Chapter 5
Conclusion

Beyond Limbo: Re-casting a Post-Gender World

Obviously the most oppressed of any oppressed group will be its women.
(Tanika Sarkar. Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation)

Women writing was believed to be a sort of repressive desublimation, a harmless channel for frustrations and drives that might otherwise threaten the family, the culture and the society on the whole. This view was endorsed by many theoreticians who recommended that women write as a therapy, as a release from the stifling silence of monotonous existence, and as a rebellion against the indifference and insensitivity of the men closest to them. Thus emerged one of the most fervent beliefs of the Women Writers Suffrage League that the inner recesses of the female psyche would find unique literary expression once women had overthrown male domination. This was what the writers like Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Shauna Singh Baldwin of the new age incorporated in their writings. The vision of feminist utopia, although it preserves the identity and happiness of the oppressed subjects, is not conspicuously transformative as far as the patriarchal structure is concerned. What these three writers are able to achieve is not a blissful separatist retreat from the world, but an individualistic and subjective feminist utopia within their worlds that offers a synthesis of sociality and individuality within the normative community.

These writings are run by a libidinal and cultural, hence political, typically masculine economy; that as a tendency and tradition puts the male before the female, the patriarchy above the matriarchy, the husband before the wife and thus enhances the cause of female subjugation. This is the locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that’s frightening since it’s often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction. This is also the locus that has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition, where woman like
Sarita, Virmati and Roop have never been given their turn to speak, as is visible in the three texts under study. This is all the more serious and unpardonable as:

writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.

(Helen Cixous. *The Laugh of The Medusa*, 337)

Complying with Cixous view of studying writing as propaganda for subversive thought and the basis of its existence, the three subversive novels under study were chosen. Male and female characters of these novels are also considered misfits by the traditional society because they question the validity of its values. Their struggle to change these damaging patriarchal norms leads to their subjugation by the upholders of the traditional society. As a way of negating this victimization, the ‘outsiders’, namely the patriarchally victimized and self-victimized women characters in these three most explicitly feminist novels create their own value locks, norms, traditions and cultures that define their lives and contribute to their claustrophobia. All the three writer’s vision of a ‘feminist utopia’ is tied to their characters ‘outsidedness’ which thereby points to the connection between the acts of dissidence and creativity and shows how these elements can be combined to transform patriarchal societies. As Helen Cixous quotes in *The Laugh of The Medusa*

We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies- we are black and beautiful. We’re stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing, arid we’re not afraid of lacking.

(Cixous, 337)
The characters in going against the set prescribed norms and traditions of *Pativrata, Sati-Savitri* become outsiders to their community and stand out on the margins. The characters in these novels however, do not retreat from the world but openly reveal and reinforce the revolutionary and reconstructive features of their utopian community to the society at large, so that it can 'see' how the outsiders' community provides a combative force against the patriarchal ideology to free both men and women.

Some critics have however raised concerns regarding the viability of such feminist utopias, which according to the present study is altogether a visionary ideal life, a sanctum of a kind, a ‘comfort zone’ or a spiritual transcendence of the characters inner voice. In her article, *The Ideal Community and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Young argues that utopian societies by negating the existing social structure negate the concept of social change or evolution and thereby become static, functioning outside time or history. But these female protagonists namely Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*), Virmati (*Difficult Daughters*) and Roop (*What The Body Remembers*) though projected as members of an outsiders' community, do not de-temporalize the process of change, but rather through their views show that if "institutional change is possible at all, it must begin from intervening in the contradictions and tensions of existing society" (Young 17). They thus act as a signifying agent, naming experiences that are at the root of feminist movements' emergence as a growing force in Indian society and politics.

The members of this feminist utopia are not merely private individuals but participants in a shared national life, members who have a collective as well as individual stake in the decency and humanness of public arrangements. The outsiders' community is thus envisioned in these three novels as a 'microcosm' of the ways in which the entire society might function, by bringing about a transformation in the consciousness of the members of the 'macrocosm' (i.e. the patriarchal community). It hopes to create this change by functioning successfully as a small non-violent and egalitarian society within the shell of the patriarchal society with the hope that it will keep on growing larger.
The axial point at which the visions, of these three postcolonial women writers, converge is in the belief that feminist empowerment and fulfillment can emerge only through a process of dismantling the patriarchal edifice of knowledge or by deconstructing the faces of power, namely the traditional role prescriptions and normative discourses and practices and then by re-construction of a new feminist ‘utopia’ relative to the needs of the individual but free from intense submerging in tradition and culture. The varying visions of feminist emancipation, on the other hand, however point to the fact that the theory of Indian postcolonial feminism is by no means a homogeneous discourse and that Indian women, let alone Third World women, cannot be categorized monolithically. Here the difference in theoretical interpretations and the implications and impact of Western Feminist theory, be it black or white and the third world Indian feminism is implicit, and thus emerge viewpoints that cannot be termed as single or whole. Utopia thus emerges in the study, in the ultimate sense as a vision and a ‘trace truth’, relative to the cultural, social, material, economic, political, physical and mental settings and positions within a given pattern and norm.

Women then must write, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which during the moment of her liberation according to Cixous will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, at two levels that cannot be separated: (i) Individually: By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display; the ailing or dead figure. Deshpande, Kapur and Eldwin attempt in these three novels to return to the body exposing its weaknesses and victories, voyeuristically placing patriarchy somewhat responsible in making Cixous body a dead figure. (ii) An act that will also be marked by woman’s seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain, which is the margin or the patriarchal harem, as critics comment. In all the three women writers under study, a successful attempt has been made to put the body into the text and to break out from the silences giving voice to the psyche and sexuality of the protagonists through socializatory and cultural acceptance of the difference and
similarities. All three women can thus be looked at from Burton’s point of view as ones who,

made use of memories of home in order to claim a place in history at the intersection of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the national and the postcolonial (Burton, Dwelling in the Archives 4)

In breaking down distinctions between public and private histories, on the one hand, and historical and literary study on the other, What The Body Remembers highlights the extent to which ‘women’s worlds’ can command universal significance and, thus, help to re-shape understandings of history more generally. An example in this regard is Butalia who believes in the open ended social system of surveillance of feminist works and their analysis. “The world of feminism and the world of women is changing so rapidly that we need to keep track of that and in some way adapt and be open. Which is not to say that there is no room for the old kind of feminist publishing that we have been doing in the past, but there is also a need to expand” said Urvashi Butalia in an interview while explaining that one should take into account this change. Butalia emphasised the need to look at non-stereotype roles and said that she was even willing to do some "fun" books on women. "I think we can learn to laugh at ourselves, laugh at various situations. Those are some of the areas, which I hope to be able to develop finally.”

