CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
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This Thesis attempts a fresh and revealing comparative study of the selected works of Triveni and Shashi Deshpande from the feminist perspective. It begins with an in-depth study of gender discrimination against women in a patriarchal society, examining woman’s position from a historical, socio-cultural perspective. It goes on to trace the origins of the feminist movement, its various groups, the question of feminism as it exists today in the West, drawing parallels with the status of women in India in the past and in the present. Triveni was a major writer of the fifties and sixties, and her novels are relevant even today. She has written twenty novels, sixteen of which are feminist in spirit. The other four novels deal with psychological subjects. Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in contemporary Indian English fiction because of her unequivocal feminist stance. Both Triveni and Shashi Deshpande discuss woman’s marginalization and deprivation within the framework of family and also in the larger social context. Both excel in delineating social, psychological, and personal turmoils and study them with a keen perception and deep insight. Their concern for human relations, gender oppression and their subtle exposure of the marginalized and repressed position of woman in a male dominated society, bring them closer to each other.
Triveni and Shashi Deshpande exhibit a common concern for the plight of woman. They depict woman's experience with a great insight and understanding. Their novels unravel new dimensions of woman's experience. The comparative study of these two writers will reveal certain similarities and differences in their handling of women's problems in a patriarchal society.

**Chapterization:** The whole thesis is divided into Six Chapters. The following is the chapter wise plan of this thesis

The First Chapter is entitled **Introduction.** It is divided into three parts namely Feminism, Feminism and Realities in the Indian Context and Image of Women in Indian Fiction. In the first part, a general discussion of Feminism is undertaken. The mid-twentieth century saw the development of a new awareness about women's marginalized position resulting in the commencement of women's liberation movement. The second part Feminism and Realities in the Indian Context makes a historical survey of the subordinate position of women and their exploitation in various ways. The third part Image of Women in Indian Fiction focuses on different images of woman is presented from different angles. Innumerable novels and the ideology of motherhood became one of the most significant emblems of the emerging nationhood of India. The widow as a protagonist reappears at a later stage in Rabindranath Tagore's and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's work adopting an increasingly bolder approach to the actualities of life. In The
Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao portrays the ideal woman by comparing herself with Mother Ganga.

In the Second Chapter, Women Novelists in Indian Writing in English and in Kannada, a study of women novelists in Indian writing in English and also in Kannada is undertaken. Women novelists’ expression of feminine consciousness brings out clearly the difference from that of the male novelists. Indian women novelists in English have dealt with the place and position of women in Indian society and their problems and plight from time to time. The earliest women novelists are Toru Dutt, Rajalakshmi Debi, Krupabai Sathianathan, Swarna Kumari Debi and Cornelia Sorabji. Their works aim at conveying their views on Women’s problems and on desired social reforms. The new Indian woman’s plight has been treated in sufficient detail by novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Bharat Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Arundati Roy, Shobha De, etc. They portray Indian women’s sense of frustration and their alienation. The beginning of 19th century saw the emergence of women writers in Kannada literature. In Karnataka, Nanjanagud Thirumalamba, R. Kalyanamma, Kodagina Gowramma, Giribale, Shyamaladevi, H.V. Savitramma and other women writers effectively portrayed the changing scenario in their writing. Triveni, M.K. Indira and Anupama Niranjan portray real life situations in the changing domestic patterns and social environment of ordinary life.

