Chapter - 1

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of secularism and plurality of religions. It holds a distinguishing mark regarding linguistic, demographic, socio-cultural and religious aspects. The word “grandeur” is appropriate relating to its geographical expansion. The multiplicity, diversity and ethnicity of this continent make the people share their outlook distinctly, but they are identified as Indians. It holds a special place in the cultural interactions of various people among themselves. It is a territory of various traditions and is an umbrella with many religions. The positive relationships of various faiths of people promote them to prosper with harmony.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are the ancient religions of India which convey the different modes of Indian lives. Islam and Christianity have made their presence in the later period. Hindu culture has its own impact on these religions in India. Each religious community regulates the personal and social lives of individuals with certain norms. The religious and cultural heritage of the country itself is evidence for the rich historical background of the land.

Practices and the early doctrines of Christianity are held universally even today. Christianity is based on the principles of love, equality and justice. It articulates and trusts the existences of God and individuals. God, prayer, creation of the Universe, heaven, eternal punishment, sin and confession are bonded in the Christian course of life. Catholic believers understand God as Trinity and hold to the idea of self-revelation of deity through Holy Spirit. They are bound by the seven sacraments - baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist, penance, holy orders, matrimony while the Protestants accept only baptism and Holy Communion. Protestant Christianity rebelled against the irrational and hegemonic tendency of the church. As a group, they preached the words of the Bible. This holy book was
considered as the sole existence of spirituality and their new awareness divided them from Catholic group in the way of worship. The testimonies of the church and the Holy Scripture are reverence to the believers of Catholicism. The church’s encouragement to read the Bible has educated many commoners. They practise the doctrines of the church regarding marriage, divorce and family. The church firmly condemns the artificial method of birth control and treats it as a violation of God’s law. Catholicism expects celibacy from the clergy and nuns, whereas Protestants do not concern themselves with celibacy.

**Christianity in India**

Indian culture and traditions are deep rooted among people of the Christian community in India. These customs and sacraments assist them in identifying themselves as Indian Christians. Thus they share two ways of customs.

Indian Christians are identified with their respective cultures even as they are enlightened with the good news of Christ and committed to the belief. Indian Catholic Christian community understands God in the traditional concept of trinity (Father, Son and Holy Ghost). And God is termed as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. This finds resonance in Indian religions and aids in understanding the message of the Gospel. Christians in India follow distinct culture concerning their regions. Their contributions in the educational sector, in the corporate sector and in social service are hallmarks of Indian society. Many groups among Christians are Roman Catholics, Syrian Christians, Protestants, Pentecostals, Anglo-Indians, Naga Christians and Baptists, etc who are identified as Indians with diversity of languages.
Sathianathan Clarke expresses:

Indian-Christian theology occupied itself with the challenging process of recollecting, reinterpreting and reappropriating its religious and cultural legacy mainly in terms of the Hindu tradition. Correspondingly, theology in India continually sought to translate, adapt and correlate the 'good news' of Christian proclamation by taking into consideration its Hindu philosophical and cultural framework. Doing contextual Indian-Christian theology was, thus, overwhelmingly conceived of as baptizing the gospel of Christ into the holy waters of Hindu philosophy and culture.

The Catholic community is highly populated in India. Christian life is brought under the umbrella of parish authority (church) empowered with ample power. Biblical doctrines expect believers to be committed to spirituality throughout their lives. Entering the shores, it touched Indians with a tide of prayers, churches, biblical messages and confessions. Their work is impressive in medical care, education and selfless-service aspiring for the love of God in their deeds. Christian community in India is also caste-ridden. Dalits are the marginalized group and considered as untouchables from the mainstream of Hindu community. Its inclusion within Christianity in India creates aspirations in the isolated group to get position in society. On one side, the arrival of Christian belief in the life of Dalits opened the door for literacy and encouraged liberated aspects. On the other side, they are pushed to suffer discrimination as outcasts. This superiority of caste is deep rooted in South India and it narrows down the relationships considering the spoken tongue and region also.

Christianity in India was popularized initially with the gospel spreading activity of the Apostle Thomas in Kerala. He built churches, carried out preaching and conversions particularly in South Indian regions. Progress in the fields of education and social life was initiated during the age of St. Francis Xavier. Besides it was vastly rooted in India with the establishment of colonial rule of the
British. In South India, people with spiritual inclinations to improve the conditions with privileges turned to Christianity. Believers in Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Mangalore imitated colonial rulers’ way of life. In Karnataka, Christianity entered initially from the coastal region with the process of trade. The contribution of evangelism is recognized with remembrance of Rev. Dominican around the place of Mysore. The enhancement of Christianity is visible during the reign of Vijayanagar dynasty and Mysore Wodeyar’s rule. The recognizable impact of this religion is seen in major centers of Tamil Nadu like Madhurai, Tanjore, Jinji and Maravanadu. Kerala holds a special place in representing majority of Christians in India. The high literacy among the people in Kerala is noteworthy, where Christian religious institutions have played a leading role. Christians are considered as a minority group and the struggle to get opportunities in educational sectors, other professional sectors and political sector is visible. Dalit Christians are still socially and religiously uprooted.

During the colonial period, Indians were enlightened and moved to be aware of adverse beliefs. The eradication of poverty, rigid caste system, sati system, widowhood, superstitions and child marriage in Indian society was successful in bringing social change. Considerable contributions can be seen in opening orphanages, educational centers, and hospitals. The highest promotion of education and the betterment of woman’s conditions are issues acknowledged by women like Krupabhai Sathianadhan in the 19th century.

She was deeply influenced by the colonialist and missionary discourse that India was in as helpless and degenerate a state as were its women (the metaphor for nation) and that only the civilizing arm of the colonizers could lift it out of its degradation.  

Women and the Holy Scripture

The topic of women’s lives in the writings of Indian Christian women writers is like wine and milk offered to God in a ritual ceremony. It is also like
candles and oil lamps lighted to drive the darkness of illiteracy away from the world of women. Wine symbolizes the blood of Christ in the New Testament. It is the symbol of sacrifice, love, compassion whereas milk is the symbol of sacredness and purity in Hinduism.

Indian woman owes purity of mind and body, even in her thoughts and deeds. Sacredness and purity are inherited quality from generation to generation. She lives ever and ever with this traditional and cultural foundation of Hinduism. Christianity adds sacrifice, love, and compassion, eradicating illiteracy in a woman.

Thus Indian woman becomes Indian Christian woman, a complete woman. She spells Christianity and smells Hinduism. Her vision of Hinduism combines with the mission of Christianity. Indian nationality lives in her with the notion of Christianity. The tradition and culture of Hinduism take rebirth with spirituality and civilization. She is the symbol of ‘Shakti’ (power) but preamble of ‘Bhakti’ (religious observance), which lead her to ‘Mukthi’ (liberation), that is the freedom of woman. Embodiment of this inner strength broadens the inner sight and makes them fight for women’s cause with care and dedication. The past experience and present influence make their voice universal.

‘Shakti’ is the mother goddess in Hindu Mythology. The trinity Gods; Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara take their origin from the Goddess ‘Shakti’. Once all male Gods and Devathas failed to overcome the evil spirit or wicked power on earth; they offered prayer to ‘Adhi Shakti’ in order to save the earth. Shakti took the form of ‘Durga’ with all her super power; she destroyed the evil spirit and rescued them. So what male Gods were unable to achieve was done by the female Goddess ‘Shakti’. Though the image of woman is worshipped in Hinduism and praised in Hindu Mythology, she is ignored in reality. Eve is the first woman created in the Bible. Only after her creation, the meaning of creation completes.
But Eve’s disobedience is considered as curse upon woman’s race though the creation of woman is made important in the Scripture. Thus the Old Testament influences the status of women in Christianity and prevents women from touching the Scriptures. Situation is not different in Hinduism. Indian women (Christian and Hindu alike) are made to be most obedient to their spouses and are made to believe that they are living Gods to them. Chastity and Pativrata (one who is vowed to her husband) Dharma have occupied a unique place in the lives of Indian women. Through this, they are oppressed and subjugated in the hands of men. They are considered to be the sole property of their husbands. Life of woman is confined socially, economically and religiously. Almost all prophets, founders of religions are men. Though religions are founded by men, they are spread and strengthened with women’s power. In New Testament, Jesus opens a new chapter in women’s lives, indirectly but effectively. A common woman is elevated from margin to the center. For instance, he honors Mary Magdalena, a prostitute and a diseased woman is cured with his touch.