This is what Adrienne Rich had earlier called “re-vision”, that is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich, When We Dead Awaken, 90). This took on a more actively self-protective coloration in 1978, when Judith Fetterley in her The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach called upon women reader to learn to “resist” the sexist designs a text might make upon her, asking her to identify against herself, so to speak, by manipulating her sympathies on behalf of male heroes, but against female shrewd or bitch characters. Underpinning a great deal of this critical re-reading are the novels of Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin. Taken together their works demonstrate the importance of language in
establishing, reflecting, and maintaining an asymmetrical relationship between women and men. "Language conceals an invincible adversary," observes French critic Helene Cixous, "because it’s the language of men and their grammar". But equally insistent, as in the works of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar is to learn to penetrate the otherwise unfamiliar universes of symbolic action that comprises women’s writings, past and present.4

An important question that arises then is: Why did these women begin to write? What was the cause, the power, the urge that drove them to first pick up their pens? This question swept the women back to the early days of their writing. They didn't begin writing in the hope of gaining fame or recognition. Unlike male writers, the women did not begin to write when they were six or seven years old. Nor did they write because they came from learned or scholarly families, encouraged by doting fathers or uncles; or to transform society and bring about a revolution. These are the reasons that men give.5

The answer can be found in feminist criticism, which can thus be divided into two distinct varieties. The first type is concerned with ‘woman as reader’; with woman as the consumer of male produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes. This kind of analysis can be termed as the feminist critique. It is a historically grounded inquiry, which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male constructed literary history. It is also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience, especially in popular culture and texts, and with the analysis of woman—as sign in semiotic systems. The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with ‘woman as writer’; with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women, termed as Gynocriticism. The feminist critique is essentially political and polemical, with theoretical affiliations to Marxist sociology and aesthetics; gynocritics is more self contained and experimental, with connections to other modes of new feminist research.
The texts under study can be analyzed under both the types. An example of this feminist critique can be found in *What The Body Remembers*, where Roop’s role is a passive one, severely constrained by her womanhood, and further burdened by her status of the second wife, there is no way that she can wrestle a second chance out of life. She cannot master events, but only accommodate herself to them. Similarly the tragedy of Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and of Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* lies in realizing the inadequacy of this system, and in their inability to repossess the loving bonds that they comes desperately to need.

In the works of all the three novelists the crisis of an ordinary middle class professional woman is visible and all of them pose three questions in line with Periyar’s viewpoint:

1. Are they really happy with modern situation?
2. Can economic independence make them individuals in the true sense?
3. Are they really equal to man?

These novels are more concerned with presenting the entire picture of society than with the individual’s personal history. In these novels an individual character is shown as either unable or unwilling to accept the social role that the traditional society imposes upon him or her and in their attempts to overthrow the dictates of the society the characters lose their own selves. Their egos take over from them in dictating and thus a fragmentation and disintegration emerges. This interplay of the self with the society and the emergence of ‘trace truths’ towards the end, which are still illusory in nature and fluid in form, are visible in all the three writings. They provide no answers but set the process of thinking and thus a movement towards redemption and a search of ultimate ‘utopia’ however still a ‘trace truth’ is visible. This trace truth can be traced in the following diagram:
The narrative mode of the novels taken up for this thesis is social realism, showing an abiding interest in small social landscapes, especially that of either joint or nuclear families. In most of these novels the pattern of the development of story remains the same. This Pattern on a larger scale can be applied to all three novelists under study, though with different predicaments. It starts with the woman protagonist’s journey from her parental home where she in one way or the other feels cloistered and bound. She then falls in love with a man and there is an immature attempt to find happiness through him. She escapes from the family and gives herself to the man who is by necessity a typical patriarchal authority. In the husband’s house she soon comes to reality, which is biting enough for her to be disillusioned and tormented. Sometimes the return to parental home is possible and sometimes not but the process of self realization and mental maturity soon starts. The protagonist returns after finding trace truths and reality giving an uncertain ending to the novel.

Inspite of all the physical and the mental abuse that the protagonists undergo, they cannot be called subaltern. This is so because of the peculiarly privileged positions they occupy despite their awareness of themselves as being female. Their class, caste, education and also their ability to read and appreciate Western literature give them this privilege. Yet the protagonists cannot be termed as liberated either. There seems to be some meaning, which all protagonists as narrators are trying to convey and establish. The
privilege of their position does not exclude elements of subjugation. This meaning validates their existence and provides an answer to their problems.

If one could superimpose these novels upon each other, one would arrive at the common pattern with one or more of the following themes: uneasiness in marriage but a desire to go with it, the crises caused by the death of a loved one, the conflict with a mother or a motherly figure; the presence of a male figure outside marriage who generally understands the creativity and sensitivity of the narrator, the wise father or the father figure who is kind to the daughter; the transition from the joint to the nuclear family, the longing and the nostalgic memories which are attached to an ideal childhood. Yet these are not to be dismissed as some refrain or monologue. The universalisation of women is not brought about by the narration of the story, but it seems to have been achieved by the compelling re-narration, which takes place in many of these novels.\(^5\)

The women characters in all the three novels remain attached to the man unworthy of them. All of them cannot even remotely understand what was happening to them, all of them think their husband’s behavior contradictory, abnormal and deviant; all of them think that their world was falling to pieces, and in all three novels there are moments when they refuse to identify themselves and their true inner worth. This becomes self-alienation for them. This alienation is further solidified by myths that play with tradition and modernity. Seldom ideologically neutral, myths are constructed, socialized and disseminated for legitimizing certain power filled practices, attitudes and ways of seeing. Often, they are aimed at ‘naturalizing’ and even ‘divinising’ a particular worldview. The need for myths is as real for women as it is for men. Yet the situation is asymmetrical because while men have myths on their side, women have myths against them.

Myths oppress by denying their victim’s voice, visibility and dignity. De-centering this world is not disowning it, but attempting to revise and recast it more justly and fairly. The fact that no single myth has escaped reinterpretation or improvisation gives further legitimacy to practices of critiquing and updating myths. Herein also lies the
deconstruction of popular conceptions of Indian womanhood, studied in the thesis. De
centering of myths has to have a central place in the agenda of women’s studies. By
allowing women to become the narrators of their lives and by making them visible and
active, the exercise not only lightens their ‘mythic’ burden but also gives them
confidence in themselves. It is only by shaking, disturbing and de-centering them for this
purpose that myths can be made ‘friendly’ for women. This is what is being attempted in
the thesis.

