in Writing Degree Zero, Roland Barthes articulates the fundamental problem faced by the revolutionary in culture. Writing exists by conventions that constitute and are constituted by history. In order to be always new, the writer must destroy the very thing being created. Thus Barthes concludes,

there is therefore in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a
coming to power, there is the very shape of every revolutionary
situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution
must of necessity borrow, from what it wants to destroy, the very
image of what it wants to possess.¹

Feminist criticism, by definition, engages this struggle. It is political, that is, it
necessitates a challenge to the disposition of power within the critical establishment. It is
revolutionary, a destructive and reconstructive rather than just a deconstructive act. The
feminist critic, in order to work towards the transformation of society, attempts a
particular kind of duplicity; she works within the present order so that she can destroy it;
she borrows its tools in order to subvert it.

Each reading in the moment of presentation offers itself as the interpretation, and
the critic strives for interpretive dominance. Through its analytically shrewd method for
exposing assertions of power within critical discourse, deconstruction can assist feminist
criticism to exercise its political potential by refusing univocal and totalizing reductions
within its own tradition as it resists such constructions in the broader field of critical
theory. Eluding the circularity of power/ knowledge requires yet another move, the
simultaneous deconstruction of the interpretive construction. This is what is being
attempted in the thesis.² Present day feminism is a historically specific movement, rooted
in French Enlightenment thought (Mary Wollstonecraft) and in British Liberalism (John
Stuart Mill), and consequently wedded, in deeply critical style, to notions of truth, justice,
freedom and equality. Jacque Derrida (ICA Documents) summarizes his own position as
follows:

We—have to deconstruct, to take the time to deconstruct
Enlightenment. But when I say we have to deconstruct a thing, I do
not say we are against it, or that in any situation I will fight it, be it
on the other side. I think we should be on the side of the
Enlightenment without being too naïve, and on some occasions be
able to question its philosophy.
Derrida is against easy reduction of feminism to simplistic dogmatism. What feminists in the Third World are doing then is to dismantle not only the concept given to them by western feminists but the understanding of social and economic process that is being given to them by what is called the dominant discourse within classical capitalism or socialist frameworks. They also are in the process situating their deconstructive gestures in the political contexts or in the process of reconstructing.

Before the Women's Liberation Movement, criticism of women's writing took the form of an androgynist poetics, denying the uniqueness of a female literary consciousness, and advocating a single or universal standard of critical judgement, which women writers had to meet. The women’s movement of the late 1960s initiated both a feminist critique of male culture and a Female Aesthetic celebrating women's culture. By the mid 1970s, academic feminist criticism, in league with interdisciplinary work in women’s studies, entered a new phase of Gynocritics, or the study of women’s writings. With the impact of European literary and feminist theory in the late 1970s, gynesis or Poststructuralist feminist criticism, dealing with “the feminine” in philosophy, language, and psychoanalysis, became an important influence in the field as a whole. And in the late 1980s we are seeing the rise of gender theory, the comparative study of sexual difference.

The androgynist position was articulated early or by Mary Ellman in Thinking About Women (1969), which wittily deconstructed the pernicious effects of thinking by sexual analogy, and also by Carolyn Heilbrun in Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (1973), which argued “our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender.” (ix) Thus Feminism in Indian English literature is a by-product of the western feminist movement but its subsistence derives from our freedom struggle. The availability of western feminist theory should not lead us to indiscriminate application of theory on individual lives or the novels under study, because cultural contexts which are comparatively relative and culturally diverse must be considered. The study indulges in an analysis and application of this diversity.
Feminist ideology and ideas are diffused. They are not general to all women of all races and classes at all given times. In ‘re-representation’ the problem of authenticity would remain a nebulous term still. Critics and writers like Sayantani Das Gupta, Shamita Das Gupta and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, all of who identify themselves as feminist activists have accepted that due to their Indian cultural background their perceptions of feminism are very different from those of white women. Keeping this in mind, Spivak and Sara Suleri both point out the Diasporic identity of women as it is represented within a single woman, evoking yet another important area of focus i.e. the multiplicity of female body, psyche, and self that needs to be explored. The aim then would be to come to terms in the 21st century with the complexities of life and literature, gender relations and the form of fiction and language.

Most attempts at feminist critical theory fail to take into account the fact that the masculinist tradition is attempting to impose upon feminists a theoretical quandary of its own construction, belying the same unquestioned values that under gird the literary canon and dictates the limits of interpretation. When the feminists challenge the presumptive authority of male hegemony, they are accused of having instituted a new hegemony, like the old except with a reversed gender hierarchy, and their opponents say that the very fact of challenging suggests that they know “what is right” and the opponents don’t. So even if the feminists haven’t intended a hegemonic reversal of power relationships, the mere existence of their criticism demonstrates to some that they have. For the most part, the masculinist tradition negates and ignores them, but the feminist writers and critics must continue to speak, even within paradigmatic constrains. The writers Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Shauna Singh Baldwin belong to this revolutionary category.

K R Srinivasa Iyengar observes that the vastly different scenario in India encompasses contradictions of a kind undreamed in the mainstream feminist philosophy. (K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar. Indian Writing in English) He lists factors such as caste, class, economic deprivation, sectarian fragmentation, overpopulation, the growing power of fundamental forces, the sway of superstition, female foeticide, and above all, the essential
nature of Hinduism which combine to create a situation that defies an easy solution. Along with these factors the internal politics of an individual, her upbringing, social context, parents, family, there ideologies, schooling and value systems also are responsible in moulding a woman's character and her problems. She cannot operate in isolation from her contextual society however hard pressed she might feel or however dire her need for freedom be. These cultural and social pressure bodies also operate on the protagonists of the novelists under study who present aptly the condition of the modern day woman. The characters are thus reduced to lifeless creatures silently following the dictates of the society. External and internal pressures of guilt and shame too operate on the muted and mutilated protagonists. Amidst this complex interplay of society and self the struggle and search for ‘truth’ continues.

Looking back to the “great tradition” of western political thought beginning with Plato, women were ‘silenced’ since ages. He argued that the private speech of the household, the speech of women, lacked either the form of philosophic argumentation or the form of poetry. It was, therefore, without meaning, unformed, chaotic, evanescent, the speech of doxa (mere opinion, not truth). The women of Plato’s time were not only excluded from politics but also debarred from participating in the process of becoming what Plato meant by a ‘good’ human being, a process that required a special search for truth within all male forums for philosophic discourse, pedagogy, and intimacy that is the mise en scène for the Platonic dialogues. Women historically had no place to bring their thoughts, certainly no public arena to voice them in the misogynist milieu of Greek antiquity. When they did speak, their language was labeled reactive noise, devoid of meaning and significance. Cut off from the philosophic speech of the ‘symposia’ and the public speech of the agora, women’s communications in classical antiquity would have taken on the terms of their enforced isolation. (Plato. The Republic of Plato, 366A-367a)

In a different but related context Makarand Paranjape has pointed to the possibilities made available to the Indian critic by the intersection of tradition, modernity and post modernity. (Paranjape. Indian Literature, 75) Otherwise also, so much has happened since the images of women criticism came into vogue that a critique and a
reconsideration are in order, if only to help it reorient itself in a changed theoretical
geography and to reaffirm its relevance. Plato’s theory about women also thus needs to
be looked at and analyzed in a different light. A critique is an examination of the
constitutive possibilities of a system, a concept or a practice. It is an archeological
endeavor in the Foucaultian sense. As such, critique is at the heart of the feminist
enterprise; the feminist aim is to make a transformative intervention, and no real
intervention can be made without examining the constitutive possibilities of a given
system. The present study is an effort towards such examination. The images of women
criticism are founded on the following assumptions, which need a study.

1. The images of women in literature reflect women’s reality; viewing it as a social
document.
2. The images do not reflect women’s reality; or that literature constructs a false
world in which women are insidiously portrayed disgracefully, so that critics task
is to show and decry the author’s complicity.
3. It is within the power of the feminists to construct alternatives, empowering
images of women or that literature should construct a world in which women
appear as powerful.

The guiding notion underlying these assumptions is that literature is a reflector of life, a
reflector both in the sense of a mirror that reproduces the actual thing and in the sense of
an instrument capable of shedding a revealing, impacting light on its object, a light that
determines even as it reveals.

The complexity of patriarchal structures as ideological, economic, cultural and
political is acknowledged but few works bring this out in its fullness. Perhaps the
direction gender studies need to take is a closer examination of historical transitions from
a feminist standpoint. Here Gerda Lerner’s method for establishing the relationship
between class, patriarchy and the state, and tracing the differentiated nature of patriarchal
structures as they operate on women of different classes in early social formations, makes
way for a feminist historiography concerned with patterns of transition (Gerda Lerner.
In a psycholinguistic world structured by father-son resemblance and by the primacy of male logic, woman is a gap or a silence, the invisible and unheard sex. In contrast to the ‘writer only’ problems of androgynist poetics, therefore, most feminist critics insist that the way to contend with patriarchal bias against women is not to deny sexual difference but to dismantle gender hierarchies. No sexual difference itself, but rather its meaning within patriarchal ideology, “division, oppression, inequality, interiorized inferiority for women” must be attacked. (Michele Barrett. Women’s Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis, 112). On the other hand Elaine Showalter is of the view that, “the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems.” (Showalter. Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness) These diverse theoretical idioms need to be analyzed and reconstructed in order to portray or even represent women in the modern light.

