CHAPTER I

FEMINISM—HISTORY OF AN IDEOLOGY
Feminism, broadly speaking, is a phenomenon of social change which gradually affected the age-old fixed sex roles and gave rise to ripples of awareness leading to revolt in the minds of women. It aroused a new consciousness and liberated women from the confinement of social norms, traditions, male chauvinism, social prejudice, religious taboos, illiteracy and superstition. In a way, it challenged the roles society had assigned to women and advocated for a fundamental change in society's attitude towards them, and their attitude towards themselves. It threw light on the injustice done to them and pleaded for an end to all common notions, myths and prejudices that they should occupy a separate sphere and should hold an inferior position. So feminism as a concept is fundamentally a protest against such notions and a demand for the reshaping of all religious, social, economic, mythological, political and legal norms that place a woman in a secondary position, without proper basis for such views. In its broader sweep, feminism is the establishment of woman's right as a human being, a right which has been denied to her in many societies. It leads to a redefinition of woman's sphere.
of work and her status in the family and society. Yes, it stands for the eradication of all atrocities committed against women in the name of religion, custom, tradition, cultural values and social attitudes. Feminism is the universal idea of equality without an oppressor or the oppressed, where it is every person's fundamental right to be a human being first and then a man or woman. Thus feminism is one of the outstanding movements in the modern history.

Literature in general and fiction in particular of any country reflects consciously or unconsciously, the contemporary cultural and social interactions. As such, it gives insight into the set-up of society, traditions, norms and the social status of men and women which regulate the human relationships. It depicts human drama in the backdrop of society where the lives, values and attitudes of men and women are undergoing major social changes. Therefore a study of fiction with a feminist perspective is worth attempting. Feminism in novels expresses itself in the novelists' intense awareness of feminine problems and their desire to present aesthetic social criticism. It is of no use, if one tries to ascertain fact and figures in a novel, but it may be of paramount value if one tries to reconstruct the prevailing attitudes, values and customs.
and the changing pattern of life depicted in it, by which one can decide the status of women and their conditions in that area. And novel being a condensed form of the 'mental image' of a real age, gives a quick reflection of the pattern of life and its values which are ever changing. Some novelists are unconsciously committed to portray feminist issues from contemporary changing social conditions. As one feminist puts it:

Bring the feminine principle into an entirely masculinised world and thereby make the world human instead of only masculine.

Before going into the study of fiction with a feminist perspective, it is necessary to trace the causes, origin and history of feminism and feminist movements and the impact of that of the West on the East. But to discuss and evaluate the role and status of women in literature one must probe in to the real status of women in different societies at various times in history. As Mary Ann Ferguson claims, a keen perception of history is inevitable to identify women stereotypes and other images of women in literature.

We must know something about women in history, about the psychological and sociological viewpoint that have existed.
and we must know something about the 
process by which literature makes use 
of these views. Literature both 
reflects and helps to create reality.  

From time immemorial the position of women has been 
inferior to that of men and in many cases they are treated 
as chattels and are doomed to occupy a secondary status in 
all spheres of life. Why is it so? Why are women oppressed? 
And how could men impose their will and authority over women? 
Scholars, philosophers and feminists have put forward different 
reasons for this age-old suppression of women. According 
to John Stuart Mill, a woman's bondage to men from the 
beginning is due to her physical frailty and her sexual use-
fulness to men. In *Origin of Family, Private Property and 
the State*, Frederick Engels explains how sex oppression can 
be stated in terms of private property, ownership and author-
ity. He explains that the secondary status of women is the 
result of the father being the owner of the house property. 
He has the access to the surplus and holds power and influ-
ence over other female members who in turn work for him 
without any protests or demands because they receive 
surety and security from him for their silent contribu-
tion in the form of 'worthless domestic work'.
Here Engels compares the earning member (father) to 'Bourgeois' and refers to non-earning members as the 'Proletariat'. The cause of woman's subjection is often attributed to her economic dependence on men.

Equality and mutual respect between the spouses is impossible if the woman has to please her husband sexually and in servitude for the free life he offers her. Periodical impurity and maternal weaknesses of women are also said to be an important base for the notion of the inferior status of women. Though most of these arguments taken individually appear to be an oversimplification of the cause of women's oppression, all of them in a way contribute to the notion of the inferior status of women.

No doubt, there have been innumerable obstacles in the way of a woman's development. The age-old tradition of male superiority founded on a male oriented social institution confined women inside the four walls of the house and laid down thousands of restrictions to limit their activities and social contacts. This age-old segregation of women bred inferiority complex in them and restrained them from exercising any freedom to determine their will and actions as men do. So, when men went out into the wider horizons in search of various challenging occupational
goals or a variety of other personal satisfactions, women continued their monotonous job of housekeeping such as cooking, rearing and nurturing children. The domestic work, even now, is considered an insignificant contribution to the family, compared to man's hard work outside which brings income for livelihood. Money symbolizes power and lack of servitude. Man could exercise his will and authority over woman because he provided her with food and protection, whereas she had to suffer because she depended on him or lived at his mercy. And it was considered prestigious for a man to keep his wife and daughters away from employment and free from outside contacts. So marriage came to be considered as a woman's only vocation in life. As Viola Klean puts it:

For her personal happiness, her social status and her economic prosperity, marriage was for woman an indispensable condition.  

And, naturally, without marriage, a woman came to be considered as cursed and lost. Here came the myths about unmarried women as shrews or witches. It gave rise to the prejudice that marriage alone can bring surety, security and social status to a woman. But in reality, it also smothered her individuality and self identity as a human
being. Marriage should be for the togetherness of two equal individuals, who form a healthy family unit and thereby a healthy society. But marriage has always proved a contract where woman loses her identity and is forced to merge with that of her husband. More often than not a woman's individuality, ambition, interests, talent, dreams and aspirations came to be sacrificed at the altar of marriage. And all this for the security which marriage is supposed to give!

And after marriage, a woman is expected to give up all her personal pursuits and live for the sake of her husband and children only. Thus narrow-minded ideas about marriage have been another obstacle in the way of a woman's development. Emancipation of women is a mirage as long as women live dependent and poor. Economic dependence on some male members of the family, denies women an adequate footing to resist men's dominance and unreasonable authority. Men's pedantry took advantage of women's dependence and tamed them in the golden cage of wedded life.

And again, ideals of chastity and virginity came to be imposed upon her which are once again masculine ideals by which man values women and woman values herself. These masculine ideals of femininity, chastity and morality are so well-founded in the social attitudes, customs, traditional and
cultural values that woman feels shy to break away from them. They are social maladies which hamper her individual development. She has neither the wish nor the capacity to free herself from the shackles of ignorance, illiteracy and wilful subservience to find new avenues to assert her equality. The age-old suppression of women and domestic tyranny has turned them into a subdued lot. As Promilla Kapur, a well-known sociologist says:

Women have to be stirred out of their age-old slumber of ignorance and pig-like contentment. By and large women are like satisfied pigs—having no ambitions, expected desires, and no definite constructive plans, for raising their status and position in society.