The process of gender socialization unfolds before our very eyes in these
narratives. Within American feminist scholarship, the term “gender” is used to mean the
social, cultural, and psychological constructs imposed upon biological sexual difference.
Ashis Nandy, (Sudhir Kakar, Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality) the social
psychologist has in one of his earlier essays penned a very succinct paragraph. The most
socially valued attributes of the male, Zilboorg argues, “are a result of the natural
selection imposed upon him by the female’s original power to instinctively sense which
mate is biologically fitter. This primal dominance arouses in man insecurity, jealousy and
hostility towards women. He has a phylogenetic awareness that this primordial role is
highly specialized as no more than a temporary and ephemeral appendage to life” as a
“parasitic” fertilizer. Till now he has had no civilizational awareness that he has been
trying to work through this basic hostility by limiting the full possibilities of woman
through sheer oppression.

In 1929, Girindrasekhar Bose the founder and first president of the Indian
psychoanalytical society wrote to Sigmund Freud about his finding in Indian patients,
quite different from the latter’s finding in western individuals:

in Indian males, the castration threat owes its efficiency to—its
connection with the wish to be female. The desire to be female is
more easily unearthed in Indian male (patient) than in the
European—the Oedipus mother is very often a combined parental
image and this is a fact of great importance. I have reason to believe
that much of the motivation of the maternal deity is traceable to this
source. (Jung, Collected works)

Sudhir Kakkar, a practicing psychoanalyst agrees with Bose about “the ubiquity
and multiformity of the primitive idea of being a woman and the embeddedness of this
fantasy in the maternal configurations of the family and the culture in India”. Kakkar
adds, “one of the more dominant narratives of (the Indian) culture is that of Devi- the
great Goddess especially in her manifold expressions as mother in the inner worlds of the
Hindu son”. (See Kakkar. Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality) Like race or
class, gender is a fundamental or organic social variable in all-human experience. It has
several elements instilling in the girl’s mind a sense of her own inferiority and of gender
role differences, compelling her to accept her subordinate status vis- à-vis her brothers,
and training her for her future role as wife and mother. (as in the case of Saru in The Dark
Holds No Terrors). Taming a girl into a suitable submissive future wife, mother role was
a difficult task and sometimes called for drastic measures. Women in the novels as in real
life and in theory too, became the site where the conflict between the old and the new was
played out.

This conflict is analysed in this study. In postmodern age, the study however
transcends the traditional definition of the women’s wife- mother role with ease and
attempts self- definition for a woman as an individual with direct links to the larger
society, and even to the whole universe. Peering inside the three novels under study, into
the lives of the women characters as revealed by themselves one is struck by the
harshness of their personal and social reality, and the complexity and maturity of their
reflections. Starting life with a strict upbringing, which crushed individuality and
enforced conformity to an approved feminine ideal, they struggled with obstacles, which
were in many ways similar yet different. Marriage brought its trials and rewards, and
even the rewards seem not to have been offered but created by the women themselves.
Again, their attitude to marriage was basically similar; compatibility was felt to be
crucial, but its absence was expected as a reality, and solutions were sought in terms of
the ideal of husband worship or Pativrata, Sati-Savitri both in the traditional sense and in its ‘modern’ variation of the wife being the husband’s ‘creation’.

Complex questions concerning their individual combinations of conformity and subversion, conventionalism and quiet rebellion arise in all the three seminal texts. Their adherence to tradition and orthodoxy, an essential concession in bargaining and negotiating for greater space is another interlinked area of discourse. The fact however remains that through their personal ordeals they emerged to form the core of a diffuse kind of feminism, a feminism that did not gel into a movement but nevertheless, survived in the lives of the individual women characters. In these different yet similar voices echoing different standpoints of understanding and criticizing theory and its applications on literature, Helene Cixous too sends warning signals within the feminist project: “Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified!” To attempt to situate ourselves at these crumbling centers of power/knowledge is to heighten our complicity.

For women, the common cause then was loneliness and alienation, which emerges from an analysis of the texts. They had no one to share their thoughts or feelings with like Virmati. Some women like Shakuntala and Saru were the first to be educated in their families, and entered a new world with many visions and hopes. Some had struggled with family and community to achieve this education. All of them found the burden of the restrictions placed on them, at home and outside, unbearable. Was the emotional turmoil and mental confusion they suffered as a result of these restrictions natural, they wondered. The thesis discusses three texts from three different women writers and all of them coincide in their representation of some aspects of Indian culture and family life which create the conditions for difficult relationships between mothers and daughters namely a rigid interpretation of tradition, established sexist prejudice, a tight family budget in a society that still accepts dowry and the belief that a woman belongs primarily to her husband’s family. These were the problems faced by not only the protagonists but also the dilemmas in the minds of the women writers creating them. Without any clear sense of how to fight these restrictions, unable to conceal the rebellious thoughts that
churned in their minds, many women claimed they picked up the pen as an instrument, a weapon of survival, while others thought of it as an escape route to give vent to their pent up emotions or a kind of 'catharsis'.

The thesis also studies extensively the Western impressions of the lives of Indian women, which are typically flavored by stereotypes: oppression, fear, docility, and so on. Sadly, a kernel of truth often informs stereotypes. There is no denying that the caste system, the tradition of dowries, arranged marriages and a Hindu woman's duty to bear sons (as in Baldwin’s novel) all contribute to the stereotyping and misrepresentation of women. It is not surprising then that feminist activism has found a ripe battleground in the subcontinent. The complexity is daunting. But India remains a marvelous window into the extremes of female existence, from crusading earth mothers to modern screen goddesses and demure submissive wives. We find such things interesting and bewildering because we are unable to reconcile them with our Western or modern sensibilities, which keep, changing with age, time and culture. The frontier, the edge that mediates the unavoidable meeting of East and West, is spiced with such bewilderment and frustration.

Further it should be noted that the structures of feeling and desire in the 19th C and 20th C were clearly changing and the social and cultural dimensions of this sexuality were matters of grave concern to the self-consciously modern male; especially since his images of womanhood were being shaped as much by colonial Victorian notions of proper sexual behavior as by his own perceptions. By the turn of the century this became quite vivid in terms of fictional description, as is evident from the novels of Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin. The novels speak of the desire to 'free' the female as well as regain the rights to her body, which produced the phenomenon of the wife who was already the mother. Thus the women’s problematic sexuality was elided in an easy and interchangeable duality of roles. The turning to women as if they were the last frontiers in a beleaguered culture and civilization was evident everywhere. It also talks of the conspicuously male tendencies, which includes the middle class Hindu male’s desire to self-consciously rationalize his actions and beliefs like Sardarji of What The Body Remembers and eschew superstitions and fear, retaining the public masculine self while
dormant and ambivalent notions and intimations of femininity were sought to be displaced and nurtured in the domestic and conjugal sphere.

Periyar’s (The Thought of Periyar E.V.R) resolution of the women question which was firmly focused on the female body and self also gets validated through a study of the three novels. Unlike the nationalists, he did not consider women as fruitful subjects for a discourse on tradition or the past, nor did he perceive their condition a mere index of a nation’s well being. The ideal of women securing their sexual and reproductive rights remained a persistent motif in Periyar’s writings as in the writings of Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin, though he would argue quite vociferously that men couldn’t really help to advance the cause of women.