The Third Chapter, Novels of Triveni is divided into four sections. The study focuses on four themes. In the fifties and sixties, Triveni was a major writer of modern Kannada fiction. Though her literary life lasted only
a decade, she produced twenty novels and three collections of short stories. The central focus of Triveni’s novel is women’s experience. Her first theme is The Importance of Marriage and Family: Triveni was writing at a time when marriage and family occupied a major place in a woman’s life centered round these issues. She is one of the first woman writer to show that there is something vitally wrong and cruel in the institution of marriage, as far as the woman is concerned. The second theme is The Woman’s Point of View: Triveni’s writing focuses on woman’s plight in the midst of Hindu traditional society, the social problems, and her struggle for freedom. She grapples with the contemporary issues – the torture of prostitution, the evils of dowry system, the problem of widow remarriage, and lack of economic independence, etc., The third theme of Triveni is The Conflict between Tradition and Modernity: The progressive novelist, Triveni, expresses her views on patriarchal society and records a gradual change of attitude towards woman. Triveni can be described as a Modern Kannada writer with progressive ideas. The fourth characteristic feature of Triveni is The Psychological Novels: Triveni makes an effort to study human psyche with a sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of human mind. She has tried to present the different facets of the society, and the individuals losing the balance of mind and its consequences within the framework of family from woman’s point of view in her various novels.
The Fourth Chapter, Novels of Shashi Deshpande, an attempt is made to highlight the different themes in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Through her writing, Deshpande gives a realistic picture of contemporary middle class women. They are courageous enough to revolt against the attempts of men to marginalize them. The first section examines, The Importance of Marriage and Family in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. Her protagonists reflect great sensitivity, depth of understanding and awareness of orthodox virtue in matters of love and marriage. She highlights the difficulties of the modern women face in the family context. The second section focuses on The Woman’s Point of View; Shashi Deshpande is one of the foremost voices to deal with the women’s point of view. Her protagonists are not complete rebels but they learn in the course of their encounter with the harsh realities of life to generate in themselves the power to develop an inner independence. The third theme in Shashi Deshpande is The Conflict between Tradition and Modernity: Shashi Deshpande’s characters are shown very often as torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity.

In the Fifth Chapter, A Comparative Analysis of the Works of Shashi Deshpande and Triveni is undertaken for study. Shashi Deshpande and Triveni are two distinguished names in Indian literature, and they are well known for their ‘feminine’ mode of expression, for their honest views of man-woman relationship. Both Deshpande and Triveni delineate with keen perception and sensitivity the problems and suffering of women in marriage, who feel
entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, and shows their reaction to it in their novels. Some of their women accept their fate unhesitatingly, but most of them gasp for freedom. Further, Triveni and Deshpande both excel in delineating psychological and personal turmoils and study them with keen perception and deep insight.

The Sixth Chapter, forms the Conclusion of the thesis. In this chapter, the final analysis of the various themes in the work of Triveni and Shashi Deshpande is given in the Conclusion.

1.1 Feminism:

"Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is but absent from history."

(Woolf, A Room of One's Own)

This quotation brings out the irony about the place of woman in life. Men need her, love her, worship her and write about her but they do so in relation to their own selves. Women are an integral part of human civilization and culture. No society or country can ever progress without the active participation of women in its overall development. But women have been denied full justice: social, political, and constitutional, and are largely ignored as the "weaker-sex" all through history. The mid twentieth century
saw the development of a new awareness about women's marginalized position resulting in the birth of women's liberation movement. The term 'feminism' was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet called "L, Homme femme" to designate the emerging movement for women's rights. What exactly is the meaning of the terminology, "feminism" "female-ism" or "femaleness"? Feminism is essentially a belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men have.

Feminism is a kind of social revolt against the existing convention of the suppression of women. Feminism is not a science or a philosophy, but "The word feminism stands for sexual equality combined with a commitment to eradicate sexual domination and to transform society. It represents the major changes in social thinking and politics because only feminism radically questions the understanding of men and women and social structure which maintain the difference."2

Thus, feminism is a social force, aimed at ending the superiority of men in all spheres of life, both public and private. Feminism is purely a product of the Western society. This movement started in America and England. During the Victorian era, the position and status of women in these countries was not satisfactory. Women were denied voting rights, and not considered politically equal to men. In England women were not recognised as even citizens. Feminism as a political term for the equal rights of women came into use in England during 1891. But feminism was recognized in
public politics in Britain even during 1850 and the fight for franchise was the starting point for feminism in Britain. In other words, feminism stands for gender equality, independence, sexual freedom, reproductive rights, and equality of opportunity in every field. Hence, Feminism is known as a movement "of women, by women and for women."³

The concept of feminism developed over many years through the writings of feminist thinkers all over the world. Their masterpieces constitute the core or basis of feminist ideology. The feminists' fury against men, society, and the system created by men are reflected in these works. Then it gradually developed into a world wide cultural movement to gain complete equality with men.