Another obstacle is the sex-segregation which starts even in the early stages of childhood. Girls are discriminated against at their birth itself. Most of the people crave for male children and they fear at the thought of begetting baby-girls. Religious beliefs and social attitudes are responsible for the desire that they should have sons. So the kinds of welcome given at the birth of a boy and a girl are different. And later the way they are treated is also different. The boys are fed and cared for in a better manner than the girls. In millions of homes, baby-girls are
trained and moulded from infancy to be humble, obedient, and subservient housewives whereas their brothers are encouraged to grow adamant and aggressive. The also keep separate behaviour patterns for boys and girls. As Viola Klein puts it:

This stereotype of feminity serves as a pattern of conduct to the growing girl, influences her life plan and so contributes in shaping her character.\(^5\)

This creates unpredictable psychological harm to the personality and character of children which later leads to form separate moral standards for men and women. So one may say that social attitudes and cultural values still block a woman's development. If a woman transgresses the social attitudes and trespasses the unwritten moral code, society degrades her. In spite of the many laws designed for the equality of women and the improvement of their status, the unwritten moral code of society still permits male dominance and female subordination. So women are always discriminated against in various matters, particularly in matters related to morality and behaviour. The same action and the same behaviour of men and women are differently viewed and differently interpreted. It appears that what is...
considered normal or accepted in men is a horrifying sin or debauchery in women. There will not be any equality nor any status for women in society, as long as the sexual double standards and chauvinistic behaviour patterns prevail.

Ignorance and illiteracy are the other obstacles that obstruct a woman's development. Progressive changes will not be possible in a society in which women are illiterate and superstitious. In fact, it is woman who moulds the character, of both boys and girls. But in reality, lack of education and ignorance trap many a woman in subservient conditions and she consider her toil and suffering as fate. Even prosperous women living in material contentment are often dissatisfied and lost. In a way, the major obstacle for the emancipation of women is their lack of training in some field of work and the absence of education.

With education some women could comprehend their recondite human potentialities and individuality. And this has definitely prepared them to face the challenges of life in and outside their family. Owing to their 'enlightenment' and 'self awareness', they refused to ratify blindly certain barbarous traditions in the society, which denied them identity or self esteem. Thus, educated and enlightened
women understood the irregularities and double standards imposed upon them and came forward to assert that women first and foremost are individual human beings and have every right to develop their human potentialities like men. They brought to light many discriminations that were practised against women in home and society. And various women's movements sprung out of this self-realization.

The main objective of feminism is to improve the living conditions of women, her position and status in the society. All social reformers and feminists having different strategies and ideologies fought for the same, ultimate goal - the establishment of a woman's rights as a human being. So the concept of feminism aims at the resurrection of woman from the fettered, sex-discriminated, inferior social status to that of a fullfledged human being.

Another objective of feminism is to minimize the discrimination between the sexes through strict implementation of social legislation. As has been pointed out earlier, in spite of the innumerable laws designed for women's equality in all fields, the unwritten moral code of society still encourages male dominance and sexual discrimination. As Promila Kapur puts it:
It is the social attitudes that lag behind the legislation. It is here that creation of a new awareness is required. Women should be 'brain-washed' of their weaker feelings so as to enable them to exercise their freedom of choice and will in any sphere they choose for their development. The legal rights (equality in law) gained for the expression of women's individual potentialities are worthless unless men and society shed their prejudices against women in the changing socialization process. So the emancipation of women is emancipation of men too. Men should volunteer to peel off their inbred superiority complex to treat the other sex as human beings and not as mere commodities or objects of lust. Education has to play its role here. In fact, education is the only remedy to liberate women from the shackles of blind beliefs which have steeped them in subservience. Education, the right type of education, is a must to bring awareness and enlightenment in women. So feminists have stressed the importance of education. Mary Wollstonecraft was the first to draw attention to this fact.

To comprehend the recondite human potentialities in a woman, the foundation should be laid in the home
itself. Many disparities can be removed if the parents allow boys and girls to grow up in similar environments and give them equal opportunities to develop their will individuality. Here they learn the first lessons of equality and accept the idea of partnership for a joint pursuit in life which is contrary to the present social value system, i.e., male dominance and female subservience. This foundation laid in the home and later continued in educational institutions can change many of the prevailing value systems and cultural attitudes.

It is felt that initiative for changing attitudes gives an adequate footing to women, so that they will be forced to dispel the inhibitions inbred in them. The feminists aim at making women aware of their position and then accordingly to educate themselves to achieve a status in society. It may not be easy to overcome centuries-old social attitudes which the society still cherishes because women do not have a voice and cannot claim equality even in the home as they are economically dependent on some male members of the family. It appears that when women cease to be parasites or when they no longer need family protection (economic) they are well placed to oppose oppression and degradation.
Feminism aims at women's compulsory education and later their employment. Economic independence will create a suitable atmosphere for the development of feminine individuality. To quote Viola Klein again:

... it seems fully certain that the independence and social recognition which [women] enjoyed on account of their work, the self-respect which is inspired in them, and the greater social contacts which it involved will have had a permanent influence on their attitude and their character.

And economic independence, as William Henry Chafee also puts it, means so much:

... first it would allow women to realize their potential as individuals in the wider society. And second, it was the only way by which they would achieve the personal recognition and identity essential to a healthy family life.

It becomes clear here that emancipation of women is possible only when women also contribute in production or add to the total income. Career women always have
certain advantages over the idle homely type. It gives adequate footing to women to resist men's authority and dominance which otherwise is freely exercised on dependent women.

But the general attitude towards feminism is biased. The reason is obvious. From time immemorial society has attributed a certain social role and a few duties to women. And from generation to generation people have carried forward a particular set of views about women because of the culture, religion, tradition, value system and superstition. The women who rebel against the present condition and challenge the traditional feminine traits are often referred to as masculine women or "abnormal women". Feminism as understood by the traditionalists and the so-called male oriented society is that it is an idle woman's wishful cry for masculinity. The traditionalist's dominant argument is that a woman's "natural" place is home and her work, domestic servitude. Though there is no anthropological evidence to establish that a mother is the more necessary parent all through a child's growth and no scientific evidence to show that women are incapable of handling matters of intellectual concern, women are expected to make motherhood and housekeeping their preoccupation in life, whether they like it or
not and they are also expected to find fulfilment in wifehood and motherhood. To men emancipation of women means chaos in the set-up of future society. The traditionalists condemn feminists for challenging the natural roles society has assigned to women and for advocating for a fundamental change in society's attitude towards women and women's attitude towards themselves. They regard feminism as a threat to social institutions and conventional morality and visualise chaos in the future. Another reason for this biased belief results from the fact that in the beginning, the feminists did not have a definite strategy to attain their goal of equality. The feminists were always a stock of ridicule because of the early feminist's eagerness to be like men, to gain equality with them. This spread the notion that by emancipation women wished to wanted to be like men and discard all their feminine qualities. But by 'emancipation' or 'liberation', what women really wanted (and want) is resurrection from their age-old confinement to be human beings in the real sense. Margaret Fuller makes this idea clear by arguing that by feminism women want to be free in their thinking and action and not to imitate anyone.