In Karnataka (South India) Basavanna brought about a revolution in Hinduism. He gave freedom to women’s rituals and thoughts. Akkamahadevi is one of the memorable characters. She rejected her family life and her spouse (a prince) and accepted her abstract God “Channamalikarjuna”. Another living example is Mathe Mahadevi, a religious scholar. She propagated her own religious ideas with established institution. Mary, St. Philomena, St. Theresa and other Christian women saints devoted their lives to religious cause. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Kasthuri Bai and others were brave and firm enough to uphold our tradition and culture. Being influenced by Christian views and awareness, they were the strength behind their spouses to fight for India’s freedom. We cannot ignore the dedicated work of Christian women like Annie Besant, Sister Nivedita, Wealthy Fisher and Mother Theresa for the cause of Indian women.
Raja Rao describes woman as:

Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of that which he is, and reminds herself through him of that which she is. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the gods, inherence; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe.¹

Woman is considered as the largest subaltern group in the world but she plays major and varied roles in the society. The stereotypical role of women embeds her to the existing obligations. Her aspirations are enmeshed with moral injunctions.

Editors of the book, Just Between Us describe:

As Hindi poet Anamika, put it, a woman’s life is censored from start to finish, and if not censored then severely edited.⁴

Empowerment for a man is through detachment from everything but a woman’s encircled role with attachments makes her sustenance impossible in the social context. Biological roles and religious laws from birth stress woman to the level of second grade citizen.

The Biblical patriarchal authority assigns women responsibility in the household, while men hold power in the sphere of home and outside. Women’s breaking the silence is regarded as a disgrace. Obedience and quietness are assigned to women in the church. Even the Holy Scripture considers some virtues for a woman as follows:

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not
Patriarchal social codes imposed control over women such as Ruth, Naomi, Sarah, Esther and Hannah in the Old Testament, whereas Jesus allowed crucial role for women in the New Testament. According to Gospel, women were the first beholders of resurrection. Among women preachers, Mary Magdalene witnessed a significant role. Religious commitments of women enforce domesticity and established norms pertaining to her biology consider the female as unimportant. Ideals of womanhood are formulated forms the perspective of patriarchy. The veiled figure of woman is thought natural and becomes target of oppression. She is valued negatively as an irrational being. Alienation of women in social relations within the respective cultures is visible.

Lack of exposure to women makes her unaware of her personal problems as political due to traditional conditioning of womanhood. The revolutionary stage is not fully visible in the Indian scenario even in this post-modern period. Literate or illiterate, women are expected to be encircled in the typical domestic roles. For instance, she is valued with her cooking dishes. The exclusion of women from certain religious places, observance of practices, limiting life to a widow, enforced rite of sumangali and maintenance of silence regarding rights of women are conditioned factors in the patriarchal system. The mute images of women tend to represent her as irrational and less intelligent to take decisions. The new centuries and transformations of the world fail to change the bounded realities. So women encounter alienation, quest for the perfect relationships and find her treatment as
commodity, broken marriage, health problems, and crimes. As a fragile creature among human beings, she is persecuted between cultural, political, social and religious dominated forces. There is always a gulf between women and men. The female is ignored by religious norms owing to her biological function. The negotiation of women with complexities, responsibilities, stress and the autonomous and authoritative lives of men are the realities. Alienation of women on the one hand and security and dependence on the other, mirror the powerless state of women. The traditional patriarchal hold uses the word 'writer' for the male writer and 'woman writer' is termed to female. The existence of this sexual disparity moulds women as Other and limits her space in the literary canon also. Thus the structure of patriarchy extends its shade to torment women psychologically and physically.

**Christian Doctrine and Woman's Status**

Prior to the age of Jesus Christ, woman was deprived of social status, divorce rights and was voiceless in the domestic life. Atrocities on widows, inequality between men and women pertaining to property and other privileges of men pushed women to the position of subservient. Confining them to domestic chores, they were made irrelevant to the decision making. Culturally defined rules for women were not favorable during the period of Old Testament. To all these suppressive approaches, Eve’s story is considered as the basis. Breaking the rule of God in the story of Creation, Eve is threaded with degradation and sin. The condemnation of her from the very first pages in the religious Scriptures of Christianity appears as a knot of negation of women’s status. As a result, she finds it difficult to present herself in the way of self-affirmation.

Thus, from the beginning, Christianity has failed to fully acknowledge women as forgiven and redeemed members of the body of Christ.
Esther David in her essay "A Second Look at Michelangelo’s Painting – Original Sin" notices how woman is attacked as the reason for human sufferings in the creation story. Firstly she studies the painted Satan (Serpent) as female and secondly Eve is identified as disobedient. An interesting insight into the marginalized status of woman relating it to the process of creation in the hands of God is included in her writing. God subjugates woman’s role by creating Eve out of Adam’s rib. She explains that as one of the Biblical stories of men it is convinced that Adam is loyal to the deity but tempted with the words of Eve to eat the fruit of life. After expulsion from Paradise, Eve is punished with physical pain during child birth. But the feminist thoughts of Esther David show Eve as a strong woman, she dares ever death at childbirth. Her creation is out of rib, not with clay like Adam. The breaking of God’s order is not to eat the fruit of knowledge but the mark of her creativity. Esther David writers:

In the Bible, the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Life or Tree of Knowledge is not described in detail. And, it is definitely not described as an apple, but known as a fruit, as Eve confides in the serpent, “it is pleasant to the eye”. Her female instincts are seen at their best here as like all women, she fancies beautiful objects like the beautiful fruit.7

The lives of Martha, Mary and the Samaritan woman focus on the honour and status of women. These women in the Gospel highlight Jesus’ positive attitude towards woman. He directly condemns the social evils which persecute women. Mary is honored as the immaculate mother of God. In this way, women have a dignified place in the company of Jesus Christ. Irrespective of caste and class, he shares a cordial human relationship with women. The dispossessed state of women in the hands of men at the time of the Old Testament is transgressed with the extension of autonomy to women in the New Testament. Many women as disciples have leading role in spreading Christian principles.
Surekha John Nelavala describes:

Status of women in Jewish religion has a great influence and impact on the present church to determine the status of women. Patriarchal interpretation of the Scriptures from down the centuries has limited and controlled women to have equal share of authority. But Jesus, on the contrary gave equal status to women by His words and deeds in relation to women. He elevated the status of women from margin to the centre on several occasions.

Men have authority within the church and the household. Religious institutions irrespective of their knowledge, ability and commitment hold sexist bias towards women regarding religious ordination. Women’s tongues are guarded in the churches. Decision makers are the men and they play central role in the aspect of finance also.

Surekha John Nelavala points out:

The status of women in the church is no different from the status of women in society. Religion has degraded their status by superficial interpretation and reading of the Scriptures as the justification for the subordination of women. In reality it is the church, which is far behind to address the issue of gender equality.

Power structure, rigidity against human freedom and direction of sexual morality persist within the religious institutions of Christianity from centuries. As a result, males find themselves as the oppressors and their feeling of powerlessness is expressed outrageously as their lordship over females. She is seen as an object and not eligible to enjoy power in any institutions. The family of the Christian community is owned and ruled by the eldest male. He is assigned with the role of parent with power. Believers of the church expect such parental authority in the church from the priest also. Concerning human status as directed by the church, women are curtailed from liberty and spiritual roles.
In the language of Christian theology, authority of the masculine power is expressed with words like ‘father’ for the image of God. Besides, Catholicism is also marked with the experience of spiritual women and saints by preserving the written records.