Feminism is a more or less worldwide phenomenon today. Though it began in England, the American women were probably the first to wage a hard and long fought battle for equal rights and break into previously barred professions and win the right to equal education with men, to speak in public, to vote for and hold office and to own property. The first and the Second World War gave the movement a further push since women were required to serve as WACS and WAVES and to keep the home fires burning. Feminism is a movement with a long history. There were three basic positions of feminism: "(1) a conscious stand in opposition to male defamation and mistreatment of women; a dialectical opposition to misogyny, 2) a belief that the sexes are culturally, and not just biologically, formed; a belief that women were a social group shaped to fit male notions
about a defective sex, 3) an outlook that transcended the accepted value systems of the time by exposing and opposing the prejudice and narrowness; a desire for a truly general conception of humanity. 4

Feminism is a system of beliefs based on equality and is today a necessity. Men and women are born equal but society suppresses women and makes them feel inferior. Feminism is about rights and redressal, about justice and equality. Sushila Singh pertinently writes: "The feminist goal of equality with men has undergone a significant change in recent years. The woman centered perspective now locates specific virtues in the female experience."5 The cause of women's oppression is men's urge to dominate and control them. History is the story of the unchanging patriarchal structure through which men have subjugated women.

Feminism helps us to a better understanding of the condition women find themselves in. As the historian Linda Cordon says, feminism is "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it."6 The western feminist movement has emerged as a distinct social phenomenon from the time of enlightenment in Europe. It grew steadily, various issues mainly related to inequality between men and women were brought into the open. Education is integral to the emancipation of women. Literally and metaphorically Mary Wollstonecraft was its early formulator in the eighteenth century England. Virginia Woolf in the England of the nineteen-twenties voices anxieties about the need of economic and artistic independence for women. The anxiety that woman is viewed as man's
'other' rather than as an independent human being with her own rights and needs animates the work of Simone de Beauvoir in Post War France. Elaine Showalter in the American Academy has developed Gynocriticism, a model of women's culture over the nineteen-seventies and eighties.

Emancipation of woman should mean recognition of woman's inherent right to develop her own personality. She should be free to shape her career and her life. In other words, to be herself. Women experience deprivation, powerlessness or inequality of opportunity and treatment compared to men. In upper classes, where wealthy women do not work but enjoy the luxuries enjoyed by male family members, they are denied power, which is largely in the public domain. The golden chain ties them down and they live the life of luxurious slavehood. Feminism breaks the traditional view of woman as the weaker sex and the belief that her place is in the kitchen. It claims equality of the sexes and strives to achieve for women a role in society, which such equality warrants. This leads to a rethinking on gender relations reflected in life.

Feminism is a political perception based on two fundamental premises; 1) that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and 2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but of cultural construction of gender difference. This perception provides feminism with its double agenda: to understand the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender
inequality and then to change them. Thus feminism is defined as a struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression.

As Gayatri Spivak comments: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third world woman caught between tradition and modernization.” It is believed that the literature of a country reflects the cultural and sociological aspects of its people. But literature all along has been turned to the point of view of the male element. Woman is often ‘muted’ or ‘marginalised’ in literary works. The role of woman was restricted by her womanhood. Therefore, the real experiences of women were not reflected in literature. But with the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that their inferiority was not ordained by heaven, but created by men on earth. Women realized that the system of patriarchy which came into existence with the birth of the first woman, no longer served the needs of the rapidly changing society where women were trying to emancipate themselves and define their potential. Revolting against their marginalization they have started questioning sexual politics and gender differences. The main objectives of feminism are to improve the living conditions of woman, her position and status in society. Margaret Fuller makes this idea clear by arguing that women want to be free in their thinking and action and not to imitate anyone.
As Margaret Fuller quotes:

"Women did not necessarily want to be like
Men but wanted to be free."8

Today's women are more open to the world than their predecessors were and possess an admirable curiosity. The most important contribution made by feminism and feminist researchers lies in its fundamental premise that 'Woman' is a valid and necessary category in any feminist inquiry or research. Women have common experiences by virtue of being women and these shared experiences derive not casually from supposed 'biological facts'; but women's common experience of oppression. Feminist inquiry thus seeks to give a legitimate place to this experience of oppression and subordination, which was absent in previously generated knowledge.9 Feminist theories begin with the manifestation of an ongoing dialogue between women and men. They illustrate the way in which the world and the academy intervene in the lives and processes of each other. The revolutions that make feminist theories possible do not always happen in the public domain. Education, history, and literature which are public institutions have belonged to men for much longer than to women.

The first major feminist Manifesto, A Vindication of the Rights of Women, namely the education of women, was written by Mary Wollstonecraft. It was published in 1792. Wollstonecraft married William Godwin, also a revolutionary thinker, in 1797. Through this work, Wollstonecraft attacked the social and economic system. She strongly
demanded equal opportunities for women in the field of education, economics, and politics. She was concerned with the status of women, and women’s rights, which were seen in the context of human rights in general. Men and women alike must be involved in revolution. The ideals of liberty and equality were thought to apply to both men and women. There is the related point of the nexus between the campaign for equality in gender-based issues (feminism) and class-based issues (socialism). In her introduction, Wollstonecraft demands that women should be treated as human beings:

Dismissing, then, those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex, and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone.¹⁰

A Vindication is the first document where full humanity of women is asserted and the author insists upon its recognition. Even today when a certain amount of educational and political freedom has been attained, the recognition and acceptance of women as independent, individual human beings, having their own independent personality, remains the crucial issue.
One of the strong male supporters of women's cause was John Stuart Mill who in his *The Subjection of Women* (1869) showed serious concern over some of the issues earlier raised by Wollstonecraft. He also felt the need for improved education for women in all spheres and said that the power of earning is essential to the dignity of women. He fought for liberty and individual freedom. He argued that women's oppression was because of the system and condemned it as "domestic slavery". He believed that the existing subordination of one sex is the chief hindrance to human improvement. Mill held the view that the subordinate position of women is not natural but is the result of political oppression by men. He maintained that the masculine domination of the family was a corrupting influence, making boys selfish and girls abject.

Contrary to this, there are writers, philosophers and thinkers of all ages who have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven. JeanJacques Rousseau makes quite damaging statements about women:

> Women have or ought to have, but little liberty, they are apt to indulge themselves excessively in what is allowed them. Addicted in everything to extremes, they are even more transported at their diversions than boys.¹¹

In other words, gender is the product of culture conditioning. Thus women may be stereotyped as being compelled to have certain 'womanly' qualities. Which restrict them to a subordinate role. The earliest feminists
were women who were active members of Civil Rights movements, who protected against the Vietnam War and struggled for the abolition of slavery. This revolutionary feminism was a political necessity to fight against racism, sexism, capitalism, and patriarchal society.

English fiction in the eighteenth century achieved, among the new topics, the moral nature and status of women as one of the most important issues. Among the new authors there were women. The first major woman novelist to make her mark on English literature in a powerful way was Jane Austen, who became a publishing novelist in 1811. Her novels deserve to be called feminist, since they are concerned with establishing the moral equality of men and women and the proper status of individual women as accountable beings. The earliest wave of American feminism emerged in 1800, during the period of industrial development, which "provided the context for the first collective assault on traditional ideas about women's place."12

Contrary to widespread belief, eighteenth century feminism did not begin with Mary Wollstonecraft, nor was it specifically concerned with political equality of women, though it is true that from the start it carried political implications, initially brought into the open by Catherine Macaulay and Wollstonecraft in the early 1790s. The feminist impulse showed itself first in the objection to the assignment of women to an inferior status as depraved beings to which the Biblical story of the Fall of Man is at least partly responsible. The essential claim of Enlightenment feminism was that
women, not having been denied powers of reason, must have the moral status appropriate to rational beings; formed in the image of a rational God. The claim that women of the middle and upper classes should be taught to think may not now seem particularly revolutionary. But women had, in orthodox moral discourse, been commonly consigned to a special consideration with slaves, the unlettered and lunatics.