Thus the project aims at first deconstructing layer by layer the ‘essence’ of Indian Womanhood lying veiled under these oppressive forces and then reconstructing the subject ‘woman’ in the modern context focussing on Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters (1998) and Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers (1999). At the basis of these novels lies the paradox of being a woman. She is outside her own psyche, her own body, her own self and her own being, with vibrant external forces operating on what she herself is unfamiliar with. Traditionally taught and moulded to follow the stereotyped roles of a Daughter (Suputri), Wife (Sugrihini/Pativrata) and Mother (Sumata); boundaries of her ‘Comfort Zone’ (Emotional, Psychological, Spiritual, Sexual and Personal) are invaded at all times and disfigured by these determining forces which are all set ups of society, culture and age.

In studying these texts, the thesis would analyze and put under scrutiny the life of the Third World Indian Woman, which in the modern context goes much beyond traditional roles. The thesis would attempt to study patriarchy as a hegemonising force.
and see to what extent and whether any point of convergence and confluence in the modern context is possible. The research project sets out to study the self-validations and the self-disclaiming of the women characters who are caught in the power relationships and explores the 'shame' of 'being' a woman. (Salman Rushdie. *Midnights Children*) In exploring the imagery of the 'victimization' and 'locked womanhood', it would go beyond spaces and places, trying to analyze female representation, extensions of these roles and their psychological engraftments and aftermath. Starting from the study of the ancient written norms for bringing up a girl child, which is time and again repeated in the bringing up of the protagonists of the three novels under study; the thesis indulges in a study of the often quoted texts and beliefs as given in Manu Smrithi:

*Pitaa Rakshati Kumaree, Bhrataa Rakshati Youvanee;*

*Putroo rakshati Vardhakyee, Na Sri Swaatanrayam Arhati*  
*(Manu Smrithi; ix, 3)*

This philosophy that the father protects the woman during childhood (daughter), the husband during her youth (wife), and the son during her old age (mother) proclaimed the rule of patriarchy as propounded by Manu. It became obvious to the then society that a woman does not deserve freedom. This problem of the suffering Indian woman appeared as early as 1864 in the novel *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Since then this image of the woman has dominated both Indian and Indo-Anglian Fiction. With a hoard of feminist writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Krupabai Stthianathan, Anita Desai, Kamala Das coming up to investigate this problem and its standings the issue gained importance. The thesis then asks the question; How far is the woman in literature (as in life) content to play the roles of a *pativrata* (a woman loyally devoted to her husband, a chaste woman) or a *Sita, Savitri* and *Shakuntala*? Once Shri Radha Krishna said, “Centuries of tradition have made the Indian Woman the most patient woman in the whole world whose pride is suffering.” (Dr S.Radhakrishna. *The Hindu View of Life*, 27) Is this suffering and pride in it still a value lock with modern day woman or has she found other ways of de essentializing her inherent nature. The novels under study help in the analysis of this basic question.
In *Image of Women in the Indo-Anglian Novels*, Meena Shirwadhar claims that Tradition, Transition and Modernity are the stages through which the woman in Indo-Anglian novel is passing. The image of traditional women, the *sati-savitri* type, was at once, easy and popular. In India, with the strong bent for tradition, women were expected mainly to live for others than for herself, because ‘others’ controlled and moulded the social structure. Shirwadhar says, “Modern women, in life, has been trying to throw off the burden of inhibitions she has been carrying for ages. Yet a woman on way to liberation, trying to be free from inhibitions, is rarely seen in Indo-Anglian literature.” (153-154) Do the novels under scrutiny still represent this rarity or otherwise.

The present study traces this movement of feminist theory through three stage of cognition or reasoning, awareness to resistance by taking the examples from the three seminal feminist texts’s under study. In doing this it traces the movement from modern emphasis on ‘Equalisms’ to Post-modern focus on ‘Difference’. Susan Gubar describes four stages of feminist criticism in *What Ails Feminist Criticism?* The first stage of feminist criticism, which Elaine Showalter has called “critique”, undercuts the universality of male-devised scripts in philosophy as well as science, in intellectual as well as social history. (Showalter. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*). Although critique remains a vital aspect of feminist analysis, it was quickly followed by the second stage produced by the scholars Showalter dubbed “gynocritics”.

The book on women writers by Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* talks of the three Feminine, Feminist and Female stages. During the feminine phase, dating from about 1840 to 1850, women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalize its assumptions about female nature. In the feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. The personal sense of injustice become increasingly and explicitly
feminist in the 1880s, when a generation of new women redefined the woman role in terms of responsibility to suffering sisters, bringing in a feeling of universality. In the female phase, ongoing since 1920, women reject imitation and protest, two forms of dependence and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the form and technique of literature.

Representatives of the formal female aesthetic, such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, begin to think in terms of male and female sentences, and divide their work into ‘masculine’ journalism and ‘feminine’ fiction, redefining and sexualizing external and internal experiences. Their experiments were both enriching and imprisoning retreats into the celebration of consciousness; even in Woolf’s famous definition of life: “a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end”, (See Virginia Woolf, Modern Fiction: Collected Essays) there is a submerged metaphor of uterine withdrawal and containment. In this sense the Room of One’s Own becomes a kind of Amazon utopia, which is being tried to achieve by Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin in their work. Then ‘What is a typical Indian wife?’ To find this mythical creature is illiterate and bullied. The point is the idea of the Other often relies on stereotypes and ideological constructs, those of post-colonial correctitude as much as those of earlier Orientalizing; and a novelist disengages from any discourse based upon ideas of the Other that prohibit or inhibit the characters that desire to be written.

The third stage of feminist criticism can be termed the engendering of differences. The verb engendering is used for the third stage because it engaged feminists in the activity of bringing gender to bear upon other differences: sexual and racial differences primarily, but also economic, religious, and regional distinctions, thereby accentuating dissimilarities among women, divergences among men. The fourth phase entitles the dismantling of the category women, in two arenas. On the one hand, feminist criticism was disparaged by African American and postcolonial thinkers as universalizing a privileged, white womanhood; on the other, it was maligned by poststructuralists as naively essentialist about the identity of women. Notable is the emergence of scholarship
on lesbian and gay topics, critics like Teresa de Lauretis and Terry Castle, Diana Fuss and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explored such subjects as the social construction of heterosexuality, psychoanalytic models of lesbian desire, and the representational repercussions of homophobia.

The theory of ‘Difference’ gains ground from David Kinsley’s Hindu Goddess (34) in which he unites:

Goddess imagery challenges the stereotyped view of women found in traditional Hindu law books. Such a characterization perhaps suggests the extraordinary power that is repressed in women who are forced into submissive and socially demeaning rules.

The thesis reconstructs the absent community of women giving voice to their traditional roles in the garb of post modernism by exposing the ideas of absence and presence. A progressive feminist politics thus relies on a rejection of the seductive yet restrictive boundaries of these paradigms that define or constrain the experience or identity of women. Alison Jaggar in her excellent book Feminist Politics and Human Nature starts from an agonistic definition of feminism, which can be seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. Such an oppositional definition posits feminism as the necessary ‘resistance’ to patriarchal power and holds feminism as an impossible position. Logically, then, the aim of feminism, like that of any emancipatory theory, is to abolish itself along with its opponent. In a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist.

Critics like Toril Moi however consider the above way of defining and constraining feminism as an impossible undertaking. First, feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, a struggle which has often been seen simply as the effort to make women become like men. But the struggle for equal rights historically and politically commits feminists to emphasize the value of women as they are. For the very case of equal rights rests precisely on the argument that women are already as valuable as
men. But given women's lack of equal rights, this value must be located as difference, not as equality: women are of equal human value in their own way. This logic, which avoids taking the male as the norm, has been evident in western feminism since its inception. Thus, under patriarchy even equal rights feminism has to assert the value of women as women, since it is the only efficient way to counter the systematic devaluation of women and women's work under patriarchy. Equality and difference are not in this sense antithesis.

Given this logic, a feminist cannot settle for either equality or difference. Both struggles must be **aporetically** fought out. But we also know that both approaches are caught in the end in a constraining logic of *sameness* and *difference*. Julia Kristeva therefore suggests that feminism from now on must operate in a third space; that which deconstructs all identity, all binary oppositions, all phallogocentric logic. But in deconstructing patriarchal metaphysics, we also risk deconstructing the very logic that sustains the two forms of feminism outlined above. These three spaces of feminism, in other words, are logically and often strategically incompatible. This theoretical jargon is applied to the three novels under study in order to validate it or decenter the same; and in turn bring out the true study of womanly qualities.

Traditionally, marriage for women has entailed a most submissive feminine role. Although a woman ideally has power as a mother but as a wife she submits to her husband and his family. As a first step towards freeing women and women's bodies from the bondage of a conventional marriage, Periyar came to initiate a new social practice: the performance of self- respect marriages. He saw such marriages with their basis in mutual love and trust, and sustained by an informal choice of partners. The chief virtue of self- respect marriages lay in the fact that they defined women as persons rather than as wives or potential mothers and they served to free women from the onerous task of reproducing all those norms of a caste bound patriarchy. Since self- respect marriages constructed women as equal subjects, with equal rights to property and power in the household and outside of it, women did not have to consider themselves, henceforth as mere adjuncts of men and as the bearers of their seed. Self- respect marriages were thus
of tremendous political importance in that they prepared women to view motherhood as a choice rather than as their destiny.

This thesis studies Motherhood, which is clearly central to patrifocal family structure and ideology and is highly elaborated in Hindu myth and cosmology. Indian girls are reared to consider themselves pre-eminently mothers, as a character in What the Body Remembers says: “This is what women are for”. The aim of the project is also to deconstruct the idea of a singular identity of women. Mothers, Wives and Daughters are border crossings, migrating across definition. In doing this Postmodernist theory would be employed which is to rapture traditional associations and attribute ‘ad-hoc, arbitrary, and unsanctioned’ meanings to given terms or ideas. The achievement of a quintessentially equal situation between the hegemoniser and the hegemonised, thus emerges as an essential precondition to actively open the self to the other, to construct what Arasanayagam describes as “a self-created firmament”.