Tina Beattie describes:

In every century there are women such as Hilda, abbess of Whitby (d.680), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Catherine of Siena (1347-80), Teresa of Avila (1515-82), and Mary Ward (1585-1645), who span the era from the early Middle Ages to the beginning of modernity and who continue to shape Christian spirituality.¹⁰

Religious faiths extend control over the individual life and thoughts. This ethical voice directs the paradigms of spirituality to women. The voice of women tries to interrogate such religious ideologies in their lives. The traditional authorities of the church lose its hold with the advent of new ideas like democracy in the period of the Enlightenment. So the goals of liberation and the feminist ideology pave way for multiple voices against the repressive hold within the church circles. The history foregrounds the names of women such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susana in the New Gospel and Priscilla, Lydia, Tabitha, Tryphosa in the early Christianity. The leadership of women in the New Testament is conspicuous. Penny Jamieson notes:

The gospel of Jesus Christ preaches liberation from the social conditions and structures that oppress and bind (Luke 4.16-20). Jesus was particularly hard on institutional religion, and proclaimed that he was the alternative.¹¹

In Christian history, the writings of Felicity, Blandina and Perpetua reflected the feminist thoughts giving accountability of women’s position in the church and their bold move against men’s resistance to their liberty. Women proved themselves as powerful with their participation in the religious
reformation. The history of the church seldom showed women's contribution because of the less number of literate women with freedom. But recent discoveries of women's writings expose the women's thoughts and ways of life of different historical periods. Many women stand as zealous promoters of Protestant Reformation during the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe. Katharina Von Bora's veiled life and dedicated life of Martin Luther's wife picturise the bold and self-confident women. Catherine Zell raised her voice to defend clerical marriage. Elizabeth of Brandenburg left Catholicism and practiced Protestant beliefs against her husband's wish. Olympia Morata, Marguerile de Navarre, Jeanne, Louise de Coligny, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were celebrated with their recognizable contributions. Though void space was left to the stories of women in the historical pages, they played vital role in formulating and influencing doctrines of the church when they entered the holy order.

During the English Reformation, Queen Elizabeth extended her control over the church and had strong hold over the system. The adventurous life of women involved in preaching, assisting ministers in the church and teaching the Bible on Sundays saved their names historically during the Age of Puritanism, Pietism and Evangelical awakening. Beginning of the 15th century to the end of 19th century, widows and women have played leading roles in discharging responsibilities with their involvement in church activities. Mary Sterling was accepted as the first women missionary of Brethren church in the 19th century. In 1800, the United Church of the Christ ordained many women. The issue of women's leadership within the church forced the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland for the inclusion of women in the church ministry. In July 1867, through the Holiness movement the ordination of women in the churches was welcomed for the first time in New Jersey. This movement was basically a Protestant religious movement in North America which addressed the loss of moral standards in the churches. It made way for women's participation in
ministry and to preach the message. Lettie Burd Cowman, Isabella Thoburn and Laura Haygood were regarded as the Bible women by considering their work to maintain the Bible schools and missionaries. Thus women got positive roles and right to serve God within the church ministry in the male dominated western Protestantism. In 1989, Penny Jamieson was ordained as the seventh Bishop of Dunedin. She proclaimed that it was the victory of women not just her personal triumph. Thus women imposed their power against the patriarchal rule in western society which advocated that women be kept out of power in Christian tradition and practices. But the expected change did not prove within the established structure. The feminists condemned the institutional act of giving authority to women priest and naturalizing the authority of the priest in church affairs. Feminist theology which came into existence in the nineteenth century resisted the sexism through women’s movement. Along with the emancipation of females, demand for reforms made a room for women inside the church. In 1976, when the Vatican tried to bar the ordination of women in the orthodox churches, many movements and feminist arguments questioned the place for women in the churches. Mary Daly, Daphne Hampson, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Phyllis Trible were leading feminist theologians who tried to seek equality for women in the religious niche.

The reflection of male domination of Indian society in the Indian Christian tradition depends upon the regional culture and the Biblical thoughts. Women’s religious involvement such as arranging and imitating traditions of church services were hardly considered. Identifying the various efforts, Rev. Elizabeth Paul was assigned with ordination of Diocese of Madras for the first time in India in 1976. But she was able to take up the service in 1987 after getting legal verdict. The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church appointed Lydia-Vedanayakam, a high school headmistress as the first Indian deaconess in South India in 1945. Rev. Sister Elizabeth Paul was the first woman assigned with ordination in the Church of
South India on the direction of Bishop of Madras, Sundar Clarke. Padma Mudaliar was allowed to render Evangelist service in the Pentecostal churches of male organized system. The ordination of women gave religious status. But even after the entrance of women in the holy orders, they failed to get away from the shades of male-domination. The enlightened women’s efforts opened door to theological colleges, conferences, and workshops to redefine themselves with the influence such as All India Council of Christian Women and Joint Women’s Programme. In 1983, the Church of North India accepted women in its ministry. The stress for woman’s religious representation was recognized in the Baptist churches also. Church of South India allowed women to share equal opportunity with men from 2001. The modern ideas offer Christian thinkers to do away with inequality of gender. The liberal space in Protestant Christianity allows both men and women to operate in the realm of ordination.

The representations of women are recognizable both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Ester, Martha, Mary and others are noteworthy for playing a dominant role in the development of the church and in spreading the Gospel. In the Holy Scripture, the Sumarthian woman spreads the Gospel and Mary gets the first words of Jesus during resurrection to tell the news to his disciples. Women, who are capable of renouncing the material world with the attitude of service and religious dedication, are termed as saints and charitable women. Fanny Crosby’s contribution to the hymns of the church is recognizable. Julian of Norwich writes about the plight and pain of Jesus Christ.

**Progress of Women under Christianity**

Women in South India with colonial impact are exposed to education and to transition. As a multi-tasker, woman’s participation both at the outside and inside the family portrays her as enlightened Indian woman. She appears as a teacher, a doctor, a nurse, a social worker and a politician in every strata of life.
Mary Clubwala Jadav was appointed as the first woman Magistrate, Annie Besant and Sister Nivedita dedicated themselves to school service and political activities of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Aruna Asaf Ali are notable for the cause of woman. The memorable endeavor of these women is a kind of beacon or guiding light to the contemporary women.

Mrs. Ruth Manorama, an activist encourages woman’s participation in politics:

Women are treated as nurse. But they have to nurse this country.\(^{12}\)

The Roman Catholic Church engaged in Evangelic work in India during the 16\(^{th}\) century and the Protestant Christian faith was popularized with the activities of German Lutherans in the early 18\(^{th}\) century. The Evangelical movement in the Anglican Church and in the American Church during the 19\(^{th}\) century focused on the life of women in the dominated system. In India also, the process of Evangelicalism took place with the active role of women. Besides this work, western missionaries recognized the social inequalities and practices of Indian women and tried to influence the concept of conversion to lift them from the ills of society. Thus the native women’s role was unique for Christianization in India. The effort of the women missionaries resulted in cultural and social transitions in relation to higher education, social liberty and equality. The status of women in the public sphere was significantly raised by providing opportunity in many organizations, in missionaries and in charitable activities. Mattie E. Currie, a missionary teacher, has recorded Telugu women’s acceptance of Christianity and missionary activities in South India. The contribution of many women to missionary work is historical. Mary Lyon of America and Jarena Lee are significant as female preachers. The activities of Amy Carmichael are monumental in the pages of Indian history. She opened a new avenue for prostitutes and suffering children with an organization called the Dohnavur Fellowship.
She engaged in missionary work after adopting Indian culture. Wholly their purpose of spreading the Christian message got a positive response from native women by the social work, health service and educational facilities extended to them.

The effective instrument of women’s education brought about social changes against all evils of Indian society. When East India Company was not interested to promote education among the natives, missionaries founded a number of schools particularly for girls and women. They created awareness about the importance of literacy, childcare and hygiene to build a healthy society. Many Protestant missionaries established residential schools for girls to teach Evangelic thoughts along with academic activities. The girls, who were exposed to the traditional norms of family and society, were rescued from child labor and from restricted life. Women’s acts were remarkable in this movement and were aware of their human rights. The missionary movement contributed remarkably in bringing women to the public domain with charitable activities, working in the labor markets and learning organizational skills. Missionaries initiated formal and informal education for women on humanitarian and Evangelical grounds to bring new evolution in western India. It paved destitute women and miserable widows to find new ways of life out of unjust practices of society and poor women were assisted with money and clothes. Particularly in South India, Harijans turned to Christian belief proclaiming their identity.