The Enlightenment feminists were what Virginia Woolf called 'the daughters of gentlemen'. But even though they might restrict their claims to women of the middle class, it did not escape their opponents that the arguments they used had equal validity for the labouring classes in England, and for the unhappy Africans enslaved in America, whose plight, by the end of the century, had speared the conscience of almost everyone who had a conscience. Ibsen, in his drama *A Doll's House* created the character of Nora, who was treated as no better than an object fixture in the house dedicated to her husband and children. The women, who used to bring up children, look after their men, nurture familial and social relationships and maintain social values suddenly awoke to intense introspection and discovered their status of non-being in family and society. Feminism would encourage women to choose her partner in marriage according to her will. It does not allow woman to accept her husband as master or overlord and allow herself to be his slave. It is a dynamic power in the hands of women, which removes the cobwebs of the past and earns a respectful life for them.
Toril Moi distinguishes between the terms 'feminist,' 'feminine' and 'femaleness.' Feminism is described as 'a political situation'; 'femaleness' as a matter of biology and 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics. Toril Moi raises several questions regarding a feminist approach. Works by women on women also do not necessarily exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment. She also asserts on the necessity of deconstructing the opposition between the traditionally 'masculine' and 'feminine' values.

Marilyn French is better known for her novels, *The Women's Room* (1978) and *The Bleeding Heart* (1980). In her feminist book *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1986), she defines feminism as "a political movement demanding access to the rewards and responsibilities of the 'Male' world, but it is a revolutionary moral movement, intending to use, political power to transform society, to 'feminize' it." She argues that patriarchy suppressed women and worshipped power and controlled every essence of nature and brought the world to the brink of extinction. According to her, any change in society is possible only when men become co-operative and believe in community life. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar present the problems of nineteenth century women writers. They say women writers could not present the real woman and often conformed to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. In *The Golden Note Book*, Doris Lessing boldly describes the female sexual experience and other taboo subjects in an amazing
manner, which was shocking for an average male reader. She depicts marriage as an emotionally stifling and tyrannical institution for women.

Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1969) argues that women are politically and socially oppressed by the patriarchal system and shows how this ideology is present in the works of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet. She describes the relation between the sexes as based on sexual politics. In *The Female Forum* (1987) Rosalind Miles argues that while women have been successful in writing fiction and particularly novels, there has been a strong tendency for women’s writing to gain them the status of ‘honorary men’; rather than that of talented writers in their own right.

Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* appeared in 1963. ‘Feminine Mystique’ is the term used for the identification of womanhood with the roles of wife and mother. The book challenges the popular belief that a woman’s place is at her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood and domestic works. She wants to seek fulfilment within marriage. Most of the women whom Friedan interviewed were married, had comfortable life of devoted wife and loving mother. Friedan complains against society for not permitting women to gratify their basic needs of self fulfilment to grow seeking an independent identity, she writes in the preface: “There was strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique.” Thus Friedan condemns society for
not permitting women to gratify their basic needs of self-fulfillment to grow and fulfill their potential as human beings.

In the nineteenth century in particular we find that women writers like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Dorothy Richardson, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Margaret Drabble anticipated some of the present day feminist issues in their respective works. They argue that: “The fault lies not in our stars, our harmones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces but in our institutions—woman is made, not born.” Virginia Woolf made significant contribution to the feminist literature. She spent her adulthood largely among friends of the Bloomsbury group, which was London’s centre of intellectuals comprising painters, writers, and critics. Her own collections of childhood largely focused on repression and abuse. Woolf wanted a feminine prose, which was free from the limitations to express female experience. She expresses emotions and feelings rather than actions in her works, her famous novels, Mrs. Dalloway (1925) To the Lighthouse (1927) and The Waves (1931). She used the stream of consciousness technique for the description of the interior psychological monologue of the protagonist. Her essay A Room of One’s Own was published in 1929.