Women did not necessarily want to be like men, but wanted to be free.
And as Chitra Gosh puts it:

Equality does not signify that everybody has to be physically or intellectually or spiritually equal or can be made so. But it does justify that unnecessary and unequal restrictions have to be removed so that each one with his or her own limitations can enjoy equally with others the benefits which may be derived from society. This is emancipation - equal opportunities for all with the removal of political, social, economic and cultural barriers.

So various women's movements sprung out of women's dissatisfaction with their inferior social status and the discrimination they had to face in all spheres of life. In order to establish this as a truism, one can examine the common motives and causes behind various women's movements. Cause, action and results are interrelated and this is true of all struggles, revolutions and people's movements. This is so with the women's movement too. There are various reasons for each stage or kind of women's movements, but there is a unique reason behind all women's movements, which is, the struggle against oppression and inequality. If the early
champions of women's emancipation considered men as their oppressors or the persons responsible for their inferior social status, the later leaders wanted a radical change in the cultural attitudes and value systems to improve the status of women. In both these cases, they were fighting for the same goal—the establishment of women's right as a human being. They were sought fulfilment as persons and were demanded, for the right to live with dignity, without being typecast into fixed roles (as mother, wife or whore) because of their sex.

The emancipation of women and social history are invariably connected with each other because social changes take place when there is a break in the well established social order and in the cultural values and attitudes of people. The social history of the 18th and 19th centuries mentions a few capable women in the sphere of social reform. They fought against many social maladies such as poverty, slavery, illiteracy and alcoholism, which in a way helped to improve the conditions of women.

These social reformers were not labelled as feminists, but they did work for the improvement of society and thereby gave women a vocation and social status. For them 'emancipation of women' did not mean women trying to be
like men or women discarding what is feminine in them, but the eradication of all social evils and attitudes which do not allow women and men to live happily as equal individuals. Elizabeth Fry (belonged to a quaker reform sect within Christianity), who worked for prison reforms was disgusted with the deteriorating prison conditions which ruined the lives of many women and children. She fought against the prison conditions and worked for better amenities for the prisoners. Florence Nightingale paved the way to make nursing a career for women by nursing war victims. Angela Burdetteoutts organized charitable institutions to locate and assist destitute women and children and fought against poverty. By their devotion to hard work and their ability to overcome obstacles in life, these capable women contributed much to the improvement of women's living conditions and position in society.

In the period between 1840-70 one sees middle class women working for charity, temperance, and legal and moral reforms. And certain problems which women faced and fought vigorously in changing their social status did not pertain only to "women question" but "humanistic question". A fine example to prove this basic idea of feminism is
Margaret Sanger's efforts at raising a feminist issue like the hazards rising out of a woman's continuous child-bearing and its influence on her social position. She fought against the inequality of not having the right to control one's body, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment and the treatment women received as objects of lust and bearers of children. Sanger's demands for birth control pills and the right to control one's body were considered as pure feminist issues in the beginning, and raised much opposition among the conservatives, but consequently they became a universal concern because of their need in population control.

For a long period women's organization in England and America focussed their attention on women's suffrage. Though enfranchisement is a minor issue compared to the other discriminations, one should consider why this demand emerged and against what they fought. While men and women are equal citizens in their pursuit of life under a single government, women were denied of the privilege and right to choose the representative by vote. The women suffragists questioned this inequality - men having the right to vote and women having none.

In the 19th century more and more women indulged in public activities that resulted from the tension created
by the new male-female value systems and as a protest against the new moral codes and the restrictiveness of domestic roles which the Industrial Revolution imposed upon them. The growth of Industrial Capitalism gave new avenues for men in public sphere and economic market, whereas it curtailed the freedom of middle class women and restricted their roles to that of housewife. New moral values emerged to idealize domestic women as chaste, traditional and moralistic. Their idleness at home came to be considered as a prestige issue, whereas men who worked were supposed to be materialistic as they were connected with public enterprises. So the women's movements of that period were a reaction to their restricted roles, sexual double standards and the decline in equality. During this period a large number of women helped shape various moral, religious, social and legal reforms. They also participated in the slavery abolition movement, temperance, economic reform and so on.

In the Asian context, particularly in India, the reform movements and women's movements were connected with the Independence Movement. The status of Indian women should be valued only after considering the complex problems such as the caste system, customs, religion, tradition, joint
family system, superstitions and so on. Here eminent men, along with capable women, fought against prevalent social evils. The deep rooted male dominance had devalued women's status and position. Many social reformers who were disgusted with the social evils, ardently tried to liberate women from their pitiable plight.

After discussing the origin, the aims and objectives of feminism, the general biased conception of feminism and the real ultimate goal of feminism, it is necessary to trace the women's movements and their relation with literature. As has been pointed out by Herbert Marder:

The effects of this growing women's movements is apparent in the literature of the time. Many important writers were influenced by feminist ideas and a significant part of the social criticism in Victorian novel has to do with the grievances of women.

In fact, feminist ideas have influenced writers not only in England in the Victorian period, but in all countries at all times where women have been struggling to gain equality. India is no exception. Socially, intellectually, politically
and culturally there has been a great influence of England on India. It is interesting to trace how much India was influenced by English in Women's Movement or whether she was influenced at all. A brief survey of the Women's Movements in England is given, before going over to the assessment of the women's position in the Indian Society and the role of the Women's Movements in improving it.

The Women's Movements in England:

English women's status and position in the Victorian era and earlier could be better explained in tracing the origin of the English word 'Woman'. The original word 'wif man' i.e. 'wife man' indicates that a woman's status and power are valued (or determined) only by considering her marital status or by her relationship to a male. In the 14th century the "f" was dropped to say 'wiman' and in the later stage it became "woman".

A Victorian cliche is that the last thing a man would civilize would be woman. The Victorian and Pre-Victorian morality has puzzled many philosophers, scholars, psychologists, sociologists and social reformers. Even the Victorian dress (heavy whale corsets, many petticoats, hats,
full sleeves, long restraining skirts and face veils) is symbolic of Victorian social attitudes and morality. Gerrit Smith, a reformer wrote of Victorian dress:

"So long as she remains in her clothes' prison, she will be dependent and poor."

The contemporary feminine ideal of the Victorian was that of wife and mother. They were considered as the source of all virtue, purity and love, and they represented the conscience of the Victorian society. Novelists, poets, moralists and philosophers personified the domestic role of women in their work with a universal appeal and dimension.

The heroines of the Victorian novel appear pale and anaemic. As Francoise Barch puts it:

"With Pamela, Clarissa Harlow and Olivia, Richardson and Goldsmith introduced into English literature the stereotype of the fragile heroine, pure and innocent, more attached to virginity than to life; a stereotype which was to dominate the Victorian novel."

For example, Mrs. Gaskell's heroine in North and South embodies charity and philanthropy. Thackeray's novels teem
with typical Victorian women, who are idealized as sweet, pure and innocent. Even in more realistic writers like George Eliot and Anne Brontë, we can find traces of this traditional cult.