The three novels take this view from Periyar that masculinity as an idea and concept degraded women. The continued salience of masculine norms, insisting that freedom and courage inhered only in the male subject perpetuates the idea that women are not worthy or simply unsuited to live by these qualities. The writers portray women weighed down by tradition and custom who would never begin to think about themselves and men had to, therefore, impel them towards their path of freedom. This is evident in the case of Virmati of Difficult Daughters adhering to the dictates of her husband who is a lover cum tutor and is authorized by her unfailing love to guide her through life and education. She has no way out as it was she who chooses the lover over and above her paternal family and therefore now has to submit to his authority however educated she might be. Deshpande shows less concern with a problematic masculinity than with the conventional femininity of women. This point of view was also seen by Kapur and Baldwin as they exhibit the objective of the struggle, which is the refusal of masculinity and conventional femininity and the liberation of women from those roles of mothers, wives and daughters thrust on them by biology and reified by culture. In other words the goal was the freeing of the female body and self from the bondage of motherhood and reproduction and the accentuating ideology of Pativrata and Sati-Savitri willingly.
Women have more often been imaged against than ‘imaging’. The prerogative of imaging women, whether through writings or the arts, has, by and large, been a male enterprise. Literary or social language typified the ‘law of the father’ meaning the patriarchal voice. Traditional representations of women have tended to locate them within bi-polarities— the public woman, the prostitute vis a vis the private woman, the virtuous housewife. Women are either seductive, crafty and bold or shy, modest, silent or self-sacrificing. Women in male representations are therefore ‘frozen’ into ‘icons’ either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The thesis in studying female representations tries to break free from this mould, trying to provide new paradigms of reconstructing female subjects in fiction as in life.

In re-representation the thesis further indulges in a study of the traditional nomenclature of pativrata. Pativrata denotes a concept, which symbolizes devotion, loyalty and love of a wife towards her husband. Certain ideas were formed about what an ideal woman should be and women were then imaged in terms of these ideas and accordingly turned into icon of pativrata i.e. devoted wifehood. Women who are the subjects and objects of such imaging are themselves living, palpable entities whether they belong to the hoary past or the immediate present. This leads not only to a multiplicity of interpretations of female representations within patriarchal structures but also to transmutations and transformations of the images themselves, being imaged and re-imaged as a result of a vibrant interaction with the imaged/iconised women. The focus of re-search and reconstruction, as the thesis title suggests, then is on the very dynamic process by which women become iconised in Indian history myths, fiction and the arts and the shattering of many of these representations as icons turn into women, changeable and ever changing.

In the three seminal texts under study namely The Dark Holds No Terrors by Shashi Deshpande, Difficult Daughters by Manju Kapur and What The Body Remembers by Shauna Singh Baldwin this point is greatly studied and validated. The three protagonists namely Sarita, Virmati and Roop of these three novels go out of bounds to demonstrate that sex too like gender is culturally constructed and is made to seem natural
or real or fixed through regulatory practices. Further the body, whether physical, astral or psychological, plays a very important role in the lives of the three protagonists and the condition of India at that time in history. They valiantly seek to make deconstruction and feminism answerable to the colonized; however, at times the process leads them to set themselves up as righteous representatives of subordinated people or the third world persons who remain quite distinct from empowered and therefore degenerate readers. The protagonists further validate the basic cause of feminism in proving that they are humans or rather ‘hupers’ first and much more than just mothers, wives or daughters.

These role playings are further bound to the idea of purity or chastity. In this regard, Periyar talks about a Tamil word used to denote chastity- ‘karpu’in his book The Thought Of Periyar. Karpu is considered as adjunct of the female body and self. Karpu is associated with a kind of feminine power, as if through her steadfast loyalty to her husband, women acquire the gift of an energy, which can, in fact, perform miracles. There can be nothing more fearful than losing one’s Karpu. The three novelists like Periyar repudiated this ethic of chastity and rejected the sexual norms implicit in it through their writings. Karpu in its early origins similar to popular conceptions of Hindu tradition- Pativrata, Sati-Savitri and Sita imagery as is manifest in all three novels and has been time and again pointed out in the concerned chapters, referred to qualities of firmness, steadfastness and honesty, all signifying universal human qualities. Exemplifying this is What The Body Remember in which Satya is the one who rebels and the one who has to die before the novel ends. Her absence is to later on in itself become a presence, which haunts both Sardarji and Roop constantly.

Let silence reverberate forever with the absence of Satya, the knowledge that but for a little more love, she would still be. By her absence will she make her presence felt, till they will both long for her as devotees long to be reunited with the infinite—Sita, too, gave Ram the gift of her absence, called upon the earth to open and swallow her, called upon death to make Ram’s remorse when she could not speak to it—Sita, too, entered the soundless scream of the
earth, with holding her presence at her husband’s moment of triumph, countered all aspersions on her worthiness with absence. (Baldwin, 363)

Karpu came to denote wifely chastity only after Aryan Hinduism had entered the south, for it is then that we come across terms such as *pativrata* (ideology of the chaste wife). Periyar played off the term *pativrata* against such Tamil terms as *nayaki* (lover) and *manaivi* (wife, woman of the household) to indicate that the former denotes subjugation, surrender and control while the latter were connotative of equality, at least in the private realm of love and desire. Kapur in Difficult Daughters seems to use both the imagery of the *nayaki* and *manaivi* negatively though, by creating characters such as Virmati and her mother Kasturi. Baldwin too negatively creates Roop as the ultimate *nayaki* and Satya as a *manaivi*. Instead of standing out as connotations of equality, these terms further validate the subordinate and demeaning roles of mothers, wives and daughters in the given texts.

It is necessary to detach men’s sensibility from an obsessive concern with female sexuality (for men would also be judged and hence could not unilaterally assume the role of judging patriarchs), but it would serve to liberate women from the regimen of the body imposed by a self-serving culture of masculinity. Women, often consented to their own oppression and devaluation in the three novels under study, much like the people of the lower castes as Saru tolerated sadism for a ling time before shouting out for help, Virmati suffered at the hands of the hedonist professor and Roop was unwillingly turned into a child producing machine. Periyar view can be subscribed to in this regard in which he declared that he desired to see the day:

when a woman can walk out of a loveless marriage to which she had hitherto felt bound due to ideas of chastity--- when those laws and religions, which enjoin women to be a passive and patient sufferer of her husband’s brutality and violence, disappear--- when women can express their love freely without heeding that inner voice of chastity which keeps
most women bound to a loveless relationship. (The Thought Of Periyar)

Periyar's acceptance of the female body as a natural biological entity that was not fundamentally different from the male body except for its constituent parts and functions, may be contrasted with the rejection of the female body and its consequent objectification as a site of tradition, law and scripture in social reform discourses of the 19th c. It is against such objectification and typecasting that Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin speak out.