She demands economic independence (which she places later at five hundred pounds a year) and domestic space (privacy within the home and stretches of freedom from cares associated with it). She also constructed an imaginary picture of Shakespeare’s sister as talented as the dramatist. She dislikes the possessiveness and love domination in men. She quotes:
There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place, but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex described itself.¹⁷

Woolf's fundamental contribution to feminism is her argument that gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and changed, and that gender inequality begins very early in the patriarchal family which in turn leads to fascism.

American theorist Elaine Showalter shifted the focus of attention from 'woman as reader' to 'woman as writer' in her book *A Literature of Their Own; British Women Novelists* (1977). Here, and later in an essay, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", she uses the term 'Gynocritics' for establishing female literary tradition because feminists complain that they have been muted by their male counterparts. Gynocritics also aim at theorizing women's literary production. It is being emphasized that women have a way of writing, which is totally different from that of men. She distinguished succeeding generations of British women novelists into three stages; namely, feminine, feminist and female. She explains:

...Woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary
history; and of course, studies of particular writers and works.\textsuperscript{18}

The essay \textit{Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness} highlights the need for feminist theories to work out a framework they can share. She also suggests Gynocritics theories, which are centered on the experiences of women as writers, through which she explores biological, linguistic, and psychoanalytical models of difference in women's writing. \textit{The Second Sex} posits the existence of the myth that "woman" is man's other, in European thought. This myth says Beauvoir, subordinates and alienates women. Man always thinks that he is in the right. Man considers himself the subject and absolute and woman is the other. She quotes:

She is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to be made as a sexual being. For him she is sex, absolute sex, no less...she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is -he subject, he is the Absolute she is the Other.\textsuperscript{19}

Simone de Beauvoir is a radical feminist. She argues that in patriarchy women have been forced to occupy a secondary position in relation to men. She observes that this secondary position is not imposed of necessity by natural 'feminine' characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of social conventions and education, which have been under the control of men. She opposed the women's role, which is based entirely by the biological fact of sex. Woman is seen only as a sexual entity. She observed
that woman is defined in relation to man, never the other way about. She also describes the issues of unwanted motherhood, the unmarried mother, and abortion. In conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that women should be freed from the bonds of slavery. She recommends that women writers should develop a “Vocabulary of the body” to describe the female sexual behaviour through their novels.

Some limitations apart, feminist criticism has been a major critical revolution. It influences women writers to write about their own emotions and experiences, which were earlier considered as personal, boldly and unselfconsciously. It has helped in raising consciousness in gender related issues and hoping for some gradual change in the stereotype division of gender roles. However, women’s writing at the moment appears to have acquired an importance more than ever before. Women have started questioning the age-old oppression and colonization. Women’s writing with all its variety, timidity and marginality has been slowly moving to a dimension where we find them asserting themselves and some of them has already received international recognition.

1.2 Feminism and Realities in the Indian Context:

Indian women are placed in a paradoxical situation in life. There is a great difference between the idealized concept of women in Indian myths and scriptures, and her position in real life. On the surface woman enjoys a very high status and is known as Devi (Goddess), Lakshmi (Goddess of
wealth), or Shakti (Goddess of power), but in real life she is harassed, oppressed and tortured in various ways. Female infanticide, sati, harassment of widows, rape, family violence, dowry deaths in recent times are some of the visible forms of the oppression of women. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “As women begin to realize their strength, as they must, in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.”

Some of the major religions of the world have looked down upon women as evil or as items of property or as weak beings requiring constant protection. Christianity considers women as evil because of the mistaken myth of the fall of man. Islam thinks of women as no more than items of property belonging to men and having no personal rights and who can be cast away by uttering the word Talaq three times when the master gets tired of them and these unfortunate women can not even claim maintenance after divorce. Hindus consider women to be weak creatures constantly in need of protection by their fathers, husbands and sons. Buddhism considered women incapable of serious public work.