Feminism in Indian context has come from below, through women’s own lives; the novels and issues in question are overtly and simplistically representative of the codification of women in these roles and the present study would attempt to find an answer to problems endemic to post-colonial and feminist criticism keeping in mind these areas. Women writers have moved away from traditional, enduring, self-sacrificing women towards conflicting female characters searching for identity. Not that they are inclined to reject the traditional values lock, stock and barrel. In fact, theirs is a highly selective attitude towards tradition and modernity; they must retain tradition where they cannot do without it, but they must go for modernity where it promises a better and more meaningful life to them. The project thus explores these hitherto undealt areas of women study, much beyond traditional role-playing and seeks to awaken the inherent feminine virtues in women. She cannot find fulfillment in ‘being’, except by accepting herself completely and consciously. Acceptance means not only being aware of her being a woman physiologically speaking, but also becoming conscious of her feminine self and of her role in this world along with placing herself in a matrix of relationships. She embodies the ‘absolute’ and has the power to exhibit that ‘absolute’.
Women of the Third world are more than a single generic group, often typified as uneducated and oppressed, a construct of western feminist theory. The message is clear according to Gayatri Spivak, “Just as male oriented constructs of western academia marginalize and homogenize all women, so does western feminist theory constrict our view of women of the ‘Third world’.” (Spivak, The Politics Of Interpretation) Who is then this woman of the third world and how far has she come in breaking free from any ‘Voyeuristic’ constructions, be it native or foreign is what is being dealt with in detail. The feminist essays of Gayatri Spivak, now collected under the title In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, may be read as an effort precisely to develop a materialist, anti-imperialist feminism which draws on the insights of recent poststructuralist and postmodern theory. To a similar end, Spivak’s views are applied here to evoke that rare insight into women’s nature.

They are a textual study of the feminist discourse. Spivak’s recommended textual strategy, for instance, is to make different discourses “critically ‘interrupt’ each other in order to bring each other to crisis. This strategy not only draws from the work of Derrida but also is an enactment of the violent clash of discourses experienced by the subject in exile. As Spivak’s texts show, the crisis that ensues can provoke quite exceptionally stimulating insights. Her texts though are packed with trenchant statements and unambiguous political and theoretical positions; there is in these strategies of writing a courageous effort to explode linear sequentiality, a deliberate desire to enact the decentring of the subject and its discourse.

Gayatri Spivak rightly asks, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and herself provides an answer in saying that “Representation has not withered away” and it is the intellectual who must represent the subaltern. No amount of theorizing will solve women’s problem, especially in the Indian context. Unlike hard-core feminists, one should not agree that being a wife or mother is unnecessarily imposed on a woman. It is needed. One should crave for ‘a greater balance’. The focus in most of Indian writings is on the delineation of the woman’s inner world, woman struggling to find her own voice but in the process
“become fluid, with no shape, no form of — (their) own”. (Deshpande. Roots and Shadows). The real picture, the real you never emerge. The role of the wife is nothing less than walking on the razor’s edge, like in Difficult Daughters and What The Body Remembers.

Talking about other theoreticians, Helene Cixous in The Laugh Of The Medusa too began by using Derrida’s notion of hierarchized binary oppositions to censure western culture’s identification of masculinity with activity, rationality, culture, and logos and of femininity with passivity, sensitivity, nature and pathos. Similarly in her influential Speculum of the Other Woman Lucy Irigaray castigates the specular logic of the ‘same’ in philosophical traditions established from Plato to Hegel and Freud that situate a woman ‘outside’ representation. For Irigaray parler-femme, described in This Sex Which Is Not One constitutes a recoverable and fluid style that is “always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them.”(29) This parler-femme of the novels is trying to be studied in the thesis.

The thesis then studies the role-playings of the daughters in the three seminal texts and what larger implications can be drawn from their depiction. Duhita’s or the one who drain away the family resource was what daughters have been named since ages. Considered to be a burden on the family, their birth was not marked by rejoicing and celebration. The three novels present this daughter image in a new light, all of who share somehow a special bond with their mothers. As Manju Kapur emphatically says, “I got this part of me from my mother” (Kapur, Difficult Daughters, 12). The thesis deals with the psychological development of a daughter in a patriarchal set up, studying the amount of freedom given to her and how far are her wishes and feelings taken into consideration from the sample of these three feminist works. Is ‘being’ a daughter still a burden attached to the subject which is to be carried through out life or has the society allowed this role to go beyond its normal function in exhibiting some other time and person specific traits and how far has culture moulded this nomenclature and role-playing of mothers, wives and daughters in the modern context is under study here.
Another role under scrutiny is that of the wife. “Nothing soothes a man’s soul as much as a good wife; Nothing brings more misery to man than a bad wife” (Ibu Abd Rabbihi in Al Jad al- Farid). This stereotypical image of a good and a bad wife has dominated Indian literature for a long time now; the voyeurs still being the same males who decide the parameters of good and bad. On reaching puberty when a daughter becomes a wife she suddenly loses her uncultivated ‘self’ in order to be just, “cracked open for seeding like the earth before the force of the plough. If she is fertile good for the farmer, if not, bad for her.” (Baldwin. What the Body Remembers, pp 21) Her body and sexuality take over and it is considered her duty to follow her husband’s commands and satisfy his desires. Has this typical image of a Pativrata changed in the modern context? What is the position of a second wife earlier relegated to a secondary position? Has the real woman been able to peep out from this covering of a necessary role? These moot points need and analysis.

The thesis also studies the precarious position of the ‘second wife’ like Roop in What the Body Remembers and Virmati in Difficult Daughters. Although tradition allows man to take more than one wife, the whole of polite society frowns upon them. Are they just there to beget sons, to continue the family hierarchy as in the case of Roop or to satisfy the physical hunger of man, as in case of Virmati. The project explores their psyche and emotional upheavals in a societal framework which although has double standards, rejects them outright. A man taking a second wife is a man all right, but the wife becomes another ‘object’ to be voyeuristically gazed at and her individuality is constantly scratched to mere shreds.

“Home is where your Mother is, one; it is where you are Mother, two.” (Sara Suleri, Meatless Days). Women are homemakers, their bodies are their homes. In Hindu faith mother is regarded as divine. Mother is celebrated as a source of all, the beginning of all beginnings. The term Jagatjanani, Jagatmata and Jagatdhatri bring to our notice the elevated position ascribed to mother synonymous to Goddess in religion. In the convention bound society of India, where women live to marry, bear children and look.
after the family, child bearing and rearing is a social obligation. In this patriarchal set up, she follows the norms laid down by her male patrons. The role of a traditional mother who is 'only a mother sans wife' solidifies upon the goal of reclaiming rights to her womb and filling her 'empty vessel' with the unreality of a child. Like the term woman, motherhood carries burdens reflective of shame, foolishness, and weakness along with the paradox that follows her all along for the carrying of and caring of one’s offspring, a feat of that kind of importance and responsibility refutes the previous weak and foolish castigation. Throughout Post-colonial literature, motherhood appears in the form of metaphors, imagery and political discourse. What is being searched in the thesis then is an area of confluence of all these three roles and their modern presentations.

In doing this patriarchy needs to be analyzed and questioned. The patriarchal world has used Motherhood as a tool for women’s domination, whereas the true experience of motherhood, which is entirely, the women’s province, is deemed with pleasure, satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Motherhood can also be seen in these three novels under discussion as the manifestation of the Mother’s identity, though in a different way. Motherhood as an immaculate conception and the metaphor of locked women appear in all three novels, threading the commonly bound woman to accessibility. The role of motherhood lock women into the responsibility and duty of caring for their children. These stories of procreation lead us to define motherhood as a consequence of the male invasion, abandoning women with the rubble and loot of warfare namely children. Is this view of feminist critics outrightly correct or this theoretical idiom needs a reallocation is what the study analyses through the role-playing of mothers in the three texts defining society at large.

So often, society and tradition lock up the female ‘empty vessel’, suggesting the privacy of her genitalia remain secured until she partakes in sexual intercourse; contrary to societal pressures which lock the doors of the female body, insinuating female genitalia are filthy and not worthy of investigation. As Shashi Deshpande writes for one of her characters in That Long Silence, “It made me glad for her that she had such introspective courage to knock at the door of her body and insist it let her out.” The body
question thus needs a reexamination. Sexuality, gender and its implications are under analysis here.

Throughout Post-Colonial literature, motherhood appears in the form of metaphors, imagery and political discourse. Authors materialize natural as land, water, and farmland take on feminine characteristics in their creation of a “mother image”. They portray women as caged women, and as bearers of both shame and joy. Motherhood is clearly central to patrifocal family structure and ideology and is highly elaborated in Hindu myth and cosmology. Indian girls are reared to consider themselves preeminently mothers. “Wifedom”, which is also culturally elaborated in Hindu doctrine, is in reality de-emphasized in the everyday life of a joint family. Helen Cixous tries to solve this dilemma by saying:

A women’s body, with its thousand thresholds of ardour-once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction- will make the single grooved mother tongue reverberates with more than one language.