In the 19th century, impact of colonialism and modernity opened a new vision by the eradication of the crudest of traditional Indian practices. It was possible only through the reinforcement of education. The establishment of Fort William College, the Hindu College in Calcutta and the Sanskrit College at Banaras gave impetus of this. Protest was raised against evils like sati system, child marriage, and denial of education and property for women. The status of women at every level of society was emphasized. The Progressives to bring social
change turned their back on the formulated laws of traditional Indian society. The religious right of women was also interrogated. These reforms were led with the help of rational knowledge. Sati system was prohibited due to the effort of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen fought for the marriage ages of the women and Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar stressed on women’s education. Besides, many publications were informative about women’s rights and their status. The constitutional rights for women came into existence in 1949. With the supportive attitude of the Indian National Congress, the first women’s delegation demanded political rights for women in 1971. These unique facts strengthened Feminism in India. Active women like Pandita Ramabai, Mrs. Ranade, Anandbai Joshi, Cornialia Sorebji, Madam Bhikaji Cama and others appeared in the public life and their participation in the National movement exposed the sequestering of women in the patriarchal stronghold. Female spiritual leaders of the missionary movement in South India rescued women from social evils and they proved themselves as reformers bringing mobility in the lives of women. These western missionaries took the help of local women for raising awareness. This reawakening process was successful with their missionary Feminism. They shared the values and aspirations with Indian women and developed a network to organize women’s associations. This era considered as the age of women which focused mainly on the issues of women with feminist consciousness.

The educated women of vedic period were Lopanmudra Apala, Sikata, Ghosha, Gargi and Sulabha Maitreyi. As vedic teachers, they participated in the democratic assemblies. They were compelled to accomplish education in their lives and found themselves in the higher status of the social sphere. But there was discouragement of female education in Brahminical, Puranic and Medieval periods to keep women as subordinate. Women were forbidden to enter the public domain and total domestic sphere of life denied formal education. American Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society, and Scottish Missionaries stressed to impart
education to women for the eradication of rigid Indian taboos. So they established orphanages, boarding, vocational schools and domestic system of education for girls in India to enlighten the aspects of rationality, liberty and equality. In addition to this, the American Missionary established the first girls’ school in 1824 and the Church Missionary Society found an institution in 1826. The succeeding roles of Mrs. Wilson, Anna and Hay Bayne are treasured in the historical pages. These facts assisted women to get rid of outdated Indian social structure. Even the enlightened individual personalities in India took initiatives for social mobilization. Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar founded thirty-six schools for girls and played a leading role to pass Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 and D.K. Karve channelized the success of women’s education with the establishment of S.N.D.T University for women. Many organizations and associations also worked in this direction. For instance, Association of the Students Literary and Scientific Society of Bombay founded several schools for girls. The Servants of Indian Society and Arya Samaja engaged in motivating higher education for women. Female school and employment opportunities were supported with the assistance of the government with grant-in-aid and with educational policies. The joint efforts of Christian missionaries and the British government extended educational privileges from primary to higher level with professional colleges and art courses. On May 8th, 1917, Women’s Indian Association came into existence to consider women’s identity and provided a platform to discuss problems of women irrespective of castes and communities.

In South India, fame for the establishment of women’s organizations was reserved for Pandita Ramabhai. Besides her social service, she opened a new way of life to women as professionals in industries, hospitals and schools. As an Indian Christian woman, her contributions to the society are remarkable. Her contribution to the Indian women is a mile stone in Indian history. She dedicated her life for the cause of women and battled for their rights. For instance, she
established a home to provide security for persecuted widows of Brahmin caste. As an independent, literate and courageous woman, she worked for the liberty and welfare of women and her writings struggled to reform the society by emphasizing women's role. This "mother of modern India" built many institutions for needy and widows. In 1883, she moved to England for educational purpose where she got baptized and started her social service. She aimed to liberate women through "Mukti Mission" institution. Christian theology was exposed to many women with her selfless service. Sister Nivedita, a western woman, was a staunch follower of Swami Vivekananda. Her contribution to our country is outstanding. Indian culture and Indian womanhood influenced her impressively. This enlightened woman extended her support for national development. Participating in Indian political affairs, she criticized the policies of the British in India and their economy. Annie Besant was the leading women's rights activist and president of the Theosophical Society. She dedicatedly represented the Indian National Congress. Her effort to establish the Central Hindu College and to organize the Home Rule League is noteworthy. She was accomplished with many talents and worked as an orator, a writer and an educationist. Her spirituality attracted Indians towards the Theosophical Society and made great impact on the religious life of Indians. Her radical thoughts and the education, she imparted to Indian women transformed their confined lives. The revolutionary views to reform Indian societal bias were interpreted in her "The Commonwealth" a weekly and "New India" a daily newspapers. The selfless service with striking temperaments of Annie Besant won the hearts of Indians. The scenario of Indian journalism reformed in the guidelines of her innate thoughts. She left her name as imperishable in the Indian history through her educational, political reforms and supportive attitude towards Indian freedom struggle. Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsee Indian Christian woman was the first woman to graduate from Bombay University. In India, she worked as the first woman barrister. As a prolific Indian woman writer, she captured the contemporary woman's suffocation, frustration, seclusion and conventions of rural
women. Her commitment to work for the women’s franchise was great. Imitating her family, she dedicated her service to missionary work discharging her duties in the field of education and reforming women’s conditions. The notable fact was that Indian women did not see their movement as a rebellious act, even though they entered all spheres with men and made their existence in gaining the lasted power. In the meantime, they maintained the expected womanhood ideals of Indian ethos both outside and inside the domestic life with responsibilities. Krupabai Sathianadhan pursued medical studies for the first time in Madras Medical College.

Krupabai was deeply committed to contemporary women’s issues and was an integral part of an evolving, albeit conservative, Indian feminism. She actively promoted women’s reforms in Ootacamund. She taught in the zenanas and in an Indian girls’ school, and inaugurated a small school for Muslim girls.\textsuperscript{13}

Education and western ideas compelled her to work for the betterment of women’s conditions through her literary and social services. Her journal \textit{The Indian Ladies’ Magazine} was the voice of woman, which advocated social progress and the cause of women. It opened a world of emancipated women with the activities of Lady Harnam Singh of Punjab, Miss Cornelia Sorabji belonging to the profession of law, Miss Isabella Thoburn, an educationist and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu.

The services of Dr. Ida Scudder, the founder of Vellore Medical College and Mother Theresa’s service to the disabled are memoralbe. Today, the living image of Rev. Sister Jean in Bengaluru invokes these leading women of the past. She is working for the marginalized people to have education, medical care and employment. Dr. Tessy Thomas, who works as the Project Director of Indian IRMB, enjoys the title of Indian Missile Woman.
Dorothy Sampath Kumar expresses the state of women:

Women have moved forward and risen to heights of excellence in practically every field, yet prejudices, meaningless traditions and unfavourable attitudes are quite prevalent in our homes and society. The most common reaction women succumb to is just worry or get agitated or just feel helpless.\(^\text{14}\)

In spite of remarkable achievements, contemporary Christian women are in an inevitable situation while promoting and balancing themselves in the perpetual roles of religion and the defined roles of domestic life. Thus the struggle is carried forward today.

**Progress of Women Writers**

Men perpetuate gender ideology through literature and language and place themselves in the superior position. Women writers recognize the issues of women raised by such male attitude. They explore them in their feelings and experiences. Through revolutionary movement, they address the issues of recording women’s stories and denial to publish female work. Thus the canon of women writers is popularized in the twentieth century.