By making parenthood rather than motherhood the decisive factor in the nurture and care of human life, all three novelists liberated the female body from the oppressive and suffocating realm of eternal fertility and sought to grant the female person a will and subjecthood. Having done this, Kapur turned her attention to conventional modes of fetishisation of the female body. She refused to accept the argument that women needed, and desired to look beautiful and that this was the reason why eagerly took to adorning themselves. Baldwin too wrote in exasperation that literary descriptions of women were solely given to hyperbolic celebrations of their bodies (like Roop's) while almost nothing was said of their minds, their thinking and reasoning abilities and their intellect. She observed that from childhood girls were taught to feel and look simultaneously proud and vulnerable about their bodies and that this led to their transformation in adult life into icons of desire and pride. (like Virmati and Saru in whose minds this was indoctrinated from childhood). Realizing this fact, Deshpande too created Saru (Sarita) the protagonist of The Dark Holds No Terrors who was obliged to give this ironic (imaginary) advice to future wives,

A wife must always walk a few feet behind her husband—
That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage.
Don’t ever try to reverse the Doctor-Nurse, executive secretary, principal-teacher role— no partnership can be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it is unequal in favor of
your husband.

This subjugation was also evident in the child bearing and rearing rituals in the novels as in the real life. Men’s responsibility as shown in the novels ends with getting women pregnant but all other responsibilities beginning with the moment of pregnancy through the time the women experience labor pains (including the dangers accruing to women’s health thereafter) are women’s alone. Even after a child is born it is the mother who nourishes it with her blood and milk. Women who went through the rigors of childbirth time and again were mere automatons that had become lulled to the monotony of their existence. This is beautifully illustrated in Virmati’s mother Kasturi in Difficult Daughters, and Roop of What The Body Remembers. Women should be considered rational, self-respecting persons and to this end the thesis argues against conventional notions of chastity, beauty etc. that demean and negate women’s selfhood. To be able to use the range of one’s voice, to attempt to express the totality of self as a recurring struggle in the tradition of these writers like Shashi Deshpande, Kapur and Baldwin from the 19th century to the present is then what the thesis has attempted to do. It attempts to find an answer and give voice to the diversity of discourses on these and many more issues related to women.

The novelists can be said to dwell into the anima of the characters in trying to search for an answer to the women’s problems and its manifestations in the terms of sexuality, body and psyche. By anima is meant the feminine self, both in the woman and the man. Since there is controversy about what is feminine, the term has been operationalized as far as the present novels and their study is concerned. Feminine is seen here as embodying the receptive (or tolerant), the nurturant (or caring) and the connected (where the social self is favored over the individual self). Some have suggested that given the controversial nature of the term, ‘feminine’, should be allowed to desiccate but given its philosophical heritage, this might prove difficult.  

In the study it was observed that within a man-woman relationship, oppression results from attempts to deny one’s deepest anxieties, which are projected to an
exploitative relationship institutionalized over centuries, be it a father-daughter, husband-wife or son-mother relationship. The present awareness of the constricted role of woman in Indian society and in public affairs is part of an ongoing process of civilizational change and must be so analyzed. This demands that we identify the structure of the defenses, individual as well as cultural, which has given meaning to the role of women in Indian society, defenses which have been challenged in recent times by new waves of social consciousness, and thus redefine the arima by de-centering it first.

India has not rejected the ‘primordial’ feminine primacy. When we designate the eternal feminine and masculine principles it is the former, the prakriti (nature or the female principle), which is the active, and the purusha (male or the masculine principle), which is the passive principle (notwithstanding the later Brahminical nuances that it is the passive purusha which is superior). The novelists here in the novels try to validate the prakriti of feminine and study the dominant purusha and the shaktis emanating from both.

At the final stage of evolution of ‘atmakaya’, the soul, which forms the self realization of the protagonists under study or the conclusions of the said novels one has glimpses of the point of their very being, there’s a union between both the genders the meeting point of Shiva and Shakti. In these mythological terminology the three texts can be studied in a different light, in which women are given the higher or the superior standing on the one hand but an equal and importantfooage on the other. We all are familiar with the concept of Ardhanareshwar; the concept of Shiva as half male and half female. And even our body contains both ying and yang. When there are vibrations, it is called Shakti without which Shiva is also known as Shava (lifeless). He becomes forceful when she joins him. They complement each other. So these labels of female or male chauvinism are meaningless. In doing this we are in a way going back to the origins, as is evident towards the ending of all the three novels where the protagonists experience a let go of anxiety and an ultimate bliss which can not be only termed as a self realization in the modern light but also an act of atmakaya through the acceptance of the Shakti manifest within each huper being.
Is patriarchy to be blamed completely then? This is the question that comes to the fore. According to Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics patriarchy was defined as ‘a political institution’ rather than an economic or social relation, and political institutions were in their turn conceived as hierarchical power relations. According to Indu Prakash Singh’s (Dialectics of Law and The Status of Indian Women: A Sociological Study) view the perpetrators are not only the much celebrated and publicized female patriarchs (mothers-in-law) who are so according to the present study due to patriarchal indoctrination, forced essentialisms and satification of their selves but also husbands, sons, fathers, brothers plus in laws who add to the preceding appropriate patriarchal relational configurations. Even then the patriarchal society exonerates men and propounds blame-the-victim approach (femistigmatisation) the other side of this being eulogies-the-victim (femicidealisation) approach. Both the views are excoriated by Indu Prakash Singh and the present study complies with the same.

It is the patriarchal society combined with the indoctrination of women themselves, which has ultimately mauled the minds and bodies of women in the novels undertaken. 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, as are Roop and Virmati. 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 abhorrrable in the novels. Thus women are not made to exist but die every moment on their attempt to capture a glimpse of life. Women have been tutored then to lead a second construct life. Satification leads to the process of patriarchisation (externalization). Patriarchisation as a process, 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. A tentative hypothesis to this problem would be a society where no men or women would live, but only humans or hupers (removing ‘man’ from the word human, and ‘son’ from the word person) gives us the word ‘huper’
On the other hand, women who challenge these patriarchal ideals or do not practice them become victims of patriarchal perversity (lust, like victims of sexual harassment, rape, prostitution and sadism as in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* etc.). There is no escape from these two forms of patriarchisation for most of Indian women where the sway of patriarchy stands activated and bolstered. Patriarchisation, which radiates injustice, culminates in oppression/victimization (objectivation) of women. Since there are various types of oppression afflicting women, the present study tried to subsume it in five categories as given by Indu Prakash Singh (*Indian Woman*, 210) that are also clearly visible in the three seminal works under study:

1. **Entity Bulldozing or Patriarchally Propelled Victimisation (inter-gender: man vs woman):** in this men are responsible for crimes like societal dictatorship, bigamous relationships, child marriage, wife battering, rape, sadism etc. example of which is Saru in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* whose husband Manohar turns sadist due to repressed inner complexes and she suffers as a resultant victim.