But one can also see the sharp criticism of a wife's position and the social status of a spinster as against the idealization of 'homely woman'. Some writers were equally aware of the way women were subjugated and fettered in the name of social values, family and legal conventions. They felt that woman was a victim of narrow minded ideas and conventional morality. For example, Jane Austen's novels. Though her description of a social class is superficial, it gives insight into the life, manner and way of life of a definite social class. Her irony and sarcasm expose the influence of wealth, fashion and snobbery in the lives of people. And she shows its effect on women's psychology and their social status. Charlotte Bronte too attacked the traditional roles that were attributed to a woman. In Villette and Jane Eyre she shows her feminism in her resentment of the psychological bondage of women in society. Jane Eyre and Caroline Helston are shown as refusing to conform to a social hierarchy and remain cloistered in the narrow limits of wedded life. Françoise
Basch says about the heroines of George Eliot thus:

These heroines form an admirable transition between the Victorian stereotypes of the wife, mother, the old maid, the impure woman and the characters of self conscious feminists, such as Sue Bridehead in 'Jude the Obscure' and H.G. Wells' Ann Veronica, who attack the traditional role of the woman as well as other fundamental social institutions. Against this literary transition we can notice another transition in the social history of England. The transition in the social attitude, values and status of women which is brought about by women social reformers and other activists.

Women

The early British activists shared the same background as that of American social reformers. The origin of British Women's Movements can be traced from the middle class women's effort to improve social conditions by charity, legal and moral reforms. These early activists like their counterparts in America fought against social maladies like poverty, slavery, deteriorating jail conditions, employment inequalities and so on. They all came from reformist-minded families and belonged to the
reform sect in Christianity, i.e., the Quakers. They formed women's organizations that worked for a wide variety of social issues. These early activists were 'corporate Feminists' in ideology, who demanded legal reforms and equality in politics. In this way it was appropriate for them to concentrate their efforts on the suffrage issue. The women's organizations presented a petition to Mr. John Stuart Mill in 1866. In 1867, he spoke in Parliament in support of this issue, expecting an amendment to be passed to include women in the 1867 electoral reforms. A Central Committee was formed in 1871 from the women's organizations, which focused its attention to gain the right to vote. To reach this goal, they organized meetings, filed petitions and sought the support of the sympathetic male members of the parliament.

In the later years, especially in the period between 1905-1914, England witnessed a reverse of the Victorian standards, when women changed their tactics from meetings and parades to the militant tactics of stone throwing, illegal marches and hunger strikes. In 1903, "The Women's Social and Political Union" (WPSU) was founded in Manchester under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst. They were radicals and believed that women might fight out the way to emancipation by whatever means were opened to
them. Their militancy gained much publicity in England and thus began the heroic phase of the Women's Movements in England. The British militant women's suffragist organization unlike the American counterparts, relied on action to convince society and orthodox people that they were equal to men.

The impact of the Industrial Revolution is seen on the British Women's Movements too. Its new material value systems suffocated women in their restrictive domestic roles. The mid-century criminal records in England show 1500 cases (average) of brutal assault committed annually by husbands against their wives. The inner tensions they experienced, along with the discontentment in life prompted a mass involvement of women in social activities. They abandoned the typical norms for female behaviour characterized by Barbara Welter in The Cult of True Womanhood as piety, morality, chastity, domesticity and submission. When the women of upper and middle classes demanded equal rights and freedom of movement, the working class sought equality in economic status and improvement in their working conditions. So the Women's Movements as a whole indicate their effort to widen employment opportunities, educational opportunities and legal equality. As part of this effort
some women published *The English Women Journal* (1857) in London. They advertised job opportunities for women in this journal and printed articles that dealt with problems pertaining to women and her employment.

The married women's property Act passed in 1882 was also considered as a decisive step in the economic emancipation of women. Here, Barbara Smith Bodichon's name is worth mentioning. An early champion of women's rights, she questioned the soulless existence a woman had to suffer under the so called wing of protection from her husband. Assisted by the male members of the Law Amendment Society and British Association she tried to get the legal rights of men extended to women also.

After the first World War Britain enfranchised women who were above thirty. During the war period there was a sudden change in the social attitude towards women. Women were needed to participate in war by taking up various important jobs. Daughters from decent families (who were secluded once) went out to work and walked about unchaperoned. It was accepted as a matter of course and without any disapproval. After the war the British women's movements concentrated on constitutional changes and legal
equality. So the constitutional organizations combined together to form the 'National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship' (NWSUC). During the final stages of the movements, women changed their tactics and this change led to great political visibility and public support in favour of the women's movements. About this period, as has been expressed by Strachey -

British women were in the main, free both in their persons and the women's movement was reaching its height. 15

Viola Klein has observed:

..... it can be said that with regard to political rights, property rights, and educational facilities - the three items which make up the feminist programme - the progress achieved during the last decades was immense. 16

The effects of the new consciousness created by Women's Movements is visible in the literature of the time. The writers who were influenced by feminist ideas had often indulged in aesthetic social criticism which had much to say about the wretched conditions of women. Novelists and other writers created unforgettable living female characters
like 'Jane Eyre', 'Dorothea Brooke' and 'Tess of D'Urbervilles'. One of the remarkable portrayals of feminine dilemma and confusion is the character of 'Nora' by Ibsen. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) gave an irresistible call to women to rise up from the age old slumber of contentment and to consider themselves as human beings first. The immense support it (*A Doll's House*) gave to the women's cause is seen in the fact that the revolt of women did not remain confined to the limits of a few western countries but it went farthest to Soviet Russia where complete equality of the sexes was introduced after the Russian revolution.

The history of Women's Movement in England, America and the other European countries is the same except in a few Catholic countries like Spain, France and Italy. In America the first Women's Convention was held in Seneca Hall, New York in the year 1848, and gave a thrust to the Women's Movement. The Movement took a definite shape when women demanded the right to vote. After having gained the right to vote Women's Organisations tried to improve the status of women. The 19th century witnessed a deep impact of feminism in the history of women's struggle against inequalities. The root cause of this sudden outburst
the
was the effect of the Industrial Revolution, as is seen in England. Men's pedantry led to complete seclusion of women and this denied them freedom for their individual will and self-employment. This and the Society's double standards sowed seeds of discontentment in the psyche of many women. The spots of volcano that lay buried in them gradually erupted and gave them strength to fight injustices practised against them. The Women's Organisations in America have been quite vocal, but they have not succeeded in getting Equal Rights in all spheres. So the fight is still going on. In Italy, the orthodox Christians shunned the thought of women longing to discard what is 'natural' to them. From infancy they drummed into their children's ears that girls are second class citizens and God had created women to please men and bear his children. Their argument was that nature had designed women in that way and a deviation from God's will or nature's way was a sin.