(Helen Cixous. The Laugh of Medusa)

Periyar argues that motherhood, therefore acquires a semi-divine status in caste society and an elaborate sexual and moral code is deployed to hegemonies the concept of motherhood. “Such worthy pieces of fiction,” observes Periyar, “were arbitrary in their choice of attributes for, masculine and feminine qualities are in reality produced by acts of history and practices of culture” therefore, he declares, male and female roles as interchangeable. (Periyar Ee. Ve. Ra. Sinthanaigal. The Thought of Periyar, 155) He considers the objectification of the female body to be one of the chief means through which women can see themselves, first and foremost as mothers. Thus conventional notions of beauty serve to foster a pattern of expectations and needs, which may be fulfilled only by attaining motherhood. Having been told to cultivate their bodies and look beautiful, women naturally expect to use their bodies honourably and the ideology of motherhood allows for a play of female desire within safe bounds. Periyar is especially
critical of motherhood and sees it as a carefully and ingeniously designed myth that had historically been used to secure women’s bodies with their reproductive capabilities as the natural property of men.

Periyar traces the valorization of motherhood to those early historical times when private property first came into existence. He notes that until the genesis of private property, there could not have existed a need or an imperative for children to know their father’s name. Only after a man sought to secure property in his name would he have felt the need to safeguard it, likewise only after ‘ownership’ and ‘home’ came to imply each other would ‘man’ have desired a ‘woman’ to attend to his needs and protect his property and home, like Sardarji in What The Body Remembers demands of Satya his first wife. First woman was brought into the male household as a protector of property and soon enough she herself came to be viewed as his property.

This, to Periyar is a significant development in human history for even as women came to be viewed as possession, the system of marriage was instituted to underwrite male ownership of women. This male ownership is a norm visible in all the three texts under scrutiny. When, later men wanted heirs to inherit their wealth (and name) they perceived themselves as progenitors and to preserve this mark of definitive male parentage, came to enforce on women a code of monogamy. The rationalizations offered point to the intensification of patriarchisation process. From the above mentioned cases it becomes clear that bigamous marriages have been performed or threat given for its performance mainly due to the following reasons:

1. woman failing to bear children (like Satya in What The Body Remembers)
2. if they had children none of them were sons
3. to extract more dowry from the first wife
4. to demand huge dowries from second marriage
5. to satisfy one’s perverse sexual urges (like Professor Harish in Difficult Daughters)
It is engrained in our culture that a woman is an object to be enjoyed: ‘bhogne ki cheez’, ‘ghoda aur aurat ran ke neeche’ (horse and woman are things to be used under the thighs) is a well-known derogatory and blasphemous saying. The trapped power of women has to be released and this is also the aim of Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Baldwin in their writings. The path to womanolateralism is yet a far cry. Still it does not mean that we stop our endeavor to create and bring about a depatriarchised socialist democratic society. (Indu Prakash Singh, Indian Woman 59)

Women have been tutored right from the day they had the first glimpses of this world, to follow unquestioningly and relentlessly the ideal of *pativrata* i.e. Being devoted to the husband alone, popularized by the Puranic writers, not merely implied fidelity to the husband but made service to the husband the only duty of the wife and the satisfaction of her husband being her sole joy in life. Instances are recorded in Puranic literature where a husband demanded that his wife take him to the house of a prostitute on her shoulder and the wife willingly did it to prove that she was a *sati*. The ideal of *pativrata* gave rise to and glorified the practice of *Sati* or immolation. This very ideal, started the process of satification too. The Hindu woman has been asked to put up with all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honor and for the good name of the children.

The younger generation is for a new relationship in marriage in which each partner must be able to share with the other his or her aspirations and interests. If this cannot be done there is no sense in keeping them tied in bondage. It is in the interest of both, and of the children, that they should have freedom to part and live in their own way. The modern woman is no longer prepared to accept a social code, which recognizes the dominance of the male as binding on her. Some critics then rebuff the idea of marriage altogether arguing “marriage is a system to control women’s sexuality and to pass private property into legitimate heirs. It restricts human freedom of choice, and gives men power over women and children.”
Sara Suleri considers women and coming of age a disintegration of reality. “children, women are equipped with a miniature model of reality, an empty but fillable vessel. A vessel in which much can be made to happen and to issue in consequence” says Graham Swift. According to Crick, a character in Swift’s Waterland, “reality is untainted history, revealing itself from within the vessels of mothers.” The religion of a mother solidifies upon the goals of reclaiming rights to her womb and filling her empty vessel with the unreality of a child. Sara Suleri writes that along with the realization of sexuality comes the loss of the differentiated identities of history and ourselves and we become guiltily aware that we have known it all along, our past in the construction of unreality. Further, it was held that property could only accrue to men and this resulted in a greater enslavement of women. Women thus came to be regarded as worthy only in their role as mothers and by honourably fulfilling this ‘destined’ role they not only reproduced the oppressive system of which they were a part, but also their own oppression as well.

Different from Periyar’s thought, Thiru- Vi-Ka Pennin Perumai’s The Glory of Womanhood (341-346) was an immensely popular work and ran into nearly seven editions. Originally published in 1927, the book attempts to construct a feminine ideal for the times. It apotheosized femininity as the supreme ethical and spiritual ideal humankind could aspire to and upheld motherhood as the quintessential feminine condition. To its author, nature or Prakriti itself was part feminine and part masculine, and he discovered in the organicity of the nature world the union of Siva and Shakti. Herein was also located the Ardhanareshwara concept. What stands out distinctively in Thiru.Vi.Ka’s disquisition on female education and care is his concern over the development of sexuality in the human person as he or she grows into adulthood. To nurture, what he considered a healthy sexuality, it was essential that the female genitalia be guarded against internal and external hurt. Arguing that of all the parts of the body the sexual organs were most delicate and sensitive, and with their well being the general well being of the body is bound, he went on to note that the girl child, as she grows into puberty, should be reared in such a manner that her womanhood gradually blossoms and ripens without being disrupted in its organic growth by intrusive and unclean habits and thoughts.

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Thiru, like Gandhi, desired to construct a feminine ideal, at once traditional and yet modern, and equal to the pressures of modernity. In fact, for both men, it was woman who possessed the strength and ‘innate’ resistance to stave off the horrors of western and modern culture. Thus on the one hand they ‘liberated’ women from the bonds of a hidebound tradition that was prone to consider them temptresses or benign matriarchs while on the other hand they desired to transform these conventional notions to meet the exigencies of the present. For Thiru women were not seductresses but embodied the highest spiritual ideal of humankind, motherhood being not merely a social function but their essential spiritual destiny. This was debated by critics of both Western and Indian origin for ages. In Thiru. Vi. Ka’s discourses on femininity history and materiality were elided while in their place was inserted that timeless image of the ‘mother’ who was not could not be bound by boundaries of caste, creed, religion or nation. Thus there is no female body here, no female person but only a generous and ever fertile womb. It was against such a construction of womanhood successfully deployed by the nationalists as part of a patriotic commonsense, that Periyar consciously rebelled.

Jane Gallop elects instead to remain unsettled, off center, in a decentering posture that uncovers the phallic assumptions of texts and suggests provisional alternative possibilities. The approach that emerges in Gallop’s work “might be a text that alternately quotes and comments, exercises and criticizes.” She cites Kristeva in support: “Never one without the Other,” knowingly, lucidly to exercise and criticize power is to dephallicize, to assume the phallus and unveil that assumption as presumption, as fraud. A constantly double discourse is necessary, one that asserts and then questions.

Likewise the orthodox also wanted women to remain good wives and mothers but in a moral universe defined by the orthodox male; widows and ‘fallen’ women could seek no reprieve from a merciless destiny. In either instance, the women’s sexuality, her experience of pain, pleasure, love, desire or sorrow were matters that were routinely ignored. The women who was the object of the reformers and the orthodox gaze was thus, a de-eroticized creature, occupying as she did a sort of threshold space that was only
meant to measure the distance between the past and present. Such liminality was of no comfort to her, only served to render her body and self endlessly reproducible by whomsoever wished to appropriate them. She became a site upon which law, scripture and custom could be inscribed and erased whilst she herself existed as a ‘trace’ within a historical and political logic of which she has very little knowledge and over which she had almost no control. Men always ‘dispossessed’ of culture and sexual selfhood looked to women as the last, unconquered indigenous space. This is also the predicament of the protagonists of Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin, who are here studied as a double discourse on womanhood.

In analyzing this sexual selfhood and its manifestations the thesis further studies Freud’s notions of sexual correctness of behaviour. Girindra Sekhar Bose, founder of the Indian Psycho-Analytic Association pointed out in a letter to Sigmund Freud that his patients often express a desire to turn female. Bose was attempting to convince Freud that ‘penis-envy’ was essentially a cultural phenomenon and that the Oedipus complex could not be considered symptomatic of a general human condition. As far as the reformers were concerned, the domestic space came to signify a new land of desire that would consecrate their ideal of womanhood. With the orthodox this sensibility produced a generalized misogyny and fear of female sexuality.

It is also prescribed that women’s bodies be constructed as child-bearing bodies, so that, women as agents of reproduction help preserve the patriarchal family and the caste order. The ‘father’s name’ that is decisive in determining identity in a patriarchal society, becomes an even more important index of selfhood in a caste bound patriarchy, for now it is not merely personal identity that has to be carefully and precisely demarcated but caste identity as well. Women whose subjugation is essential if norms of patrilineage are to be held in place, thus, become the most important arbiters of the caste order. Further, if women are to thus aid in the reproduction of the caste order, their consent becomes necessary, for in the interlinked realms of sexuality and fertility, coercion alone is of no avail. Thus the sexual oppression and subjugation of women and their bodies as in the text, What The Body Remembers is put under scrutiny.
Naomi Wolf wrote in *The Beauty Myth*: “as women released themselves from
the feminine mystique of domesticity the beauty myth took over it’s lose ground.” The
control over one’s body that American women had gained through reproductive rights,
Wolf claims have been taken away with a mass neurosis being created about dieting.
Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* wrote that women would be free when they have
a positive definition of female sexuality. But despite progress in education and an
increase in professional exposure, female sexuality is still negatively defined and
constructed in a way that cannot help the women’s cause. Women are more vulnerable to
absorb the beauty myth because the entire sexual education is out to ensure their
continuing vulnerability. Their sexuality is sanctioned by culture they don’t have to earn
it with their appearance. They are a part of the cultural response to increasingly powerful
market compulsions.