2. **Self-Immolation: Patriarchally Propelled Self-Victimisation (extra-intraperson):** examples of which are self-immolation, sati, suicide, etc. *Virmati* of *Difficult Daughters* tries to commit suicide as she feels cloistered down by societal customs and is denied her right to free choice.

3. **Extrapolated Oppression: Victim Propelled Victimization (intra-gender: woman vs. woman):** very often when we blame men for oppression of women many men refute this observation by maintaining that in quite many cases women themselves oppress women like mother-in-law/sister-in-law oppressing daughter-in-law. It is naïve to observe so because one forgets that this oppression is based on dependence on men. Both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law compete for the favor of this man (son and husband respectively). Nobody wants to loose this competition. In the social age and ritual hierarchy mother-in-law is in a dominant position. She uses it to the detriment of the daughter-in-law. If the dependence disappears so would the competition. Moreover,
mother-in-law who has been made a scapegoat earlier when she herself was a daughter-in-law and tortured looks for another when she is in a position of relative dominance, on whom she can project her pent-up feelings. The daughter-in-law comes handy and is thus oppressed and victimized by her. All in all, it is futile to blame women for intra-gender oppression. Assertiveness and not lying low definitely helps women. They do not have to surrender they have to fight it out. We have to debunk the surface structure and when we reach the deep structures we find man-his milieu, norms, values, mores in short patriarchy culpable. As an example can be stated the second wife status of Roop in the text *What The Body Remembers* who was victimized by the first wife Satya. Also Virmati and Ganga of *Difficult Daughters* are victims of each other as is Saru whose mother hates her for being responsible in killing her brother.


5. State propelled Victimisation (inter- intra gender) like the pressures operating on the professor in *Difficult Daughters* or on Saru’s sadist husband Manohar in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by family, culture and society.

Having discussed the various categories of oppression/ victimization, the thesis envisages the end of oppression of women in a depatriarchised socialist democratic society. Women oppression today has to be seen in a wholistic perspective according to which what links sati with dowry deaths, female foeticide, sexual harassment, sexual crimes is the fact of woman being regarded as a non-entity, a non person with no identity except that bestowed on her as some man’s daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. Women enhancing and executing this construct further validate this patriarchal construct.

Through the idolization of *Sitas* in our society, the novelists bring an awareness of the insults and injustices perpetrated on them by their husbands in order to live for the patriarchal glory like Sardarji in *What The Body Remembers* and also the women’s victimization of women. These very forms of oppression of women are rotten fruits delivered by the vicious and decadent tree of Indian patriarchy. The process, which is very pernicious to women today, is patriarchisation. Patriarchisation is a general process
wherein a disjunction between objective and subjective states of existence of an existent (women) gets prominent. The thousand years of patriarchal (shastric, koranic, biblical) socialization lingers on and rather gets reinforced with every advance of science and technology.

In Deshpande’s, Kapur’s and Baldwin’s writings, the feminist emancipation movement proceeds by a double movement: simultaneously against normative constructions of women that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social practices, and toward new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions. All three writers describe different kinds of self-chosen exiled existences of women that become a way of breaking the patriarchal hold over their lives. All writers portray the patriarchal community from the women’s point of view as obscure, cloistered, and destructive. Those who submit are idolized/ idealized mummified while those who challenge or are a threat are stigmatized/ ostracized as is happening in the three texts under study. Hence the women characters choose a marginalized existence that tantamounts to an exiled existence, ironically, enabling them to assert their true individual selves. Virmati’s words resonate this exiled existence when she says in Difficult Daughter’s “she felt out of place, an outcast amongst all these women—these larger spaces were not for her” (Kapur, 133)

The main questions, which arise and are analyses here are: does marriage exhaust all relations? Why is that any interaction between men and women is given sexual connotations? Is sex the be all and end all of all relations? Why do we have the double standards and what for? Why is it that thousands of men having illicit relations do not disrupt social order, whereas one woman who allegedly has it, is questioned time and again. With structural changes in the society microstructures too have undergone changes having both dimensions emancipative and exploitative, as is the married life of Virmati, Saru and Roop. If on the one hand we have the emergence of egalitarian families, few women opting for a career and remaining single which no long ago was a male preserve. We also have on the other hand problems like pre-marital parenthood, single parenthood, forced single hood and divorce. It is interesting that it is women themselves who serve as
agents of indoctrination to patriarchal values—overt objectification of women as commodities of labor and reproduction may be verbalized? The growing perception of women as ‘sexual objects’ is a modern phenomenon, filtering in from the city.

Feminist critics around the world have argued from a variety of perspectives that the imagination cannot escape from the unconscious structures and strictures of gender identity. These arguments may emphasize the impossibility of separating the imagination from a socially, sexually, and historically positioned self, as in Sandra Gilbert’s sensibility insistence that,

what is finally written is, whether consciously or not, written by the whole person— if the writer is a woman who has been raised as a woman— how can her sexual identity be split off from her literary energy? Even a denial of her femininity— would surely be significant to an understanding of the dynamics of her aesthetic creativity. (Sandra Gilbert. Criticism in The University)

The present study helps in the realization that traditional cultural values have served to de-emphasize the conjugal bond between married couple. It is the continuation of the lineage and performance of duties and responsibilities within the kinship networks that are considered to be of primary importance in relationships. A wife is expected to serve the in laws first, then the children as a matter of decorum, relegating the husband to the third place in her attentions. Similarly a husband is expected to underplay the demands of his wife upon his time, in the traditional set up. Her excessive workload and the absence of privacy in the household are other factors that contribute to a dilution of intimacy between the two. Apart from this sharp gender based schisms within the struggle for survival often create a psychological rift between husband and wife.