Editors of the literary work, *Just Between Us* in the introduction itself express women’s place as outsider in the literary context in the following words:

Women in India, as we know now, have been writing for more than 2000 years, and they have written about practically everything; yet they have remained invisible, much like women writers in other parts of the world.\(^\text{15}\)

In the field of literature also women writers are stifled and their voices are unheard. Some women break their silence and attempt to document the stories in the form of oral paintings. The results of women’s struggle and movement pave the way to unwrap the creative expression inside women. Women authors
recommend to live with self-perpetuated creativity denying emotional, social and psychological dependence on others. They give insight into the issues of women and provide an opportunity to discuss the realistic-life in order to emancipate women from their confined situations. While narrating stories, women writers in India initially have manifested the darker side of women within the four walls of home. Further the themes of love, marital relationships, divorce, and undermining the life of women at every step are the interesting discourses. They also create stories of woman’s relationships with men as dependent and responsible with western thoughts.

Christian women writers aspire to initiate their journey of writing to search for the self. This allows them to interact with themselves. Wollstonecraft’s radical thoughts and writings recreate theology for women and recognize the potentiality to access the rights equal to men. Social consciousness makes her seek justice for women to get over the male constructed social walls. Social order which includes imperialism before the period of Enlightenment looks at transformation in the lives of men. But she notices that this change has not crept into woman’s life of privation. Jeana DelRosso, Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, makes her effort to highlight woman in the Catholic literature. *Writing Catholic Women; Contemporary International Catholic Girlhood Narratives* is her recognizable voice to make room for the stories of Christian women. She boldly discusses the theories about Christian women’s literature. At present, Christian women writers find opportunity to express themselves, their interests and their experiences without any repressive forces. Specifically these writers direct imperative attention towards religious customs and social institutions in their literary texts.

Jayashree, G.S., Professor of English, draws out the historical development of women writing in the regional languages of India from 19th century onwards. In the initial stage women exposed to the educational privileges, wrote stories by recollecting traditional sacred Hindu texts. But their new visions were
marginalised and they were still expected to be submissive. Against such conditions Manorama Thampuratti, Kilimanoor Uma Devi Thampuratti and Tarigonda Venkamamba established their identity as significant literary persons. Further social mobility for women was recognized through women’s journals such as Bharati and Bamobdhini Patrika, the Indian Ladies Magazine, Savithri, Stree Darpan, Sundari Subodh and Mangalodayam.

Women raised their voice against purdah system, widowhood and repressive roles. As readers and writers, women got themselves involved in the National struggle and participated in the public sphere. The writings of Sarojini Naidu, Lakshmibai Tilak, Ramabai Ranade, Tarabai Shinde and Swarnakumari Devi expressed the need of self-esteem and self-respect in the life of women. Toru Dutt is also a memorable literary figure in Indian English Writing. Her novel, Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden and The Volume of Poetry recognize her among Indian women writers of the 19th century. Her voice in the literary scenario leads many women to realize their identity.

Even after independence, the confinement of women was not ended. Economic liberty and social identity were restricted. This women’s secondary role was challenged in the works of Rajalakshmi, K. Saraswathy Amma and Shivani. In the 20th century new themes are visible in the women writers, focusing on women’s question and existed societal taboos. These deliberated transformations have occurred only through education which gives them courage to cross the threshold of man-made rules. The consciousness makes the women writers to overcome the conventional stereotyped image of women in their literary endeavors. They stress liberalization and individuality by observing the realities of life. At present women writers in India like Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandeya, Kamala Das, Anees Jung, Chitra Fernando, Gita Hariharan and Meena Alexander find a new way with persistence. To depict powerful women with ideals, they overshadow the themes of sufferings, domestic life and experiences within the family.
The authority of literary canon is dominated by male authors but women authors have considerable space and are free to discuss the aspects of gender, power relations and sexuality. In the beginning, women were confined to write on particular topics but women’s movement and writings lead them towards their own development by breaking such censorship. This allows the writers like Balamaniamma in Kerala, Pandita Ramabai and Krupabai Sathanathan to get an opportunity to discuss accounts of women’s life in the public. In South India, Krupabai Sathanadhan’s name holds significance with her literary contributions. *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife* highlights the concept of “new woman” by presenting an upper-caste Hindu woman. In this course, she also finds a space to document the realistic state of upper caste women in India and gives a call to realize their individuality by disregarding traditional shackles. In *Saguna: The First Autobiographical Novel in English* she holds a mirror to the social problems and ignorance in Indian society. She is praised as:

Her early death was a great loss to the literary world for she was a gifted writer, with a talent for lyricism and irony, anger and profound sadness, and a sharp, observant eye for detail.  

Literary genres like novels, short story and poetry in English occupies a unique place in Indian history with the advent of colonizers. Its influence is also seen in contemporary women writers of English fiction. Jai Nimbkar, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Chitra Bannerjee, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Esther David, Bama, Sarah Joseph, Eunice de Souza, Arundhati Roy are distinguishing writers in Indian Literature. Their writings are concerned with the repression of women’s private and public life and their resistance.

**Contemporary South Indian Christian Women Writers**

In the present study, five contemporary South Indian Christian women writers are selected and their literary works are written from 1999 to 2009. The writers discussed are Tamil Dalit feminist literary model Bama, Malayalam feminist writer Sarah Joseph, realistic writer of Mangalore Alice Saldanha,
Mumbai novelist Eunice De Souza and the great dancer Mridula Martis of Bengaluru. Christianity enables to acknowledge education and service attitude, both of which play the role of agents to speak out for the plight of women, demands of a changing perspective of women’s life and courage to face the existing wider world. This study includes Bama’s *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Sarah Joseph’s *Othappu* and *The Daughters of Alaha* (Kannada), Alice Saldanha’s *The Dead Cannot Hear*, Eunice De Souza’s *Dangerlok and Dev and Simran* and Mridula Martis’s *There is a Dance for Every Song*. It considers the female issues that are raised, experiences of women that are discussed and attempts of the writers to provide new visions and knowledge to the society in their gendered literary works.

The novels chosen for this research assist to explore the culture, mode of life and distinguished experiences of the people of various regions. They demonstrate the narratives of Christian women writers concerning Dalit issues, context of marginalization of downtrodden women, generated alienation and conflicts of women’s mind in urbanized region, color discrimination of girls in upper caste, the influence of religious doctrines particularly on women, inevitable sufferings of poor and illiterate women, and devoted artistic endeavor of women. This study focuses exclusively on these particular writers and their notable creative technique. Because with the sketches of major and minor characters, they touch upon the existing and sensitive enslavement, paradigms of women. They portray combatively without allowing woman’s self to shrink to the level of abject injustice. They emphasize self-hood, self-actualization, essentiality of education and allow the readers to get insight into the changing perspective of women’s issues and measures to consider her life as unique. South India is enriched with culture and diversity. The outstanding South Indian regional Christian women writers have portrayed realistic images of women. A Dalit Christian enthusiastic writer, Bama is a source of inspiration to the women sect especially to the untouchables in Tamil Nadu. Sarah Joseph is an active Roman Catholic writer.
from Kerala. She deserves admiration for initiating the ideas of woman’s empowerment and resolution through the organisation ‘Manushi’. Alice Saldanha, a Christian writer from Mangalore, not only traces out her understanding of a woman’s individual distress through her literary work but has reached to wipe the tears of woman by initiating an organization of Helping Hand. Eunice De Souza is a scholar and an eminent Christian writer from Mumbai. She touches upon the common incidents in the metropolitan city and tells of the sustenance of women with fortitude. Mridula Martis, a capable woman of the corporate world in Bangalore, records a woman’s self-determination and fervour to reach the determined vision.

**Feminism and Christianity**

Feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions.\(^1\)

Feminist scholars point out the importance of women for research and they focus on the power of women. Women’s movements are accountable to the feminist theory with many strategies to break gender hierarchy and to challenge social change. They stress to establish common justice, norms, and tasks for gender equality. Subjectivity of women’s experience, political equality and diversity are acknowledged in feminist theory.