Teresa Assensio Bruginatelli, an Italian, says that Italian women's status was not much different from that of 'domestic slaves':

The laws adopted in recent years concerning women's rights have changed many things; nevertheless, the strength of traditions, and the inertia they breed are still very strong.
She says that Italian women are still ignorant of their roles in life and are shy to exercise their will to determine the path for their individual development and personal fulfilment. She quotes that the level of employment of women in Italy is practically the lowest in Europe, that is about 19%. This economic dependence of women on men speaks much about the inferior social status and the discriminations which they have to face in family and society.

In her remarkable novel entitled *The Hapless Planet* which won her a national literary prize, she depicts incidents and situations she witnessed in the patriarchal system in the so-called 'paradise in miniature'—Italy. She speaks about the inspiration:

..... the life and the society that surrounded me seemed so horrible that I had to spill into pages of my novel all the feelings that beset me and the tragedy which I saw all around.

The Women's Movement in India

The condition of Indian women has been in a way much worse than that of women in the western countries. They have suffered and suffered for long in silence. They have been
the victims of social evils such as child marriage, early motherhood, condemned widowhood, female infanticide, seclusion and so on. They were denied education. They had no right to property. Their status was that of a chattel and were at the mercy of men. The worst crime that was committed against them was the practice of 'sati'. Fortunately religion has played a major role in victimising them. Perhaps nowhere in the world has religion dominated and regulated the day to day life of a woman as it has done in the case of a Hindu woman. The socio-religious outlook and value systems of the orthodox Hindus has been very rigid and biased against women.

An adequate perception of the gradual development of Indian Women's Movement and the Indian women's present social status can be achieved only by understanding the foundation and background of Indian culture value systems and the gradual change in the socio-religious outlook of Indians. In the course of Indian history, there emerged different value systems and ideals of womanhood. The status and position of Indian women underwent changes at different times by the rise and fall of civilizations and by the impact and assimilation of foreign values.

For the convenience of this study, Indian
History could be divided in the following way:
the Vedic period, the Epic period, the Smriti age, the period of Muslim rule, the period of British rule which witnessed the freedom movement and lastly the post-Independence period which gave rise to the emergence of the 'new Indian woman'.

The Vedic period (3000 BC - 800 BC)

The Vedic literature and the Sutras manifest the candid position of women. Women were considered equal to men in all respects, much contrary to the later Hindu value systems. Women had the freedom of will and action. And the girls were brought up by the same value systems as those of their brothers. There was 'Upanayana' for the daughters too and the girls wore the sacred thread like their brothers. The girls had full freedom for their spiritual progress, intellectual development and personal fulfilment. So girls grew up as individuals with the
capacity and ability to pursue their interests in life, unhampered by any social customs like child marriage, dowry system and Purdha system. There was no social stigma attached to widows. On the other hand, widows in the Vedic age enjoyed equal rights to remarry. 'Sati' was unknown and they were entitled to perform any religious rites. When the life of a woman did not revolve around the whims and fancies of a man, she could pursue and divert her talents into any channels. This is why women in the Vedic period could honourably lead a life of celibacy and become mendicants (sanyasins).

Vedic women were considered as the embodiment of beauty, culture, civility, valour and wisdom, and they could before the world as unique emblems of femininity.

The Epic Age (6th century B.C.)

The bulk of Ramayana is believed to have been composed before 500 BC, but some of the additions seem to have been added centuries later. The Mahabharata, in its present form, is rather considered as an encyclopaedia of moral teaching than a mere epic, and includes compositions composed in a period between 400 BC and 400 AD. The characters in both the epics supply Hindus with
examples of the ideal man and woman. Rama and Sita who have become also objects of intense devotion. The heroes and heroines of the epics resemble modern Hindus in some respects and they serve as models and examples to their Hindu descendants. For instance Sita seems to be a very modern woman, a real 'New woman' in the truest sense of the word. She is represented as self dependent and self fulfilled. Though she was mild, she was strong as a thunderbolt, in decision-maker, especially at the time of her 'Swayamvara' and when Rama was about to depart for 'Vanavasa'. She was devoted to her husband to the very core of her being yet was dignified and unflinching in her self respect. So is also Draupadi, the heroine of the Mahabharat. Like the women in the Vedic Age, women in the Epic age too enjoyed full opportunities to develop their individuality. Women lived a glorious life unhaunted by rigid conventions and unreal loyalties. Like men, women had every right to choose their own husbands by 'Swayamvara'. A passage from the "Anusasana Parva" explains the full freedom and status of independence which women enjoyed during the Epic Age.
A son is like one's own 'Atmam' or soul itself and a daughter is one and the same like a son.19

The Puranic and the Smriti Age

After the Vedic and the Epic periods we see a sudden rigidity in the social system and values. Even the 'Varna system' gradually became so rigid in the later periods, that the status and freedom of movement of women started deteriorating by the emergence of new religious norms and conventions. They inhibited women from living freely and behaving freely for the fear of transgressing the written and unwritten moral codes. Thus the self-esteem, self-confident, self-relying, valiant and emotionally stable Indian women became a dream of the past.

The most famous Dharmasastra is the Manu Smriti, commonly called the 'Laws of Manu'. This treatise deals with the rights, duties and roles of Hindus in all ranks and conditions of life. It served as the foundation of our present systems of modified Hindu law. And the eighteen Puranas, which record the story of gods, are interwoven with legends and traditions on many subjects.
Human and divine are closely connected with the laws of Manu as well as the Puranas. They exercise great influence on the religion of the present day, too. In fact, Smritis show a sharp bias against femininity. The foundation laid down by Manu on which the Hindu religion and society rest, stopped 'Upansayana' rites for girls and curtailed the Vedic individuality and status of women. The severity and strictness of the morality deepened and penetrated into the lives of men and women. Because of the pressure of the religious codes and beliefs, women had to retreat to spend dark unknown years in the enclosed inner apartments. This seclusion and the lack of contact with the real world destroyed their natural healthy human development. They slowly became obsessed, desolate, illiterate, dependent, weak, meek and hence the name 'abala' came into existence.

During the age of Smriti, women plunged into the deepest dungeons of inequality, injustice, harassment and deprivation. The Smritis said of women thus:

The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities.20
Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty.\textsuperscript{21}

and

She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the husband. She goes to hell. A woman who is after the sacred waters should wash the feet or the whole body of her husband and drink the water and she attains the highest place.\textsuperscript{22}

and

There is no higher world for the women than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displeased the husband.\textsuperscript{23}

and

None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is known to be a sensu­alist.\textsuperscript{24}

and

If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a
drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away.  

The ambivalence of the real status of women in the Smritis along with the other strict social roles assigned for women in the Smritis prompted the people in the later years to interpret Smritis according to their selfish and evil intentions.