Two great psychoanalytic thinkers of the times Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy
Chodorow\(^9\) insisted that there is a relatively tight and concretely specified connection
between the particular nature of private social arrangements and public outcomes that is
detrimental to women and to possibilities for human liberation. In Dinnerstein’s view, the
female monopoly of early childhood creates as an inexorable result a fear of female
authority that perpetuates destructive male control of history making and female
domination of the sphere of emotional fulfillment and private life. This is brought out
vividly in Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*. Chodorow deploys psychoanalysis to construct
what she calls sociology of gender by examining the relationship between male
dominance and the sexuality of labor. Like Dinnerstein she insists that female private and
male public identities and activities are concealed in the early stages of childhood
development. The only way out of this iron cage is a structurally dictated shift to “more
collective child rearing situations.” Feminist thinkers could however put psychoanalytic
theory to use in the creation of a subject centered discourse if, as Freud did, they
approach theory as a commitment to truth seeking.
The area of women studies has assumed significance in recent years primarily as a result of the national and international resurgence of the women’s movement. Within the dynamics of this movement, women involved in both academic work and activism have been attempting to develop methodologies to explain the reality of women’s oppression and exploitation and to integrate patriarchy into theoretical models. Women’s studies in India are under attack from several quarters. Among others, critics have compared it unfavourably with its western counterparts, deploring the preoccupation with local details and the consequent failure to develop a proper theoretical framework. On the other hand, it has been condemned for its blind aping of the same western theories without developing its own perspective. Though these critiques obviously have their own biases, the fact remains that women’s studies remain marginalized from mainstream academia and is yet to develop adequate theoretical frameworks.

Feminist critics, however, have explicitly debated prescriptive and pluralistic criticisms. In the mid seventies, the notion of ‘prescriptive’ criticism gained brief but limited popularity among some feminists. First advanced by Cheri Register, prescriptive criticism attempted to establish norms for the production of a new feminist literature. According to them in order to earn feminist approval, literature must perform one or more of the following functions: (i) Serve as a forum for women; (ii) help to achieve cultural androgyny; (iii) provide role models; (iv) promote sisterhood; (v) augment consciousness rising. (Register, Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory)

The approach argued for the direct replacement of masculinist values concerning the production of literature and criticism with feminist standards. The resistance is somewhat ironic since prescriptive criticism merely makes explicit a feminist version of the prescription implicit in most critical discourses; in a sense, it represents the deconstructive reversal. Pluralism is another kind of response to the challenge of defining feminist criticism. Annette Kolodny in Feminist Studies, for example advocates “a, playful pluralism. Responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical schools and methods, but captive of none.” Pluralist criticism appears liberal, tolerant, and nonthreatening, but Gayatri Spivak astutely identifies its dangers:
To embrace pluralism (as Kolodny recommends) is to espouse the politics of the masculinist establishment. Pluralism is the method employed by the central authorities to neutralize opposition by seeming to accept it. The gesture of pluralism on the part of the marginal can only mean capitulating to the center.

There is an attempt in the thesis to decenter this center and its boundaries, by studying the genre of novels. As has been pointed out by Desai and Krishnaraj in Women's Studies in India: Some Perspectives; the main contributors of feminist theory to Indian woman's studies has been the conceptualization of patriarchy as a basic force behind the social and cultural construction of gender categories. A major contribution of feminist perspectives has been to question this notion of universality of behaviour. Feminist analysis has drawn attention to the complex interweaving of historical and cultural institutions and arrangements that make up a social construction of gender. There is no universal ‘man’ but only culturally different men and women. As Bernice Lott, a psychologist points out:

it is the feminist recognition of gender (in general) as a cultural construction with its enormous social, political and personal consequences that may impact on our discipline most profoundly. (Krishnaraj, Women Studies)

This cultural construction is dismantled in the texts under analysis and analyzed in order to arrive at some gender patterns followed by modern day women writers. Feminist theories, which study the ways in which social contexts shape men and women, have discovered that patterns in women’s lives are not created ‘freely’ or ‘subjectively’ but are determined by restrictive patriarchal structures that must necessarily be changed. In the concluding chapter of Literary Theory, Terry Eagleton presents a useful overview of how literary theories compete for dominance. He regards criticism as “custodian of a discourse,” operating according to the kinds of principles discussed earlier. He maintains
that, “literary criticism, selects, processes, corrects and rewrites texts in accordance with certain institutionalized norms of the ‘literary’ norms which are at any given time arguable, and always historically variable.”

Patriarchisation is another important process, which needs a mention here. It takes two forms, in the shape of providing only two options to women: femicidealisation (eulogies-the-victim) approach and festigmatisation (blame-the-victim) approach. These two forms actually are two sides of the same coin, as both oppress women. While the former idealizes/idolizes the perfect housewife or submissive women like Sita, who forbear all sorts of insults and injustices perpetrated on them by their husbands in order to live for the patriarchal and patrilineal glory. Such idealization of women is basically femicideal (femicidal), as it is an ideal through which women learn to kill themselves and not live. Dying is not merely physical, but mental phenomenon as well, turning them masochistic.

Modernization/development as a process then gets subsumed under the general process of patriarchisation. It is because of patriarchisation that though objective conditions might be emancipative (like women having joined medicine, engineering, aviation, teaching, science, administrative etc) subjective conditions (patri-cultural practices like vratas/fast, yearning for a son etc. having imbibed during patriarchic socialization i.e. Satification.) looms large over and above the emancipative objective conditions. The prominence of oppressive patriarchal objective conditions for the majority of women and men remains. Men, exceptions not withstanding, stand all the more patriarchised. Less said the better about the plight of women in the unorganized sector.

Ideationally speaking, our society is manolateral than wo-manolateral (Singh, 26-36). Manolateralism is where a vertical (hierarchal) relationship exists between man and woman. Transcendence (existentially speaking) is just for men, while immanence is the fate of woman. In wo-manolateralism, there is a horizontal i.e. equalitarian relationship between woman and man. This is an ideal woo-man relationship. Here transcendence is
extended to woman too. Personalities are no more immanently constructed but transcendent i.e. through achievements, by associating with different projects in life. While the former is “immanently constituted transcendence” where relationships are characterized by Buberian “I –It”, the latter is “transcendentally constituted immanence/transcendence” with relationships between women and men being characterized by Buberian “I –Thou”. Wo-manolateralism would come under the domain of ideal perfectionism according to which the perfection of man and humans depend upon the presence and operation of the opposite within male personality and temperament and vice-versa for women. The gendered regimented construction of personality has to be demolished to attain humanhood or personhood or huperhood than manhood or womanhood. Only then will there be an internal dialectical constitution of one making women and men, humans or hupers.

The process of patriarchisation is very oppressive and restrictive. It takes two forms namely, femistigmatisation and femicidealisation. These are the only two options open to Indian women as is evident from the works under study, which form a good example of the present situation. Most of the employed women, sexually harassed, sexually oppressed and victimized face the former. The latter two categories of women is blame-the victim-approach. Conditions that minimize or excuse violence have the effect of shifting the blame onto the victim. The problem then is that the woman’s, attention is directed away from the aggressor and from the social conditions, which sustain and even encourage violence. She is made to live oppressed life and forced to play just the role of a daughter, a mother or a wife.

When women are eulogized as and exhorted to be Satis, Sitas, embodiment of non-violence (made by Gandhi), they are actually asked to quell their aspirations, follow the dictates of their men never to raise their voice in protest, bear all the battering, taunts, tortures of their husbands and in-laws. This is what femicidealisation is. This idealization of women sung by hoary sages and the present day fundamentalist, obscurantist savage patriarchs effects femicide; not merely physically but mentally, obliterating the identity etc. since this idealization is femicidal (for those who have escaped amniocentesis today)
it is called femicidealisation, as it constrains and annihilates the egalitarian construction of women by imposing gendered structure of symbols and practices.

The virtues, which as a halo surround the concept of Indian womanhood among many, are timid, docile, humble, subservient, self-sacrificing, non-violent, self-effacing, entity obliterating, identity submergence etc. that are femicidealistic. One of the important features of the femicidealisation process is the construction of Indian women into masochistic personalities. A woman who wants to revolt against the patriarchal order is gradually made to relent. This yielding is nothing but masochistic. The tool, which not only initiates but enforces as well the patriarchisation process, is the socialization mechanism. Since this socialization process, which is patriarchised manolateralistic, instills passivity, subjection, silence, patience, perseverance in short makes women into living sati's (apart from those who have committed sati), this mechanism we would call satification. While satisation is a process, satification is an existential state. The gains through femicidealisory mobility, satisation process, do not accrue to women. They get all the mere immured not mobile. They are the source, not the beneficiaries. The women are not only separated but alienated form the satisation mobility process. It is on and through but not for them.

While sati is an event, satification is a life long ongoing socialisatory construction of a woman. It is a fact that women are culturally (culture being patriarchal) created, conditioned cultured and cloistered. Gandhi and our hoary sages have constructed the gender type of women as an embodiment of sacrifice. This theme of sacrifice is still dinned into the supple minds of young girls and thus starts the satification of a girl who is straight away catapulted from girlhood to womanhood. It is no wonder then to see a woman live for everyone but herself. The two forms of the patriarchisation process: femistigmatisation and femicidealisation thus contribute to the satification mechanism. Women are told of the two options open to them.