Further the novels taken up here make a point towards the concept of ‘difference’ as a part and parcel of the post-structural/postmodern jargon in today’s world which is caught in some avoidable and paralyzing contradictions that have sprung up from the
essentializing notions of womanhood. Since equality may not neutralize differences and nor does difference exclude equality, one needs to investigate the concept of difference in a way that does not view all women as same or as identical to men. Such an analysis does not resort to a neat and fundamental categorization of womanliness, but which accepts crucial terms of identity formation as a differential, heterogeneous and relativistic process. The study complies with Audre Lorde’s own view:

we should use difference as a dialogue, the same way we deal with symbol and image in literary study--- we need to use these differences in constructive ways rather than in ways to justify our destroying each other. (Lorde, Uses Of The Erotic: The Erotic as Power)

bell hooks in her work Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics has similarly examined cogently the aesthetics of space and the politics of marginality as the crucial components of the discourse on the so termed third world people. Contrary to the popular argument that views the margin as a site of despair and nihilism she considers the space of marginality as a site of resistance and affirmation, of strength and sustenance and a certain ‘yearning’ for peace and harmony, rightly a ‘female utopia’. This search is ongoing in the thesis where the writers have tried to do away with the marginalized protagonists viewing themselves with despair and emerging out from self-created nihilisms. To cite her critical intervention in this regard: “a message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonizer/ colonized.” (213)

Andrew King rightly says about theory in general:

the argot of postmodernism, words and phrases such as ‘pluralism’, ‘diffusion of power’, ‘loss of legitimacy’, and ‘colonization’ is the language of transition, a transition from a house that is on fire to one that has not yet been constructed” (in other terms from de-construction to re-construction).
This gets validated in the present study. The search for an answer or truth is ongoing and unending. The psychoanalyst and philosopher Wolfgang Loch in his *Truth, Consciousness and Reality*, 221 describes truth as the active construction of a self understanding. To reach this truth, with its profound implications for political discourse and political action, a particular sort of dialogue, itself a feature of the truth that emerges, must be undertaken. For Loch, this dialogue’s vital end is to reach the truth from, by, and for the subject herself as in the cases of Saru, Virmati and Roop, but within a social frame of uncoerced communication, which becomes, as in the Hebrew tradition, a rock to stand on.

This dynamic process that Loch details includes but is not merely interpretative, is the drawing out of a hidden meaning; it implicates both subject and analyst in the construction or reconstruction of truths whose trajectory aims towards the future. This is what the thesis tries to bring to the fore in the feminist analysis of the given texts where the troubled question of women’s psychic being is centered. All possibilities are being explored to establish an equalitarian and depatriarchised existence. These women with one voice proclaim together with Malan Devi, involved in the Bodh Gaya land Struggle movement: “earlier we had tongues but could not speak. We had felt but could not walk. Now we have got the strength to speak and to work.”

However Spivak’s question, which is also being asked by the three novelists “Can the subaltern speak?” is not always useful if we deal with only the protagonists of these novels because they are able to transform their silences through writing/painting in most of the cases. There is an outlet of one form or the other, an outlet not necessarily an overt one but providing some breathing space to the characters. The cloistering and claustrophobia is not of the extreme kind. The subaltern does speak in these texts although the voice often goes unheard. Despite the changes that have taken place in the Indian society, the Indian women continues to languish and be seen as a subject, that is a creation of mythology, with a history of subjugation and stereotyped social responses. Forces of revivalism are asserting themselves in and through these texts. Idea of absence
and presence is vivid in the narration mode and characterizations but remains something that cannot be defined.

A clear movement is seen in the texts, as well as in the process of self-realizations of the protagonists from:

- cognition
- reasoning
- awareness
- resistance

(psychological / mental / social / (physical / self awareness process thinking process) / process) / cultural construct / positive anger / not aggression)

‘Female utopia’ as presented here, through Saru, Virmati and Roop’s eyes is then a self creation, a state of mind, a feat achieved only when your body and mind is in equilibrium, at peace with itself and the world around. As Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* observes, “‘truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.” These books then not just talk about moral issues, raped at large in our society but also about health (mental, emotional, physical) in marriage.

The male assertion of female domination projected so vociferously in them and often caricatured, nevertheless has to be understood and contextually placed among certain historical realities. Post-independence changes seem to suggest that this assertion is born out of men’s consciousness of women’s potentialities as well as by their attempts to control women, whether directly or indirectly or through ridicule. Positive aggression teaches you to be assertive and also to fight for the right. You learn to display positive anger and not violent aggression. There’s a very thin line between rebellion and questioning. Finally, they slide into the male pattern and become resigned to being a part of the system. If they question they’ll have to get out of the system. But being part of the system should mean the right and the duty to question it and correct it.
a woman professional has multiple roles in life. One important
dimension is her professional life. She needs to contribute to the vision
of her profession and not allow her awareness of being a “woman” to
submerge her identity as a “professional”. She has to formulate her
personal vision, and needs to ask herself; what do I want? What can I
achieve and contribute constructively to a gender vision of higher
status for women and a mutually and socially beneficial partnership
with men.

The changing global and Indian paradigm offers her unprecedented opportunities talked
about by the three novelists. She has to introspect and raise her competence. There are
three major actions she needs to take, audit where she is and what she is, see all the
pluses and minuses and, lastly renew herself. We need what Gayatri Spivak calls “a
strategic essentialism” to combat patriarchy as is evident from the present study.

In the Indian society as presented in the novels and as also in real life a woman
starts with a handicap. As and when she overcomes it, it is with her own determination
and will. Empowered women who reach tough or unconventional positions make choices,
not sacrifices. Empowerment of women is not economic empowerment alone. It is a
larger question of maturity, dignity, and the ability not to look down on herself. An
empowered woman will not permit any disrespect to her and will be in a position to
preserve and protect her sense of self and her dignity. Status quo spells security. Where
there is a clash between status quo and change, it inevitably generates insecurity, thus
change is not tolerated. Vacuum- emotional or mental happens to people who are not
aware of themselves. The more aware you become of yourself, the more you reduce the
vacuum to the minimum.
The more a woman takes on, the more coping skills she has to develop and evolve. A woman, who doesn’t evolve along with her aspirations, lacks coping skills to manage things, whether at home or at work. When a woman says that she can do what a man can do, she’s only trying to merge into a complete human being. When the gynae side is required she’s gynae, when the andro side is required she’s andro. So she’s both man and woman and she is evolving as a complete person. In doing this we can assert that she is in a way going back to the origins, the concept of Ardhanareshwara. Only in her evolving as a complete person lies her ‘Utopia’ or a land of ‘Pran nareshwara’. She would evolve then into a ‘woo’ added to ‘man’. Thus the current theoretical impasse in feminist criticism, is more than a problem of finding “exacting definitions and a suitable terminology,” or “theorizing in the midst of a struggle.” It comes from our own divided consciousness, the split in each of us. We are both the daughters of the male tradition, a tradition that asks us to be rational, marginal and grateful; and sisters in a new women’s movement which engenders another kind of awareness and commitment, which demands that we renounce the pseudo-success of token womanhood and the ironic masks of academic debate. The task then of feminist criticism is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision, without confining this enterprise only to women.