The Period of the Muslim Rule

When Muslims invaded India in 712 AD, Manu's Law had become the core of Hindu society and the fabric of the Indian Hindu moral code. So to save the honour and prestige of Indian women from the plundering Muslims, innumerable restrictions were imposed upon them. Men were in a confusion. Under the pressure of the situation they were compelled to protect their women by complete seclusion. Thus women were forced to retreat to the inner regions of the zenanas. Child marriage, 'Sati and Purdah' came to be strictly reinforced to protect them from the powerful Muslims. In the name of protection, the Hindu Society curtailed their freedom of movement and
treated them indifferently. They were discriminated against in all fields of life, especially in marriage, widowhood, and marital status. So during the Muslim invasion period, Indian women lost all their freedom of choice and will. This was a period of stagnation, 'intellectual stagnation', for the whole of India. And women came to be denied education and were harassed piece of property by their men masters. The fate of muslim women was not much different. Men who interpreted Quranic words according to their selfish intentions considered themselves superior, powerful and the protectors of the dependent weaklings, i.e., women. The accepted norms like polygamy, 'Talaque' and 'Contract marriages' denied a woman's right as a human being.

Thus during the period of Muslim invasion and in the period of Muslim rule, Indian women ceased to visualise a separate existence other than some one's daughter or wife or mother. They moulded their children in this pattern and drummed into retracted the irrevocable moral codes under the notion that the blind imitation of these religious traditions would bring social status and virtue to their families. - The social evils and inequalities like the child marriage, female infanticide, 'Sati,' and ill
treatment of widows continued till the middle of the 19th century. Thus women remained separate and aloof in enclosed zenanas as stated by Margaret Muller:

"... woman lay condemned to a life long prison, a helpless, prostrate and pathetic figure, with feeble health, her natural keen sense dulled through inaction without the light of knowledge illuminating her vision, steeped in ignorance and prejudice groping in the dark, a martyr in the conventions of society in which she was born." 26

The British Period

Though the British came with the only motivation of trade, the historical exigencies required them to take interest in the political life. Their rule stretched nearly for one hundred and fifty years. And during that period their culture and education made its impact on the Indian society. The work of the English missionaries and English education created ripples of awareness and consciousness in the otherwise rigid, inflexible Hindu minds as a whole. English education and western ideas of liberalism brought new enlightenment to the educated people. Learning the essence of world culture, art,
Science and literature made the English educated Indians conscious of their morbid conditions and customs that strangulated both men and women in their human development. This new awareness motivated a few liberal minded men to work for women's emancipation - to fight the barbarous customs of 'Sati' and crusade for widow remarriage.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the first social reformers who raised an uproar among the educated elite and prompted them to restore the lost status and rights of Indian women. He had to face strong criticism from the biased orthodox caste Hindus who upheld the Hindu ideals of morality and chastity.

Reform societies and discussion groups arose in the urban elite centres which raised public consciousness. They petitioned the government to prevent hideous customs of 'Sati' and female infanticide. They also demanded widow remarriage and better treatment of the widows. The chief organizers of this movement were Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Pandit Vishnu Shastri. After much persuasion, cajoling and filing of petitions, the government of India passed an act permitting widow remarriage on the 26th of July, 1856. After experiencing the triumph of the
abolition of 'Sati' and gaining legal consent for widow-remarriage the 19th century reformers concentrated their attention on the other evil customs. They questioned the practice of polygamy by Kulin Brahmins and the low-caste people's marathon race for getting their girls wedded to one from the highest caste, the Brahmins. The unequal marriages of this type led to concubinage and prostitution which in a way affected the status of Indian women.

Parallel to the reform movements, 'enlightenment and awareness in the minds of Indians' was promoted by the movement motivated by the Theosophical society of India. This society was founded in 1825 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott and developed under the guidance of Dr. Annie Besant (1847–1933). Dr. Besant gave series of lectures in Madras under the title 'Wake up India'. The lectures that she delivered in 1914 were mainly on Indian religion and culture, but they stimulated call to thousands of Indians to wake up from their slumber and fight for freedom. It also prompted people to liberate women from their fettered life, from illiteracy, and child marriage. Her main concern and interest was education of the masses and particularly the education of the illiterate, down trodden women. To propagate her ideology.
Annie Besant founded the Central Hindu College at Banaras in 1898 and also some schools in other parts of India.

At the peak of social reform movements came Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's (1833-1866) preachings for spiritual reformation of the total humanity and the upliftment of women by directly appealing to the masses. He requested them to change their wanton notions and prejudices about women. He formulated the 'mother cult' and worship of Kali. His preachings influenced the people immensely and this in a way led to the improvement of the status of women. Swami Vivekananda zealously followed Paramahamsa's noble humanistic ideals. This ardent and brilliant disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa popularized his teachings in India and abroad. By his liberal thinking and unconventional behaviour Swami Vivekananda could assist women in their emancipation from the social barriers. He believed that first and foremost women should be emancipated from their artificial, social bondages and conventions so as to make India wholly free and modern. He worked for the cause of women, particularly in the field of education. He had many followers from various countries. Noted among them was Miss Margaret Noble, who was later known as Sister.
Nivedita. She, along with Vivekananda, worked a good deal for the emancipation of women. She opened a number of schools for girls in Bengal with Vivekananda's help.

Vivekananda's mission was carried on by the movements of 'Brahmo Samaj', 'The Arya Samaj', 'The Prarthana Samaj' and 'The Deva Samaj'. The basic objective of all these associations was one and the same: general reformation and the reformation, particularly, of the status of women and the eradication of the unnecessary religious dogmas. So the formation of 'Arya Samaj' (founded on August 20, 1928 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy) and 'Brahma Samaj' (by Swami Dayanand Saraswathi) added sparks of radical ideas which helped to kindle the fire of liberalism in northern India. These two organizations could create a qualm among the people about the conditions which prevailed around them, i.e., idolatry, caste system, polytheism, concubinage, prostitution, polygamy and the innumerable religious rites and vows that surrounded birth and life. The younger members of these Samajes were all advocates of the education of girls and the emancipation of women. In spite of the traditional orthodox Hindus' objections, the radical social reformers could provoke people and legislators to pass many laws in favour of women.
There were also women reformers who undertook the cause of women and Pandita Ramabai was the foremost among these women pioneers. A scholar herself, she had high aspirations and ambitions for women’s education in India. Being a widow she was fully aware of the predicaments of an Indian woman and her economical dependence on men. This motivated her to travel abroad for studies and later to start institutions for women. To raise the public consciousness that she wrote *The High Caste Hindu Women*, which gained much public sympathy in India as well as abroad. Pandita Ramabai was the first woman social reformer who laid a foundation for the freedom and education of Indian women.

Ramabai Ranade (1865-1922), the great wife of a great social reformer was another pioneer in the field of women’s education. She fulfilled the ambition of her husband by devoting her entire life to the cause of Indian women’s education. Dr. Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887), a relative of Pandita Ramabai, Francina Sorabji (1833-1910), her daughter Cornelia Sorabji, and Rukmabai, who rebelled against tradition and men’s domination to secure a seat in medical college, are the other outstanding women social reformers. These activists, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy,
sincerely tried to improve the status of Indian women by.
social work and by practising what they preached to the
public.