Much of the traditional gender typical observations have lent credence to the femistigmatisation form. All this talk of essential traits of a woman is gender typical. All
this configuration of ‘essences’ is conjured up having made woman an immanent being devoid of all transcendence. Such observations are not only orthodox, but also obscurantist and unscientific as well as manolateralistic to the core. Far more disconcerting than the behavior of the mob, however, are some of the deformities of the Indian psyche, which the entire episode has highlighted. According to the traditional view, a woman who has been physically “unfaithful” to her husband is “fallen” and evil-effecting femistigmatisation. Even women who have been raped are regarded as ‘polluted’.

Despite his knowledge that Sita has not let Ravana touch her during her captivity, Lord Rama sent her away from Ayodhya because his subjects criticized him for taking her back after conquering Lanka. It is futile arguing that “as a king Rama could not put up with a situation in which somebody was pointing the finger at the king or the queen. To him it was of utmost important that the character of the queen was not under a cloud in any way. So, even at the expense of his own enjoyment and comfort he decided with a heavy heart to banish Sita and to live a life of painful loneliness” (See Dr M. Lakshmikumari. The Role Of Women in Society: Sita Must Live) can’t it be said to be the highest sacrifice a man could make for his wife in those days which is something to be emulated. It is not only ridiculous but inhuman too, to ask for emulating such an act. Rama could not boldly challenge societal dictatorship. If he had the will and character he would have done so. People are ever ready to believe any accusation against a ‘fallen’ woman and to consider as ‘fallen’ any woman whose ways do not correspond to the lachrymose and long-suffering ones associated with ‘ideal’ Indian women-femicidealistic in nature and thus the links between the two forms of patriarchisation process, namely femistigmatisation and femicidealisation becomes very clear.

Women are considered to represent prakriti or the creative force and as such she becomes the allegorical representation of patience, endurance and care/nurturing. She is iconised into ‘mother nature’ in her ability to give off herself while the woman’s biological qualities of virginity and motherhood get transferred to nature and earth also takes on the ‘negative’ aspects of nature-fickleness and a tremendous capacity for
destruction. The canonical traditional texts describe women as beautiful, sensuous, timid, weak and fickle and having ascribed these qualities to women, it is prescribed that women should be protected, guarded and controlled by modest, self-effacing and self-sacrificing value locks. According to the often-quoted passage from Manu Smriti, women should submit to the authority of her father in her youth, to that of her husband after marriage and live under the protection of her son in her old age. This has been the norm for bringing up daughters since ages.

By this definition a woman who chose to live independently as Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Virmati in Difficult Daughters or remained unmarried like Shakuntala, Virmati’s sister would be a social aberration. However, those women who fitted into the role model prescribed for them got idealized as devi and pativrata. This is the spirit in which the Manu Smriti says Yatra Naryah poojante tatra ramante devata meaning ‘where women are idolizes and worshipped there even the Gods rejoice’. As has been discussed earlier, Indian womanhood has always been iconised in terms of two bipolarities Goddess (Devi) vs demoness (chudail) chaste housewife (pativrata) vs prostitute (kamini), private woman/ good woman vs the public woman/ bad woman. Iconisation of women in the arts reflects again the same tensions that exist between real and imagined/imaged women. The traditional idea of Indian womanhood can be perceived from Anne Besant:

Literature can show no grandeur types of woman hood than are to be found in the great epic poems of India- Sita, the wife of Rama, who follows her beloved to the forest--- who, her chastity assailed by unworthy suspicions meets the accusations with a dignity that is austere, enduring, gentle--- Savitri who wrenched her husband from the icy grip of death--- Shakuntala who is the one whose name we utter to express all that is best in womanhood--- and Kausalya, the ideal mother--- one might picture Savitri in a divorce court or Sita suing the cobbler for damages in a libel suit. Leave the Hindu woman untouched.
by western thought. (Annie Besant vide Verinder Graver, *Great
Women of Modern India*, 108-115)

It is also tempting to quote Gandhi the icon of Indian culture, religion and non-violence, ‘the father of the nation’ on the ideal Indian woman in his *Young India* where he once again iconizes womanhood by saying:

> theirs must be the strong, controlling, purifying, steadying hand
> conserving what is best in our culture and rejecting what is base
> and degrading. This is the work of *Sitas, Draupadies, and Savitris* and *Damayantis*, not of amazons or prudes.

Many feminists, who term it as ‘essentializing’ women nature and demeaning it, have critiqued this imaging and iconization. In imaging and iconizing women has been largely a male enterprise; the recovery of ‘real’ women from these ‘frozen’ role models has by and large been a feminist enterprise. Since the seventies when the women’s movements as well as women’s studies actually took off, women, both activists and scholars, have been writing themselves back into history and society. While on the one hand opening existing texts and looking at them with a female gaze they have at the same time produced gynocritical (a phrase coined by the American feminist Elaine Showalter) texts, which have proved invaluable to feminist studies. (See Shanta Serbjeet Singh and Jyoti Sabharwal. *The 50th Milestone: A Feminine critique*) These theoretical postulations are analyzed herein in the light of new findings and analyzed.

In contrast to this angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience rather than to adapt male models and theory. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. This is comparable to the ethnographer’s efforts to render the experience of the ‘muted’ female
half of a society, which is described in Shirley Ardener’s collection Perceiving Women. Gynocritics is related to feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, all of which have developed hypothesis of a female subculture including the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women. The present study of the three texts is also following the Gynocritical method of analysis. Anthropologists study the female subculture in the relationships between women as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, and friends; in sexuality, reproduction, and ideas about the body; and in rites on initiation and passage, purification ceremonies, myths and taboos. Michelle Rosaldo writes in Women, Culture and Society:

The very symbolic and social conceptions that appear to set women apart and to circumscribe their activities may be used by women as a basis for female solidarity and worth. When men live apart from women, they in fact cannot control them, and unwittingly they may provide them with the symbols and social resources on which to build a society of their own.

Thus in some women’s literature, feminine values penetrate and undermine the masculine systems that contain them; and women have imaginatively engaged the myths of the Amazons, and the fantasies of a separate female society.

Culture urgently needs novels, writers, films in which female spectators can identify with images and situations other than those stipulated by male hegemonic gaze and thus begin the slow intertwining process of changing consciousness and society. As while men sleep and dream their dreams of omnipotence over a safely reduced world, women are not where they are supposed to be locked into male ‘views’ of them, imprisoned in their master’s dollhouse. (Tania Modleski, Women who knew too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory, 1988)
Modleski’s description of dollhouses is similar to that of the three novelists under study in the thesis, whose protagonists too are unable to unlock themselves from their husband’s ‘gaze’. The novels belong to the colonial period and are also influenced to a large extent by the ensuing freedom struggle movement used time and again as a backdrop to emphasize on the similarity of the women situation and the timeframe. Due to the era in which the novels are set, they show changing codes of behaviour and norms of gender struggle during those times, in a way they can be termed as personal bildungsroman of each protagonist, by throwing up of the veil of masculine dominance.

The concept of masculinity in the colonial period was undergoing a vast change. Being firmly associated with the emergence of martial Hinduism in the 1920’s it has assumed a more aggressive and physically oriented form. An important associated aspect in the reworking of Hinduism and masculinity was the accentuation on female purity and chastity. There was a renewed emphasis upon these aspects of a woman. A large part of popular literature and tracts published during this period were devoted to the norms of ideal conduct and behaviour for a woman before and after marriage based on the pativrata and stri-dharma model of Hinduism.

Siva is ‘ardhanarishvara’, and his image signifies the co-operative interdependent, separately incomplete but jointly complete masculine and feminine functions of the ‘Supreme Being’. Stri-dharma model gains from this concept of Ardhanareishwara. There is nothing unwholesome or guilty about the sex life. Through the institution of marriage it is made the basis of intellectual and moral intimacies. Marriage is not so much a concession to human weakness as a means of spiritual growth. The Hindu ideal emphasizes the individual and the social aspects of the institution of marriage. Man is not a tyrant nor is woman a slave, but both are servants of a higher ideal to which their individual inclinations are to be subordinated. This spiritual growth or self-realization is the ending of most of the feminist texts written about during the colonial time frame, as are these novels. It forms an important aspect in the understanding of the female psyche.
In an ideal marriage the genuine interests of the two members are perfectly reconciled. The perfectly ethical marriage is the monogamous one. The relation of Rama and Sita, or Savitri and Satyavan where the two stand by each other against the whole world is idealized in the Hindu scriptures. In the absence of absolute perfection we have to be content with approximations. The general Hindu view of woman is an exalted one. It regards the woman as the helpmate of man in all his work, Sahadharmini. Every social movement has its own lifecycle. It grows, stabilizes, peaks, declines and puts out fresh shoots of growth once again. The Indian women’s movement, which in reality was a collection of smaller movements, all of which took up specifically gender issues as their central theme, was no exception to this general pattern. Much of its early engagement was born not of the self-consciousness of being part of a women’s movement, but as part of popular struggle. To understand the moods of the three seminal works by Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin it therefore becomes necessary to peep into the background of the women’s liberation movement in all its manifestations.

Women’s movement’s are best at the plea for fairness-equality, humanity and values. It was in the 1970’s that the term women’s movement became common currency-helped in part by the United Nations General Assembly adopting the Declaration on the elimination of Discrimination against women in 1967. In India the decade that followed witnessed dramatic times. It was not just women who perceived themselves as a political entity, but other marginalized segments like the lower castes, poor and middle peasants and various sub nationalist groups. What was unique about the women’s movement was that it could feed into these other struggles and draw freely from them.