Maria Pilar Aquino highlights:

More than a mere sociopolitical movement formed by isolated groups of women, the feminist vision seeks to shape a new civilization and a new human community linked by the principles of justice, human integrity, and equal participation for the fulfillment of life.\(^2\)

Feminism is not a constant concept in all ages, in all places and situations. The history of Feminism promotes the movement in three waves. The first female
activist campaign is connected with women’s right to vote in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The later wave is about the women’s social and legal rights during 1960’s. The powerful contributions of women’s writings are also represented. The third movement continues its struggle to seek demands which are failed in the previous feminism. The defending voices of Anne Bradstreet, Mary Wollstonecraft, Woolf and Simone De Beauvoir are all diversely associated in this activity. The Liberation movement of feminists emancipates women from the oppression and rescues from sexual and biological disparity. Postcolonial Feminism gives impetus to the women’s writings of third world nations. But these feminists have separated themselves from the mainstream Feminist’s movement due to ignorance and differentiation. Secular feminists’ memorable efforts give a voice to the future generation. Thus Feminism addresses women’s issues such as the pitiable economic status, problems related to childbirth and housework etc.

Christine de Pizan is praised as the first woman, who raises voice against the misogynic conditions of her existence through her pen. The unfeminine attribute of Queen Elizabeth and importance of education to women in writings of the English poets, Anne Bradstreet and Bathsua Makin are the memorable efforts. Mary Astell is identified as the first radical English writer, who defends women’s ignorance and argues the curtailed life of women by the rules of the church. In the 18th century, considerable changes are visible with regard to woman’s life. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Catherine Macaulay’s *Letter on Education* are impetus to educate women. During the 19th century, feminists attempt to raise movements and organize programmes to reform women’s status. They are outspoken of woman’s education and economic autonomy, laws concerning to political, social and marital life.

Mary Wollstonecraft and other writers in Europe effectively discarded the word “Irrational being” accorded to women. They challenged to get woman’s rights as humans and demanded the realization of identity for women in the
society which was restricted by the attitudes of men. Feminist discourses motivated women to recognize their individual insights and knowledge to present themselves as rational beings in the 18th century. The contributions of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelly in the literary canon advocated their raised voices against negative attitude towards woman. During the 19th and 20th centuries, woman tried to express her experiences and attitudes with the icon of “new women.” Many groups of women with enlightenment stood against powerful patriarchy. In New York, many white Christian women’s movements addressed the subordination of women. African-American Christian women also supported the white women to seek equality along with their struggle against racial and sexual oppression.

During the 1930’s women’s writings received prominence in the thoughts of Virginia Woolf. Women found space for education and occupied the status of professionals. The access to higher education was allowed in the 20th century with the establishment of universities. The initial feminists actively organized movements to demand rights to vote, property and equality and location in the academic milieu. In the postmodern period, feminists move to fight against their negligence in all areas of society and challenge to possess the privileges. The concept of ‘Other’ which is naturalized to women is addressed as the main task to deconstruct. Even though Florence Nightingale excluded herself from the women’s movement, she impressed with her service to the soldiers of the Crimean war. In her own way, she criticized the sexist bias of society. Reputed women like Barbara Leigh Smith, Francis Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, Elizabeth Garrett and Josephine Butler organized campaigns to create awareness. In the early 20th century, Margaret Sanger enlightened women folk about health and contraceptives. She extended her helping hand to the poor women with contraceptive information. Women’s force proves themselves by bringing the abortion laws.
In the 20th century Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone, Gloria Steinem, Sheila Rowbotham and Bell Hooks are the leading literary women figures. They write for the cause of women and guide women to respond to the situation which haunts them. Many conferences, activities, theories, programmes, and constitutional considerations challenge violence against women and concentrate to bring transgression.

Christian Feminism defines moral, spiritual, social and leadership equality of men and women. Christian Feminists prefer the ordination of women, equality in marital relationships and reproductive rights. John Bunyan totally opposes women’s third active participation arguing that Satan inevitably tempts the weaker Eve, rather than Adam:

The man was made the head in worship, and the keeper of the garden of God’. He referred to women as ‘that simple and weak sex’. Citing the first epistle to the Corinthians, he argued that women are ‘not the image glory of God as the men are....19

Woman is assigned with submissive role and controlled in the hands of man who is regarded as Godly authority among the Christian community. But feminists highlight women’s power to reject the authority of men when they break morality. To put an end to the demanding voice of the conscious women, men of religion demonstrated a negative viewpoint towards woman’s identity. But Elizabeth Cady Stanton interprets the religious text with explanations of God’s and Jesus’ words of equality of human beings in her work, The Women’s Bible (1895). Mary Daly’s The Church and the Second Sex (1968) and Elisabeth Schiissler Fiorenza’s In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (1983) explore the erasure of women within the religious traditions. Kant and McCarthy Brown are more interested in the feminist study of Catholic sacred texts. Mary Daly reveals the androcentric attitude of Catholic theology in her book, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation (1986). She analyzes patriarchal domination over women in Christian religious
text. June O’Connor addresses woman as the subject of study in her rereading of religious texts in the article, *Rereading, Reconceiving and Reconstructing Traditions: Feminist Research in Religion* (1989). The significant feminists challenged the religious institutions with the academic progress. And women writers project women as the centre of discourse in their writings. Thus the sacred texts are re-interpreted in the writings of contemporary feminists like Paula Gunn Allen, Caroline Walker Bynum, Carol Christ, Naomi Goldenberg, Rita Gross and Susan Starr Sered.

Woman seems to be treated as Other in Roman Catholicism. It insists upon the restrictions to assign the status of priest to her. But contemporary feminist scholars challenge this relegation at the center of religion. They make an attempt to bring forth the contributions of the feminine within the religious traditions which are ignored in the records of men. In the creation story, a male deity is regarded as powerful and God creates Eve in the image of Adam. Subjugation is justified for Eve because she is associated with Adam’s downfall and cause for human sufferings. But feminist reading brings out the hierarchical structure which is assigned to woman and man. It describes that the perfection of human race is fulfilled with the creation of Eve in Genesis Myth. In Christianity, God is termed as omnipotent, powerful and His masculine aspect seems to impose such tendencies on male and pushes female to the secondary status. Thus feminists recognize patriarchal notions in theology. Eve’s association with Satan and fruit is reconsidered as her heroic trial to acquire knowledge beyond the limitations. Tina Beattie in her essay, *Woman, Religion and God* symbolizes Mary as the redemptive “New Eve”. While discussing the discourse of women and theology, she states:

> Only in prayer, communal Christian endeavour and faithfulness does theology escape its implication in the sin that ensnared Eve, and taste the liberation of human knowing in Mary’s conception of Christ.²⁰
Approaches to bring out the stories of women in the historical records are made with painstaking efforts of female scholars. Among them, Ross Shepard Kraemer is memorable in documenting the history of women. In contrast to the new visions of the contemporary Feminism, the Christian Feminism shapes women’s role without excluding traditional norms. The transformation also occurs in the theological faith of community. It expresses Eve as the representative of woman in the initial theological story and Virgin Mary as the mother of the second Adam and assigns status as the queen of paradise. She gets the position as the redeemed lady and is believed to rescue woman’s world from the early condemnation of sin. Thus the Christian representation of woman is reconsidered from the feminist perspective to give a positive valorization to it. The questioning of woman’s status in relation to Christian tradition is the agenda of contemporary feminists globally. By this, they also mean to justify status for both men and women. In 1995 Pope John Paul II preferred this New Feminism and advocated for the space, women were demanding realizing their importance. Nietzschean views against age old traditions of Christianity inspire feminists like Daly and Irigaray to express feminist thoughts over theology and they interpret God in their own way. The claims of women for justice and human rights attempt to bring awareness in the male built society to create a healthy social system.

Along with experiences of outside and inner domestic worlds, women writers’ intellectual process accommodates bodily experiences of women’s life such as menstruation, sexuality, emotional needs, childbirth and lactation. Owing to the negative view of her sexuality, woman is denied ordination within the religious institution. But the contemporary woman’s awareness activities and campaigns try to get the status and provide an opportunity to question the sacramental duties. It also gives impetus to claims of equality in Christian Catholic marriage which formerly considered wife as subordinate because of its biological construction. Patriarchal religious traditions extend its shades over the
relationships of family members. So the authoritarian male figure of the family gets every kind of privileges. Eve is regarded as evil for her disobedience and Virgin Mary is perceived as divine; these aspects condition men’s mind to expect coded feminine qualities in women.