The period of Freedom Movement

The last decade of the 19th century could be called
the renaissance period in the history of India. It wit­
nessed a politically conscious nation preparing herself for
the freedom movement. Although the 'Indian National
Congress' was started mainly for a political goal, it later
included social reforms and emancipation of women as part
of its objectives. The Indian National Congress gradually
penetrated into the heart and soul of Indians. And Gandhiji
became the unquestioned leader of the 'Congress' and Indians.
It was he who took up the unfinished social reforms that had
already started at the beginning of the 19th century. He
realized that social evils like caste, child-marriage, ill-
treatment of widows, 'Purdah' system and unnecessary moral
conventions impeded the development and unity of India. So
his endless, courageous social work was invariably connected
to his major task of winning Indian Independence.

Gandhiji's untiring social work was for the
remoulding of the traditional Indian society in which men and
women would be equal and in which were no blind traditions or customs to strangled them. He even dared to condemn the religious scriptures that sanctioned and encouraged blind beliefs and customs which harassed women. Throughout his life, he worked for the upliftment of women. And he sternly advocated the freedom of women from their so called religious seclusion, the Purdah system and the dowry system which degraded women both morally and mentally. He said:

I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion she could labour under no legal disability not suffered by men. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. 27

Thus Gandhiji sincerely worked to improve the status of Indian women and it is this sincerity that made women of different stratas respond to his call wholeheartedly and join the political struggle. In a way he prepared a favourable ground for women to shed their inbred inhibitions and inferiority complex. Under the new conditions women threw away their separate entity and social bondages to join men in the political struggle. As an English observer puts it:
There was a breathtaking abruptness about the entry of Indian women into political life. One moment they were not there, the next they had sprung, like Athene from the head of Zeus fully armed into the forefront of the scene. 28

And thus the later period of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of the new India with liberalism, equality and tolerance as her basic principle. This and the socio-religious consciousness kindled by the social activities and religious reformers motivated Indian masses to consider the social degradation of women seriously and fight for the emancipation of women.

Women had formed a special organization of their own within the 'Congress' called the 'Desh-Sevikas'. They withstood problems and many hardships to popularize social reforms through non-violent methods. Women like Anne Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Uma Nehru, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur were some of the leaders who withstood painful experiences and actively took part in the freedom struggle. Sarojini Naidu was the most versatile among them. She was an eminent political leader, and
poetess who held important posts and also led women. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was another woman of letters who worked for the upliftment of destitute women. She was the first woman to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Council in the year 1930. It was she who brought the 'Devadasi Bill' before the Legislative Assembly, Madras and got it passed. She also founded institutions at Adayar for destitute women and orphans. Another woman political leader who contested the elections to a Legislative Council was Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya. She too took interest in women's movement.

Swarna Kumari Devi (1855-1932), the elder sister of Ravindra Nath Tagore was one of the writers of talents for the spread of rebellion and social reforms among Indian masses. She worked for the upliftment of poor widows and spinsters from the poor orthodox Hindu families.

All these movements - the nationalist movement, the religious movements and the social reform movements - indirectly paved the way for the Women's Movement, which, strictly speaking, is different from the feminist movement started in the western countries. In 1910 Bharat Stri Mahamandal, the first regular organization of women
Another Association for women was started in 1917 by Mrs. Dorothy Jinaraja Dasa, wife of the President of the Theosophical Society of Madras. This was called 'The Women's Indian Association.' This association attained wide acclaim and within a decade it founded 72 branches of its own. The members of this association worked devotedly in various fields for the social, political, economic, and educational development of women.

Another landmark in the history of Women's Movement was the All-India delegation for the franchise of women on 18th December, 1917, which was organized by Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, the then Secretary of the "Women's Indian Association". The team consisted of 14 women and was led by Sarojini Naidu. They waited on Mr. Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India to brief their grievances and demanded the right to vote. And in 1920 the Travancore and Cochin state (the present Kerala state) granted franchise to women and nominated them to the legislative councils. Thus some women had instant success in politics. But many of their unlucky sisters were still bound by unfair and baseless ancient laws and customs. The members of the Women's Organizations felt the urgent need for social reforms to liberate women from many
social inequalities. Though these rights - right of inheritance, right to divorce, freedom from child marriage and Purdah - had been long thought of by both the social reformers and religious reformers as early as the 19th century, they had been not implemented properly to reach the common women.

But "The All-India Women's Conference," which was established in 1927 under the chairmanship of Her Highness the Maharani Chimnabai Saheba of Baroda, took a decisive step in introducing many a social reform, particularly the right of inheritance. The main inspiration behind this All-India Conference of Women was Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, Who appealed to women all over the country to hold constituent conferences in princely states as well as in the British provincial states. The All-India Women's Conference held at Poona in January 1927 was attended by women representatives from various parts of India. The participants at the conference felt the need for education to create awareness and enlightenment among women. Most of the resolutions passed at the conference dealt with the education of women and other constructive programmes.

Later, in 1927, The All India Women's Conference formed another association called "The All-India Women's Conference
on Education and Social Reform. A few selected members of this association collected funds and conducted a nationwide campaign under the name of "The All-India Women's Education Fund Association".

Another important step in the history of Indian Women's Movement was their decision to submit a memorandum before the Franchise Sub-Committee of the "The Round Table Conference" held in London. A representative meeting was held in Bombay in April 1931 under the chairmanship of Sarojini Naidu. Along with a few members of the conference, she drew up a memorandum in cooperation with the Women's Indian Association. In their memorandum they demanded equal rights for women in regard to employment, power, honour and status. They also demanded the right to contest elections without any discrimination and rejected the idea of special reservations for women. They wanted the terms to be general for both men and women. The association made its view clear at the Round Table Conference in London.

Meanwhile the women's conference had agitated against the other social disabilities of Hindu women. They wanted a commission to be appointed to study the
ancient laws that fettered Indian women. One of their achievements of this period was the India Bill of 1935 which conferred the right to contest in the elections to be held in 1936. The hard work and devotion of the women's conference in raising the status of women produced high dividends at the end. A Hindu Law Reforms Committee was appointed in 1946 for the codification of Hindu Law, under the leadership of Sri Benegal Narsing Rao.

Ever since independence, many rights have been ensured to women. The constitution of India does not permit any kind of discrimination on the basis of sex. Women have equal opportunities for securing any profession or vocation. The Article 15 of the Constitution of India guarantees women's equality of rights and opportunity. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 gives women the right to divorce and the right to protection against polygamy. And the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 has secured Indian women the right to share in their father's property. Similarly, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Bill of 1956 gave more privileges and rights to women. As Pratima Asthana puts it:

In a nutshell, English education postulated social rejuvenation which brought about
significant changes in the outlook of women themselves .... The reformers who advocated the emancipation of women aspired to re-install them on their honoured seat of ancient glory and splendour ....

Western impact restored the long-lost self confidence of Indian women. This warm light of self-consciousness dawned upon them to enable them to play a unique role in the changed socio-economic life of the country.

The middle period of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of "New Woman" educated, intelligent, capable and independent. A few of them took to writing. The novel as a new literary form and a strong medium for expression of ideas, attracted the attention of these women. As in England, which produced great women writers like Jane Austen, Bronte Sisters, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, India too has women novelists who have produced meritorious works.