Five great themes have dominated the post-independence women’s movement: the struggle for legal reform; the struggle against violence; political participation; social reforms and the struggle to change ways of seeing through documentation and analysis. These themes are also visible in the three texts under study. The relentless pursuit of gender equality that manifested itself in a myriad ways changed many assumptions that marked social, economic and political life. Classics like Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, which came out in the 1950’s were among the first attempts to redefine the
woman's condition at a philosophical level. These texts go deep inside the female psyche and analyze the philosophical implications of the said issues through the protagonists.

In the Indian social cultural milieu a 'good' woman had and has to be self-effacing, like Sita in the Ramayana, who forsook life in a palace in order to follow her husband into the forest for 14 years. This self-effacement was the only permissible ideology for females, and was imbibed by every girl-child right from a young age, right from a young age, resulting in a mindset that considers it improper for a female to pursue personal goals other than dedication to the service of others in the family. Such plight, which was universalized in many novels is also witnessed in Difficult Daughters where Virmati has to give up her personal ambitions if she wishes to stay in her family.

This 'good woman' syndrome effectively throttled any aspirations in women to develop a talent. She had to be, first and foremost, a conformist in order to win social and familial approval, and conforming meant fitting in with the stereotype of the quiet, home-loving woman who devotes herself body and soul to being available as a mother and wife. A 'good woman' did not seek time and space for herself or her pursuits and passions. Therefore, a woman who sought to pursue seriously, music or dance, writing or painting was supposed to be doing so only at the expense of the family. And a woman who neglected her family invited disapproval, condemnation and censure. As Roop in What The Body Remembers is tutored by her elders,

Rule number one: you want to make a good marriage; you must be more graceful, more pleasing to your elders. I want to hear only, “achchaji”, “hanji”, and “yes ji” from you. Never “nahiji” or “no ji”.
Rule number two: speak softly, always softly! --- Rule number three: never feel angry, never, never. No matter what happens, or what your husband says, never feel angry. You might be hurt, but never ever feel angry. ---above all, give no trouble. (Baldwin, 97)
Women have been tutored right from the day they had the first glimpse of this world, to follow unquestioningly and relentlessly the ideal of Pativrata. The ideal of Pativrata i.e being devoted to the husband alone, popularized by the puranic writers, not merely implied fidelity to the husband but made service to the husband the only duty of the wife and her main purpose in life and the satisfaction of her husband being the sole joy in life. Instances are recorded in puranic literature where a husband demanded that his wife take him to the house of a prostitute on her shoulder and the wife willingly did it to prove that she was a sati. The ideal of pativrata gave rise to and glorified the practise of sati or self-immolation. This very ideal, started the process of satification too. The Hindu woman has been asked to put up with all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honour and for the good of the children.

The kind of unfettered, single minded involvement that the creation of great, abiding art calls for has always been denied to women by a patriarchal order that has used women as supportive beings rather than seeing them as individuals in their own right, with the freedom to set goals of their own choice. All that a woman has was splintered time spans punctuated by niggling demands; the baby, the cooking, cleaning, housekeeping, deferring to her in laws etc. Exceptional women like Gargi, Maithreyi, Lopa Muira and Vagambhrini of the vedic age, over 2000 years ago, are cited in support of the theory that women were not thwarted and that they had the freedom to become achievers, but these stray examples merely reflect the dichotomous attitude that has marked social perceptions of women in the Indian context all through history.

By and large, women tended to limit themselves to achieving what they could within the confines of family life and the daily rituals of Indian society. They did not conceive that it was possible to liberate themselves from an attitudinal paradigm, or that it was possible to soar to greater heights within the framework of these constrains. They also failed to realize that in their inherent genius for intuitive thought lay the key to creativity and the source of this creativity was the passionate embodiment of womanhood both as a physical reality and a state of mind. It did not occur to them that they could
harness the force of *shakti* that was there within them, and that they only needed the courage and flair to make it manifest.¹¹

At the crux thus lie the problem of gender and sex differentiation and the problems arising thereof. Neither theory alone (Western or Indian) or theory applied to practical situations is able to provide a valid answer to the ongoing discussions on Feminism and its worth. For most critics, feminism is still a reduction and a model of subjugation, an ideology to undo an ideology. Does the answer then lies somewhere in ‘relativism’; each woman or man to themselves, according to their own standings and situations for neither can be same for all and sundry, is what the study investigates. Susan Gubar has vehemently stated: “Feminism is a bad case of critical anorexia”.¹² But without this critical anorexia ‘truth’ cannot emerge. The search must go on. To study the emergence of the problem, the emergence of the points of differentiation must be introduced.

Sexuality also forms a part of the ongoing problem of the women question, which needs a discussion. Somewhere in the 18th century, “sex as we know it was invented”, as Thomas Laqueur writes in his illuminating study *Making Sex*, “We use sex to mean the biological categories of male and female and gender to designate the cultural and other kinds of identities and attributes associated with each sex.” Geddes and Thomson in 1889 stated, “what was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament”. At this time western culture was moving from what Laqueur called a ‘one-sex model’ to a ‘two-sex model’ of sexual difference. From antiquity to the middle ages women’s anatomy was not seen as inherently different from men’s, only as a different arrangement of the same parts: “all parts that are in men are present in women” wrote the 16th century doctor Fallopin. The vagina was considered an inverted penis, the womb an interior scrotum. This changed dramatically with the shift to the ‘two-sex model’. In 1913 a British doctor named Walter Heape produced a particularly representative expression of the ‘two-sex’ view of sexual difference, based on the difference in reproductive system. From here started the variegation of these differences into a number of co-branches; that of male and female, body and soul, culture and gender, homeland and alien land, colonizer and colonized, resident and creol, white and black, upper class and Dalit, poor
and rich and so on making it a never ending list. These differences are studied in the thesis and answers are sought as to the validations or the current significance of these polarities, according to the postmodern view. Helene Cixous also states in the Laugh of The Medusa

A feminist text cannot fail to be more subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there’s no other way. There’s no room for her if she’s not a he. If she’s a he-she, it’s in order to smash everything. To shatter the framework of institution, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter. (Cixous, 344)

Studying these differences, Jane Gallop claims that she has decided to “alternate between ‘she’ and ‘he’ in the hope of resexualizing the neuter ‘he’, of contaminating it with the sexual difference that seems to reside in the ‘she’. But at the same time she has also decided openly to “relinquish the usual position of command, and thus write from a more subjective, vulnerable position.” This she argues, may more accurately be described as the desire to write from the position of castration. What is striking however is Gallop’s effort to present this strategy as intrinsically Lacanian. Jane Gallop in Reading Lacan, goes to the other extreme, not claiming complementarity or symmetry, but equality before castration. Whereas in 1982 she firmly stated that “the man is ‘castrated’ by not being total, just as the woman is ‘castrated’ by not being a man”, in 1985 she is too intent on un doing the phallus to remember this unfair imbalance. In her eagerness to write like Lacan, Gallop has overlooked the fact that she is, after all, not like him.

Unlike men, however, women are always cast as lacking but according to feminists simply exhibiting their castration will not exactly subvert that belief. In other words, Gallop’s efforts to launch feminism as pure Lacanian style necessarily end up reenacting the narcissistic closure of the phallus. Setting out to embrace the gaps and lacunae of castration, Gallop ends up reinforcing the closure of the imaginary phallus. This ‘castigation fear’ that exists in the protagonists under study takes them to being
completely different individuals from their traditional counterparts in earlier fiction. An analysis to this end is made so as to bring out new issues, dilemmas and differences.

Out of this discovery the present work refers in specific to that of a ‘woman’ in particular and her dealings in society—pleasant or critical and how her role-playings enhance or subdue these differences. This kind of criticism, on the one hand, holds such traditional-bound notions as ‘one should be good to the mother’ and on the other ‘western’ individualistic notion of freedom. It is not that generalization regarding women’s situation cannot be made. The presence of a dominant cultural mode enables us to make generalization although each protagonist has individual traits and belongs to a particular relative situation typical of his/her own life.

Thus, simply to equate woman with ‘otherness’ as is done by most critics, deprives the feminist struggle of any kind of specificity. What is repressed is not ‘otherness’, but specific, historically constructed agents. Women under patriarchy are oppressed because they are ‘women’, not because they are irredeemably ‘Other’. Anti-semitism is directed against Jews, and South African racism against blacks, not simply against abstract ‘otherness’. The study specifies this relativistic ‘otherness’ in terms of mothers, wives and daughters, by an in-depth analysis of the three seminal works. The promotion and valorization of otherness will never liberate the oppressed. The fact that the oppressor tend to equate the oppressed group with ontological ‘otherness’, perceived as a threatening, disruptive, alien force, is precisely an ideological manoeuvre designed to mask the concrete material grounds for oppression and exploitation. Only a materialist analysis can provide a credible explanation of why the burden of ‘otherness’ has been placed on this or that particular group in a given society at a given time.

What is needed is a purer world, a world sans hypocrisy and double standards regarding women, their role-playings and essentialisms. What is needed is to let women be just themselves. This inadvertent act of disobedience sets in motion the project of dismanteling. Disobedience becomes both an oppositional discourse and the language of reclamation. These novels whatever they may be, allow intervention. They give ‘the
space to search for your own meanings’, therefore the possibility of rewriting, the re-
visioning, the recreating. But the way Shashi Deshpande sees it, “whether you write
about yesterday, or about today, writing is always about looking for your own truths.
Women have always been spoken for, discarding images, stereotypes, requestioning
myths and starting afresh, crawling into the minds of people, painting their inner
landscapes.”