As women followers of Christianity have contributed tremendously to spread the Gospel, their participation makes them to seek a sense of empowerment to subvert the powerful authority. But still Christianity has emphasized gender roles through canonical texts with an intention to suppress woman’s liberties. On the other hand, male-favoured hierarchy has stressed upon the church which depicts masculine virtue in the Gospel and compels the churchgoers to believe and imitate those formulated rules. Christianity as an institutionalized religion provides prominence to male deity and degrades Goddesses, associating sexuality as sin. Though the acceptance of women’s ordination provides a status, the hostility of male dominance suffocates the lives of women. The consciousness of women is enslaved through the stories of Holy Scriptures and symbols of religious institutions. Concentrated power in the patriarchal structure drives many feminists to question their powerless status. Christian feminist ethics seek to realize the identity of women because there are multiple psychological and social oppressive patriarchal holds on the lives of women based on Christian faith. The efforts of feminist thinkers allow for some kind of mobility to women in their bounded life with awareness about contraceptives and rights against sexual abuse. They criticize the traditional norms, which confine women, make them lose identity and disregard their needs. They also put forward the argument that God has no disparity between man and woman. The Christian feminist movement attempts to get equality of women socially, morally and spiritually denying the laws of the church which curtail women’s identity and are gender biased. It tries to recognize and record the participation of women in religious movement and their scholarly activity. They uphold the egalitarian concept between men and women in
Christianity. Some feminists discuss in their writings women’s learning, preaching the principles of Christianity and portray the pressures and expulsion of women who try to bring consciousness on the rights of women.

In the modern period, women have become aware of the discrimination in religious norms and find the voice to question the injustice. Christian feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Katharine Bushiness and Frances Willard are prominent to influence and stimulate the campaign. Feminists demand education for women to get a clearer picture of their role in the Holy Scriptures. They also argue for the need to liberate women to decide upon birth control. They have tried to bring change in the abortion laws. Their attempts merit them the title theologians. These women take a stand in changing the rigid doctrines manifested to women.

Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation.21

In India after independence marginalized women and embattled women start the movement to gain economic empowerment and opportunities for survival. The voice of poor, Dalit and minority class appear in the canon of feminist struggle. It turns women to have positive view, economic independence, and to go with the challenging life. Many autonomous women’s groups and organizations inaugurate new resolutions to safeguard the rights of women and uplift women from oppression making them to realize their significance. These groups are excluded from the control of political parties and activities. Contemporary women face a difficult situation to sustain in the face of communalism, classism and casteism. So these autonomous organizations are active in addressing women’s problems. On the other side recognizing the sexist bias and gender inequality in
the decorum of Indian society, women take enlightenment from the feminist movement with expressions of identity. Equality, reproductive rights and justice in all spheres are the focused principles of this campaign. Besides women activist movements enfold many theories to protest gender bias. They aim to promote women’s legal rights, women’s rights over her body and economic rights.

The Indian feminist Canon’s history varies from the west, depending on the factors that structure women’s existence and protocols of the society. Society, religion and community exacerbate women with particular conventions. The authority in all spheres is headed to the male and such a tradition disfigures the identity of women in the Indian context. Though the matriarchal system exists among Marata, Bengali and Kerala families, they are accustomed to defined rules of the culture and religion. The feminist concept worked with the emergence of Nationalism to relieve women from exclusion and structured life to affirm individual rights. Gargi, Rani Laximibai, Razia Sultana, Savithribai Phule, Sucheta Kriplani, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Amrit Kaur, Amrita Pritam are Indian women with challenging virtues.

Many social reformers organized in the first phase of Feminism (1915-1947) to eradicate female humiliation and violence. For the welfare of women, they initiated a movement against sati system, female infanticide, widowhood, child marriages, and resisted academic privileges. The second phase of feminism (1915-1947) created awareness among women with the participation in the Indian freedom struggle, political parties and women’s conferences. The reformist activities of Jyothi ba Phule, Mararshi Karve, Dr. Ambedkar and western wave of feminism influenced the thoughts of Indians. Further, gender violence against women was condemned irrespective of class, caste, religion. The questions of woman’s rights and consciousness rising were central to the aims of Feminism. Kamini Roy, Lathambika Antharjanam, Jasodhara Bagchi, Mira Dutt Gupta, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Tarabai Shinde are significant suffragettes concentrated
towards women's issues. Reformists' agenda included exposing men's world to the problems of women. Vidya Bal in her essay, *Re-defining Feminism: A Personal Note* defines:

I would say that feminism is a way of life. It aims at both men and women to get rid of shackles of manly man and womanly woman syndrome to become human beings that value equality, freedom, peace, love and friendship for all human beings.\(^{22}\)

Realization of civil rights, political role and economic independence constitute a new way of life. The liberation campaigns in the new direction against dichotomy between the sexes are eco-feminism, anti-caste traditional feminism, and peasant and rural women's movement to avoid toiling conditions.

**Feminist Literary Criticism**

Women are represented as irrational, docile and emotional and such perpetuated concepts are characterized in the literature. In addition to this, either woman is created as a negative character with evil traits or as a positive character in the image of angel which reinforces the ideology.

Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism is unique in its own type and paves way of feminist criticism. It also expresses radical thoughts while defending women's writings as distinct from male writings. Social situations and social realities of women are given stress in its discourse. It takes its existence to highlight women's literary traditions and signify their writings.

The terms Feminine, Feminist, and Female have been used by Showalter to understand writings of women, their thoughts and language in the literary scenario. Showalter constructs a feminist literary tradition by marking three phases in women's writings in *A Literature of Their Own*. In the Feminine phase, women's writings try to seek equality with men's literary acts and their
intelligentsia is proved in male dominated culture. Women’s writings of the feminist stage focus on the empowerment of women. These literary efforts raise voice against established norms of patriarchal order. The demand for women’s right and status also becomes an issue. The Female phase stresses the concept of self-discovery. The initial two stages such as imitation and protest are ignored which in turn assign women to the secondary role. So female experience itself gains importance for literary expressions of women. Radical Feminism is associated to redefine the aspects of patriarchy that ignore woman’s identity by subjugating her as Other. It condemns woman’s subordination and man’s empowerment in the social-economic relations. Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* discusses sexual exploitation and oppression of women through radical feminist views.

The contemporary women’s movement is launched to change people’s perspectives of life with its publications. The successful ideas of female significance and female writings stand as a resistance against male world in this movement. Millet’s literary analyses raise female consciousness over the disparity of sexual power. The misogynistic circumstances she discusses portray the heterosexual relationships which are based on power-structured system. Her interpretations criticize the marginal existence of women in the institution of patriarchy at every level. She also points out how female life is encircled with inferiority and male authority in the stories of mythology.

In *Sexual Politics* the Biblical and Hesiodic events of women are discussed as providing basis for women’s neglect and significance of man. She draws stories of Creation and Fall in the Judeo - Christian tradition, where Eve is condemned as helper, temptress and evil of the human world. She is cursed with pain during motherhood and enslavement throughout life in the Old Testament. Pandora in Greek Mythology is also pushed aside as representing the damnable race of women and with degenerate sexuality. Thus she demonstrates the confinement of women inherited from mythological female images constructed by men.
The role of Virgin Mary and angel are the stereotyped figures to women in the Holy Scriptures which perpetuate marginalized state, and degrading social, political, economic and legal status in the culture of male domination. She notices sexual discrimination in Chaucer’s *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*. The bold character, the wife asserts the powerful authority of the church father. So she is termed as usurper of men’s power. With all these articulations, she holds the impact of old myths on women and on her status as minor.