For women to affirm the protection of fragile and vulnerable human existence as the basis of a mode of political discourse and to create the terms for its flourishing as a worthy political activity, for women to stand firm against cries of “emotional” or “sentimental”, even as they refuse to lapse into a sentimental rendering of the values and language that flow from “mothering” would signal a force of great reconstructive potential, which emerges towards the ending of each novel. Breaching, confusing, and thereby confounding the boundaries between organism and machine, animal and human, male and female, cyborgian consciousness rejects the need for unity as the totalitarianism of totalizing, calling instead for partial identities, contradictory standpoints, and shifting affinities. (Donna Haraway, Feminism/Postmodernism, 197) This cyborg imaging is used by Kapur to identify the areas of weakness in her women characters and do away with their identity crises, as in the case of Virmati, Ida and Kasturi. All three associate with the
cyborg as a consciousness but at the same time step beyond their consciousness and manifesting the ‘utopian’ imagery of feminism, rightly in reframing a Post- gender world.

The present literary and socio cultural order then is a linguistic and conceptual captive of a phallocentric economy that depends upon its very captivity for its survival, just as, in many respects, they have been led to depend upon it. Realization of alterity, the “otherness” living inside, separates them from the illusion of equal participation under patriarchy; it guards them from the homologous structure of “knowledge” as it is. Through a strategy of displacement, the assertion of disruptions and the admission of multivoiced contradictions, it can hope to protect the interests of all feminist critics. It requires work in consort rather than in opposition, but unlike pluralism, this de-centering criticism constantly takes itself apart as it takes others into itself. Our alternative, in Feral’s words, is “to privilege the multiple and undermine the edifice of the law.” (See Feral, Towards a theory of Displacement) This is the general strategy, made specific with respect to gender by the feminists, which Derrida insists upon in his deconstructive practices. The double cross of sexual difference calls for the undoing or deconstruction of the rhetoric of difference. Around such a concern the interests of feminism and critical theory converge. By substituting diversity and displacement for the Father’s Law of the one and the same, we can guard against exclusion and create the openings needed for the multivocality of the feminist discourse. Thus, feminism requires more than the narcissistic language game of criticism and challenges critical theory to discover and admit its own politics.

As long as culture is multiform rather than monolithic, and power or access to power is localized rather than diffuse, a single theoretical formulation will prove inadequate. Joanna Russ in How to suppress Women’s Writing puts it well:

in everybody’s present historical situation, there can be, no single center of value and hence no absolute standards. Hence it becomes necessary to substitute multitude of centers of value, each with its own periphery, some closer to each other, some farther apart. The
centers have been constructed by the historical facts of what it is to be female.

The traditional concept of womanhood is undergoing a change in the contemporary Indian society and women’s own values are changing. Women cannot live beyond culture and society. Just as these roles are relative to place and space similarly ‘Female Utopia’ is also a relative term to individual, society and culture. Its realization is present within each woman which has to be searched by her own self, through personal realization and the willingness to forego the norms and rules set by society and culture to the extent that provides her a ‘comfort Zone’. Women are voyeuristically looked at as the ‘other’ of patriarchy and of her self as well. As Gates critiques in Criticism in The Wilderness.

No matter to what ends we put our reading, we can never lose sight of the fact that a text is not a fixed “thing” but a rhetorical structure which functions in response to a complex set of rules. It can never be related satisfactorily to a reality outside itself merely in a one to one relation.

Her multicidimensionality lies thus in a convergence of a traditional and modern self without letting any form of pressure, essence or stereotyping bog her down or induce a self seduction or restriction. The thesis then focuses on a wider regional scope and issues, by de-accentuating ideology/ idolization/ imaging and re-casting the category ‘woman’ by a study/analysis/critique of the gender discourse in its normative nuances. It nevertheless commits several sins of omission.
Notes:

1 See Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* who is a very provocative writer and looks at some of these dilemmas and illuminates some of the theoretical debates between feminism and anthropology. She says that feminist anthropologists have asked the question, Can there be a feminist anthropology? If anthropology is predicated on the assumption of the difference between the self and the 'Other' and feminism is based on an identification with a sense of marginalization, in which the represented is also the self, can there be a reconciliation between the two? Visweswaran and other critics quoted in the book have argued that we have to be very careful when we collapse feminism with marginalization; we have to be very alert to the presence of differences as well, and avoid this kind of universalizing feminism. They subscribe to anti-essentialism, but at the same time are also reluctant to throw out identity politics, although that's the trendy thing to do these days, because their own position arises from a lot of writings of feminists who are very conscious of identity politics. It is also important to understand why these essences are important and not just to throw them away.

2 And as Cixous says - many times - 'no I without you' and 'never I without the Other'. The thesis looks at what this other is, sometimes known as 'you other', sometimes as 'that other', who makes possible what I know as 'I'. This very idea of an identifiable Other is a problem. People are 'otherised' according to certain categories such as nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on, all of them reflecting constructed by particular cultures, and disguising at least as much as they reveal about a person, or indeed, a character, which to a novelist is the same thing.

3 See Helen Cixous. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 339: This dead figure turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor
breath and speech at the same time. Writing is an act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being too ‘hot’; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing—)
She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman.

4 In The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination, Sandra and Susan Gubar suggest that women’s writing are in some sense “palimpsestic” in that their “surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible and less socially acceptable levels of meaning (73).

5 Lee R. Edwards and Arlyn Diamond point out in The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism that the experience of women can easily disappear, become mute, invalid and invisible, lost in the diagrams of the structuralist or the class conflict of the Marxists. Experience is not emotion; we must protest now against the equation of the feminine with the irrational. But we must also recognize that the questions we most need to ask go beyond those that science can answer. We must seek the repressed messages of women in history, in anthropology, in psychology, and in ourselves, before we can locate the feminine not said, in the manner of Pierre Macherey, by probing the fissures of the female text.

6 As Periyar in his seminal work The Thought of Periyar E. V. R puts it, just as how the efforts of Brahmins and white men to bring to the Indian people the light of freedom only cause the latter to further sink into slavery; just as how the efforts at social reform undertaken by Brahmins and pauranikas (narrators of the puranas) often result in a
legitimization of social evils and discrepancies through the use of law and religion so will male efforts sabotage the project of women’s freedom. The intervention of men will only tighten the bonds that hold women down. Men’s ostensible respect for women, their statements which proclaim their concern for women’s freedom are meant to deceive merely.

7 C.G. Jung (See Anima and Animus: Collected works of C.G. Jung) who was a former disciple of Sigmund Freud, and who later completely dissociated from him and found his own school of Analytical Psychology first used this term. This is what Jung has to say:

from the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even a sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively. One of the main proofs of this is the almost universal parallelism between mythological motifs, which, on account of their quality as primordial images, I have called archetypes. One of these archetypes, I have named ‘the anima’. This Latin expression (should be) regarded as the feminine ---part of the soul.

8 See article Mauled Minds and Bodies: A Saga of Betenoire Patriarchs from Indu Prakash Singh’s book.

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