The single word ‘woman’ even when used in the context where generally women
are marginalized as in patriarchal society like India, defies generalizations. It is only by
being aware of the different kind of women that we can generalize their status. And it is
only by being cautious of these jarring notes coming from the margin, that one could
continue to talk about the status of Indian women in India, as is done by the three writers
under study. Wifehood and motherhood continue to be the main occupation of women,
but without providing the earlier satisfaction and scope for expansion and fulfillment.
They simply become physical states; hardly ever vouchsafing the spiritual status
that could have normally accompanied them. This void has robbed women of their
opportunities for self unfoldment through wifehood or motherhood. These role-playing
are dealt with in detail in the thesis and their implications on women in general and the
society at large.

Power is a social process rather than a fixed structure. The relations in the web of
which women are caught are then by and large oppressive. Every relation into whom a
woman is caught without her terms, she is at a disadvantage. Every social process greets
her with greater oppression. The patriarchal structure enlivens itself through the dynamics
of power that temper every social process. The vedantic idealism, while professing
equality of each soul as an embodiment of Atman, considered women amongst one of the
most important constituents of Maya (illusion), who had to be avoided in order to reach
the paramarthika satta (the transcendental stage). The karmic theory believed that
women who followed their duty religiously would be born as men in their next birth,
reincarnation. This thesis does away with such beliefs, now outdated by the intervention
of Postmodern thought and the modern emphasis on ‘equalism’ rather than difference as the basis of gender study.

There is always pressure on girls and women to give birth to sons as though they are the deciding factors. Swami Sivananda was a strong propagator of Patri-prescriptions. Their glorifications (eulogisations) of ideals of women mummify women and create numbness in women towards life. The glorifications are nothing but gender types or sex stereotypes, which are evolved to bait women in order to capture them. The girls and women are taught to imbibe the gender types through the socialization process. Girls are made weak through the gender types, which condemn assertiveness, individuality and foster docility and modesty. These gender types, be it mental, psychological, physical, emotional, political, social or cultural, are also operational in the three texts under analysis and an attempt is being made here to dismantle their glorification, and move towards a visionary idealized ‘female utopia’. Carl Jung, a psychoanalyst pointed out that human beings are basically androgynous (andro meaning man; gyny meaning woman). He said every human being has both the masculine component- Anima. A healthy human being has to have a balance of both. Anima brings out the Ardhanarishwar concept of the traditional ages. What is needed then is a context-based study of these concepts and a means to evolve the identity of the modern day woman through this in-depth study. (Indu Prakash. Indian Women- The Power Trapped; Maudled minds and Bodies: A saga of Betenoire Patriarchs)

This is what the thesis attempts to do by a multi aspect reading of the three critical feminist contemporary texts. What is attempted is a study of the dilemmas, such as the notion of a double voiced discourse, the imagery of the veil, the mask, or the closet; and the problem of autonomy versus mimicry. The diagram that follows, describes the basic framework on which the thesis is designed. It studies the role-playing of women under the different heads of mothers, wives and daughters. The study is a textual and contextual study, incorporating the theoretical (Western and Indian) ideologies till date in feminist criticism. Also what is attempted is a study of the impact of physical, moral, social, emotional, sexual, traditional and philosophical issues on the characters of the given three
semenal works. Culture, Gender and discourse are studied in the process. In an attempt to reconstruct the ‘absent’ community of women through deconstruction my thesis studies thematically the following points, which are being represented clearly in the given diagram.
NOTES:

1 Derrida affirms this as a motive for deconstruction in “Deconstruction in America” 15-16.

2 Diane Elam, Feminism and Deconstruction views that feminist analysis should be “a deconstruction of representation that keeps the category of women incessantly in question, as a permanent contested site of meaning.” Similarly Judith Butler in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity argues that the categories of woman, man, and sex itself have to be debiologized. See Pp 20

3 See Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasan. Indian writing in English where K. Satchidanandan observes that application of theory on different texts is different because we have different history, different ethos, different forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination and if we need a feminism specific to our social situation, we ought to develop it. He further says that the white middle class feminist theory of the west can never explain Mahasweta Devi’s account of the tribal Jasoda or Draupadi. Therefore we ought to develop a feminist literary theory specific to our own creative and critical situation.

4 Gayatri Spivak is the not only feminist in the United States to develop such a project. In 1985 Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt published a whole anthology devoted to the problems of a materialist feminism (Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture).

5 The French feminist project of “writing the body” or Ecriture feminine is a particularly strong and revolutionary effort to provide women’s writing with an authority based in women’s genital and libidinal difference from men. While the French critics of phallocentrism takes very different paths in the work of Helene Cixous, Lucy Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, all explore the possibility of a concentric feminine discourse. Whether clitoral, vulval, vaginal, or uterine; whether centered on semiotic pulsions, childbearing,
or jouissance, the feminist theorization of female sexuality/textuality, and its funky audacity in violating patriarchal taboos by unveiling the Medusa, is an exhilarating challenge to phallic discourse. This Medusa of Cixous is the castigation of ‘sameness’ by Irigary. The Female Aesthetic also has serious weaknesses. As many feminist critics sharply noted:

1. Its emphasis on the importance of female biological experiences came dangerously close to sexist essentialism.

2. Its efforts to establish a specificity of female writing through the hypothesis of a women’s language, a lost motherland, or a cultural enclave, could not be supported by scholarship.

3. The initial identification with the Amazon as a figure of female autonomy and creativity (in the works of Monique Wittig and Ti-Grace Atkinson) and with lesbian separatism as the correct political form for feminist commitment, was both too radical and too narrow for a broadly based critical movement.

4. *Ecriture feminine* described only one avant garde mode of women’s writing, and many feminists felt excluded by a prescriptive stylistics that seemed to privilege the non linear, experimental, and surreal.

5. In so far as the Female Aesthetic suggested that only women were qualified to read women’s texts, feminist criticism ran the risk of ghettoization.

6. Finally, the essentialism of the universal female subject and the female imagination was open to charges of racism, especially since black women’s texts were rarely cited as example.

One woman’s family condition (mental, emotional and physical) cannot necessarily be substituted for another’s. However in these novels under study the re narration or repetition of the same under privileged, tormented condition is seen in either the child narrating the story or through generations of universalized subjugation. This is seen in the case of Ida, Virmati’s daughter in *Difficult Daughters* who too had a broken marriage. Again Kasturi, Virmati, Ida, Saru, Roop and Satya all are victims of maledome in one way or the other.
7 Jane Gallop offers a provocative exploration of feminist criticism’s blurring of the distinction between the literal body and the metaphorical body in *Writing and Sexual Difference: The Difference Within*.

8 In the essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*, Showalter argued against feminist fantasies of a wild zone of female consciousness or culture outside of patriarchy, declaring instead “there can be no writing or criticism outside of the dominant culture.” Thus both women’s writing and feminist criticism were of necessity, “a double voiced discourse embodying both the muted and the dominant, speaking inside of both feminism and criticism. Instead gynocriticism has focused on the multiple signifying systems of female literary traditions and intertextuality. In studying women’s writing, feminist critics have challenged and revised the prevailing styles of critical discourse.

9 Simone de Beauvoir spoke with all the authority of the French philosophical tradition when she launched her epochal attack on patriarchy in *The Second Sex*. At the time, her deliberate assumption of traditional discursive authority represented a massive invasion of previously patriarchal discursive terrain for subversive purpose. Her tone and style not only irked the patriarchs, who would clearly have liked to keep high philosophy to themselves, but also forced them to take her arguments seriously.

10 It is the patriarchal society, which has proximately and ultimately mauled the minds and bodies of women. To begin with we can start from the process of satification (internalization). A woman is not only told but tutored to live for everyone but herself. She has no individuality. In this way socialization of a woman is basically satification of herself. It is a life long ongoing process. This socialisatory construction of women is all the more abhorrable. Satification leads to the process of patriarchisation (externalization). Patriarchisation is a process, which ultimately solidifies patriarchy. It affects a disjunction between objective and subjective states of being. For most of it the objective state is oppressive. Men remain and get all the more patriarchised, relentlessly safeguarding their prerogatives. Patriarchal chauvinism, bigotry, fundamentalism add all
the more to the process of patriarchisation. (See Indu Prakash Singh. Indian Woman: The Power Trapped)

11 In the Tantric cosmogony, the term ‘Shakti’ defines an unbelievable complex aspect of the universe bears numerous nuances: some of these are cosmic creative forces, mother who gave birth to everything, cosmic energy, women, devoted sister, terrible power who destroys all limitations, goddess who grants divine gifts, force residing especially in the beautiful, vital and spiritual women, fundamental energy ‘kundalini shakti’.

12 Pivotal text of gynocritics is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s monumental study The Madwoman in the Attic. (1979) They offer a detailed revisionist reading of Harold Bloom’s theory of anxiety of influence, which describes the nineteenth century woman writer’s anxiety within a patriarchal literary culture. Influenced by both these writers, theoretical programs of gynocritics have been marked by a project that defined both the female literary text and the feminist critical text as the sum of its “act of revision, appropriation, and subversion,” and its differences of “genre, structure, voice, and plot.”

13 Elaborating on her viewpoint she remarked that feminism isn’t a matter of theory, it is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beavoir to the reality of our daily lives in India. Reality is lived on an individual plain daily in our lives and speaks of an individual situation. It is relative in nature and the same realities don’t apply to all. (Deshpande, Shashi, Roots and Shadows)