Kate Millet discusses how women are defined and justified as an alienated group in the culture of male world. She mentions the Hindu culture which rules over the life of female with formulated stigmas to restrict religious rites. They are not permitted to touch food, ritual things and expected to have food after male members. In this situation, every course of survival of women is operated with the consent of a patriarch. Their behavior is totally controlled by masculine culture. Such sexual segregation closes the woman’s participation in warfare, hunting and sports. Western culture also reinforces power-oriented patriarchal system to exclude women, justifying the classical stories of Pandora’s Box and disobedience of Eve. Thus she draws out how culture handles the gender ideology while conditioning the temperaments of male as aggressive and female as passive. The sexual role of female is binding in patriarchy. It is culturally generated that man is considered as strong and women as domicile. In this context, Female Literary Criticism criticizes and examines the culture and literature of the recorded male domination. It is included as part of academic activities and throws light on woman as reader and woman as writer.

Literature and society are closely interconnected. Novels indicate social responsibilities with the reflection of its society. They are enriched with culture and aesthetic values of a particular age and try to search mysteries in the real lives of human beings. Woman’s voice is visible during the 18th century in the scenario of Indian literature which gives way to the advent of realism. Women writers
exhibit their view to the traditionally shaped standards and explore the self. Thus novel is accounted as an instrument to prove their individualistic tastes and ideas.

**Review of Recent Literature on Indian Christian Women Writers**

The impact of western women’s writings is considerable in the world which allows individual women to use writing as an instrument to express pain, loneliness, achievements and imperfection. Feminist scholars revalorize the literary works of women and subvert the systematic marginalized status.

The focus on women writings in India is a recently developing one. In this context, it is needless to point that there is a dearth of writing and responses to specifically Christian women writing in India. Moreover there are few Christian women writers whose writings are translated into English. This thesis focuses solely on South Indian Christian women writers found in English. Therefore the goals are honoured greatly.

She concludes with the findings of state of liberation and women’s power in society. Tina Beattie In *Woman* (2003), projects her views on Christian theology and tradition relating to woman’s life. Her writings are about the various struggles and opinions of feminist theologians. *The Scarlet Thread* (2004) by Francine Rivers narrates the unsatisfactory marital life of Sierra Madrid. She faces fears and insecurity in urbanized area when Aluc, her husband gets a new job. This turns her towards God for solace. The trial life of Mary Katharyn is also captured. *Purdah* (2004) edited by Eunice De Souza throws light on woman’s recursive and limited life which disturbs the progress of society. To avoid these pitfalls, education and enlightenment play pivotal role and in raising the standard of women’s life. Eunice De Souza’s edited book, *The Sathianadhan Family Album* (2005) analyses the writings of Sathianadhan’s family members and records the aspect of conversion in Tamil Nadu. This literary family as Indian Christians traces out women’s problems, relationship with Indian church and associations with Hindus. Sr. Philomena D’souza, Fma in her book, *Women Icon of Liberation* (2005) discusses the realistic issues and requirement of freedom in woman’s life. Jeana DelRosso, a Professor of English from the University of Connecticut holds up the works of Catholic women writers in *Writing Catholic Women: Contemporary International Catholic Girlhood Narratives* (2005). She recognizes significant role for woman in the literary canon. In her views, the role of a Catholic girl is curtailed from her childhood and that the church has resisting attitude towards female creativity. She discusses stories with insight on women’s status and the Catholic influence on women writers. Donna Freitas projects the feminist view of Carol Christ and analyses the writings of Jeana DelRosso in the review, *Expanding the Catholic Canon of Literature to Women and Girls* (2006). In *Catholic Church and Unruly Women Writers* (2007), DelRosso presents certain women literary writers, who focus on gender and religion. In the book, *Amen* (2009) reformist views pertaining to church and convent are recorded in the story of Jesme. She crosses the walls of the religious structure with her voice raised to portray corruption.
Even though, the patriarchal mainstream makes space for woman’s emancipation, a gesture of resistance to changes for women is visible. But they get a scope to confide complex issues, the disempowering aspects of life and to interrogate the existing order through written words. Women are repressed irrespective of caste, class, color, state and region. In order to resist their discrimination, the literary attempt of these literary producers is remarkable. In South India, women’s literary canon is glorified with the contemporary Christian women authors like Bama, Sarah Joseph, Alice Saldanah, Eunice De Souza and Mridula Martis.

**Statement of Aim**

The main intention of this research is to explore woman’s life in the view of South Indian Christian women writers. It highlights the lives of women in the selected novels and initiates women to realize self identity. It focuses on the changing perspectives and roles of woman in the view of the selected writers. It also generates awareness and confidence among women with cited actualities through the vision of writers.

- The research analyzes the prevalent gender issues in society through the writings of South Indian Christian women writers.
- This study attempts to trace out various changing perspectives of women in the light of selected woman writers.
- It examines varied approaches of women writers regarding women’s empowerment and explores the role of education in creating awareness.
- It looks closely into the sense of responsibility of the selected women writers to deal with woman’s life.
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Methodology

The present study is based on analytical method and feminist perspective is applied. In order to get a deep insight into the impressive themes of the literary texts, this research has focused on the projected major and minor female roles through analyzing every minute narrated incident. This has assisted to understand the bold assertions made by the writers. Each and every minute events, circumstances, concepts and images that are presented in the literary works of these five women writers have been studied. In the writings of South Indian Christian women writers, the characters and their stories provide the changing roles and perspectives of women. The impact of Christian doctrines and practices in lives of women and their world and responses are also delineated.

Purpose

Feminism attempts to bring awareness especially among the women regarding entrenched state and inspires to realize their identity and significance. Even though the wave of Feminism penetrates into the lives of women, they are embedded with struggles in various ways. The dedicated service of Christian women to the human world is noteworthy. As a minority group, Indian Christian woman’s life and contributions are sidelined. By asserting individual identity in the contemporary world, the Christian women writers give a tribute to the literary canon in their creative work. Their articulations that propose to enlighten the women class about existing discriminations, defiant and challenging attitude, self-esteem and the dual mentality of traditional and modern attitudes in the present situation have influenced this process of research.

The selected novels promote feminist issues extensively. The various facets and the new perspectives of Feminism such as the psychological conflicts in women, and the challenging of limitations are upheld. In addition, the attainment
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Introduction

of social and cultural changes in association with Indian norms in a Hindu atmosphere is also addressed. These chosen Indian Christian women writers are well-educated and their activism through literature strengthens women. Discussing various women’s perspectives in daily life and contemplating many incidents, they propose to send a message to the world with a view to uplift. They also recommend transgression of social norms for liberation. So this study aspires to go in the light of these writers to examine their purpose of writing. It proposes to analyze the realities of women’s lives and evaluate the various panoramas in the context of the novels. Through their writings, they uphold burning women’s issues in Indian society. Their sense of responsibility and purpose to bring consciousness towards progress in the society through change has persuaded this research work.

Chapter Contents

The chapters delineate the pressurized and indifferent, radical and potential religious strategies in women’s multifaceted personal life. Attempt is also made to throw light on the diversified views of Christian women writers in their feminist framework. Succeeding chapters are developed to reveal injustice and inequality that emerge in the contemporary world. They locate female confinement within marriage, family, religion, society and the economic scenario. Since each novel focuses on different regions each with its own culture and ethnicity, attempt is made to keep this diversity in the analysis.

There is a relationship between women’s perpetuated dichotomy and their stance to bring societal change. The sensibility of women characters in the novels regarding their crucial stance on the hindrance to individual progress is explored. The incidents and assertive acts of women against dominated, urbanized, isolated and dogmatic religious institution and the cruel attitude of upper caste stand in contrast to the images of women who fight against their limitations.
This analysis seeks to highlight the writers’ dealings of the progressive state of women. Emphasis is given to seek actualities, enlightenment, aesthetics and vitality of the feminine self. It develops on the awareness among the women belonging to religious institutions, artistic world, downtrodden and urbanized regions. Themes of the novels such as the established life of nuns outside the ordination, the survival of the downtrodden, liberated urban life and discovery of creativity provide real pictures that are positive and empowered for women in this era of globalization.

Lastly, the research foregrounds ideals of the South Indian Christian women writers and their social responsibility. It also examines how the religious upbringing of these contemporary writers influences their commitment to women’s upliftment. Thus it brings out the new out looks on female self provided by these women writers.
Notes