In England and America, the leaders of the women's movement often proclaimed the contribution of some women literary artists for the cause of women through their
creative writings. And there are instances when the artists themselves spoke and wrote in support of women's cause or feminism. Virginia Woolf is such an example. The creative writing of Doris Lessing and Anais Nin are considered as purposeful utterances for the establishment of female identity and feminist role models. And feminists regard Sylvia Plath's works as expressions of the predicaments and agonies a woman has to face throughout her life.

The creative works of Indian women novelists in English too assess to some extent the changing patterns of the Indian society. Here there is material for the assessment of feminist trends or emancipation of women. Almost all the novels written by women after the Independence present social plot motives and themes that deviate or slightly deviate from the traditional stereotype plot motives and thematic expressions. These new expressions reveal the novelists' awareness of the emergence of the new woman and understanding of the obstacles that hamper a woman's healthy, natural development. They also reveal the status and position of women in India in a particular society or period. In spite of the constitutional guarantee of equality, inequality still persists in society. The vast majority of women in this country have yet to be liberated.
from the shackles of ignorance, attitudes, baseless values, blind beliefs, superstition and moral conventions. A few women in urban society breathe in much liberal atmosphere, but the vast majority still remain as ignorant about their right and status as before. Indian women have a long way to go to liberate themselves in the heterogenous Indian society with all its caste, economic and social inequalities. These inequalities are inherent in the traditional social structure, beliefs, attitudes, values and moral conventions of the Indian society. So contemporary Indian English fiction is bound to reflect these cultural and social interactions. And this assists us to scrutinize the novels from the feminist perspective in its broadest sense, i.e., the intense awareness of the novelists' identities as women writers and their aesthetic perception of the position and problems of Indian women in the traditional Hindu Society. As such it gives insight into the social set-up and status of Indian women.

As Roger S. Henkle puts it:

One of the objectives (of social novels) as we can all guess is to acquaint us with the nature of the society that is depicted. We learn what life is like, what the shape of society is, and what tensions exists
within it .... And thus when we encounter such a novel we must understand that in interpreting it, we are being asked to interpret our own lives, for the fictional and the real are too close to avoid transgressing meaning from one to the other. 31

I have selected the works of the major women novelists which clearly present a critical social realism and enlighten the readers about women's predicament and contribute to changes in the social attitudes and social institutions. A few of these novels give glimpses of the authors' personal concern of the precarious position in which Indian women are placed while following the traditional way of life and their irresistible need for an emancipated feminine identity. Some of these women novelists have sincerely tried to portray their observations and reflections on the plight of Indian women. This does not mean that all women writers are feminists and their main pre-occupation is social criticism. Their social realism is more than mere outward social criticism, because a work of art becomes universal when it expresses 'contemporary truth' (human experiences) by the best possible aesthetic interpretations. To put it in the words of R.L. Chambers:
What all writers of contemporary significance must have is the power first to enter fully into the common experience of their generation, then to present that experience or certain important aspects of it in a more intensified and coherently patterned form than life itself can show. This is what Dickens did, it is equally what Tennyson did.  

This is what the Indian English women novelists have done. To quote R.L. Chambers again:

They grasped what was important in the thought of their age, and grappled with its problems, mental and material, social and spiritual as their interest lay; they felt in their own hearts the pulse of its emotion. Then they transmitted the beat of that pulse into the rhythmical forms of literary art, not merely the word rhythms of prose or verse, but the master-rhythms of their large conceptions. David Copperfield speaks not with the voice of Dickens, but with the voice of England almost a hundred years ago.


"In my study I have made an attempt to identify the 'Contemporary truth' and catch the 'voice' of woman that speaks in the novels written by Indian
English women novelists. So the remaining chapters explore to what extent these novels penetrate "Into the common experience of their generation" and present life in condensed form, as R.L. Chambers puts it:

... enter fully into the common experience of their generation, then to present that experience or certain important aspects of it in a more intensified and coherently patterned form than life itself can show.34

I have selected for my detailed analysis and study, the works of four major Indian English women novelists published upto 1983: Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai.

There are a few more women novelists who have shown awareness and concern for women's problems: Rama Mehta, author of Inside the Haveli, and Attia Hosain, author of Sunlight on a Broken Column. I have made passing reference to the other women novelists who write with this awareness in chapter VII.
To sum up, in the present study, I have traced the feminist movements in the West first, and later on, in the Indian context since the concept of Feminism is originally a Western ideology and social phenomenon. It may be pointed out here that it is English education and English liberalism that brought a new enlightenment and consciousness in the Indian minds. India was ruled for centuries by the British, and obviously England wielded much influence, social, political and cultural on the Indians. By considering the above facts, the present chronology gives a better insight into the gradual history of feminist ideology and its impact on society, apart from providing a balanced view of the similarities and differences between the Feminist Movements in the West and India.

As has been pointed out earlier, the history of the feminist movements in India and abroad proves that all social reformers and Feminists, having different strategies and ideologies fought for the same, ultimate goal—the establishment of a woman's right as a human being.

Though all the Feminist Movements are basically the same, there are differences in the modus operandi of the Indian and the Western Movements due to certain cultural and historical factors. And comparing to the Feminist Movements in the Western Countries the women's Emancipation Movement in India was started rather late. The impact of English education and awareness of Western ideas of liberalism...
motivated a few liberal minded men to fight against social evils in general. In a way the emancipation of women received top priority with zealous social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Pandita Ramabai. The Feminist Movement in India was part of the all-embracing social reform movement that took place in the first part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century. Strictly speaking the feminist Movement in India very much differs from the Movements that have swept England and America. The Women's Emancipation Movement in India was started by men! While women in England and America took the initiative in forming associations and fighting for their rights, women in India remained comparatively in the background with eminent men such as Gandhi who did the spade work for their emancipation. Unlike their Western counterparts, the enlightened men in India had no qualms about the emancipation of women. English educated Indian men wanted women to liberate themselves from all social bondages because they believed that improvement of the status of women was an inevitable requisite for Indian independence. In fact, the political struggle for freedom and the Women's Emancipation Movement were inter-related.

After Independence, however, women's problems still continued, though the constitution does not allow any discrimination on the basis of sex. So, even today, the
emancipation of Indian women or upliftment of the exploited women continues to be a problem which should be tackled by the society as a whole. The eradication of the sexual discriminations totally depends upon the co-operation of men and complete change in their social attitudes.

In the forthcoming chapters an attempt has been made to show how women novelists have shown their concern about women's problems. Many of their novels express the deep anguish and agony of many female characters and reflect the pitiable fact that many atrocities are still committed against women in the name of religion, custom, tradition, cultural values, social attitudes etc. In order to derive the feminist perspective in these novels, I have given a brief outline of the novels and focussed attention on the feminist problems that they deal with.
CHAPTER I

REFERENCES


9. Margaret Fuller, quoted from Gayle Graham Yate's *What Women Want*, p.34.


14. Ibid., p. 25


17. Teresa Assensio Bruginatelli, "In Defence of Women's Rights" quoted from "Soviet Women", No. 4, April, 1983.

18. Ibid.