The most famous Dharmashastra Grantha (Book) is The Manusmriti, commonly called the ‘Laws of Manu’. The treatise deals with rights, duties, and roles of Hindus of all ranks and conditions of life. Smritis show a sharp bias against femininity. The foundation was laid down by Manu. He prohibited ‘Upanayana’ 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. They slowly became
obsessed, illiterate, dependent, weak and hence the name 'abala' came into
existence. As Manu said; “Day and night women must be kept in sub-
ordination to the males of the family, in childhood to the father, in youth to
her husband, in old age to her sons....” Even though the husband be
destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be worshipped as
god.”21 The world famous Smriti on women passed by the lawgiver Manu is
a complete range of the Indian view of womanhood that relates vitally to the
Indian fabric of living.

In the Vedic period, women have been the subjects of bitter
comments. Most of the hymns are attributed to only sons never to
daughters. Atharvaveda says ‘parents prayed for the grant of sons not
daughters.’ Digambar Jain religion states ‘Woman can never attain salvation
except by being reborn as men.’ Woman is considered as a polluted and
untouchable creature. In a male dominated society, woman has no choice, no
identity, and no freedom. Thus various religions and societies have their
own ideologies about woman. In a male dominated society man is at the
centre and woman is at the periphery. As Shri Radhakrishna says:
“Centuries of tradition have made the Indian woman the most patient
woman in the world, whose pride is suffering.”22
In popular language the word 'abala' or 'strengthless' is used as a synonym for 'woman' though we read in our epics and ancient history about women of power and remarkable attainment. From the past till the present, the blessings which woman receives from the elders at the time of marriage are 'Akhand Saubhagyavati Bhava'. This means she must die before her husband and that is considered to be sacred for woman. If she fails to die before her husband, she has to live the life of a widow, an inauspicious person, always unwelcome. Thus, an Indian woman faces a lot of pains at every stage of life. The critic Krishnaswamy's observation endorses this very point:

Double pulls that the Indian woman is subject to: between tradition and modernity, between Indian and western ways of living and values, between her dignity as a human being and her duty as a daughter, wife and mother, between her desire for autonomy and her need for nurture.23

The image and individuality of Indian womanhood are embedded and clearly laid down at the bottom of traditional beliefs, and mythology. Now she has lost her identity in the political wilderness of Independent India. The evils of westernization and permissiveness has also trained and tarnished the image of Indian woman and her reputation. Dayanand Saraswati considered woman as: "...The emblem of the creative power, and representative motherhood, she must be treated with respect in married life,
more so than in other relationships." A number of practices such as child marriage, purdah, sati, widowhood, prostitution, and devadasi system which suppressed the individuality of women were practiced. The Purdah system kept women confined to the four walls of the house. Thus prohibiting them from getting education, recreation, and participation in civic activities. Under the sati system (the practice of self immolation of the wife), many times young wives were found to invite death even against their wish. In the name of custom, many times innocent girls were exploited and made to lead the life of a prostitute. Woman played different roles in society. If a woman was burnt alive on the pyre of her husband here, somewhere else she played the role of a successful ruler of the country or a kingdom. If woman committed adultery here, at some other place woman was being worshipped by a set of devotees. In fact, child marriage, purdah system and the sati practice came into Hindu society as a result of the Muslim invasion from the North West. This was a sad decline because in pre-vedic times. Women were equal of men in learning philosophy and heroism on the battlefield.

Indian history has shown that women can be equal of men in every walk of life from the kitchen to the cour and to the battlefield. As philosophy of life, feminism opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society. Woman is tortured within her household by her own husband and father. This is considered customary. The woman is given no choice in life ever. She is not allowed to go to school. She cannot choose her
life partner, the kind of work, how many children she would like to have. She is not allowed any control over her own body.

Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women.

Chaman Nahal's definition of feminism:

I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome; whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.25

The culture that created a Sita and a Savitri has denied the rights of existence to woman save as wife, daughter, mother, sister etc. A woman is a non-identity, an appendage, and a slave to the master man. Her suffering is sanctioned by the norms of a patriarchal, male oriented culture. Indian women were given the same social, religious, political, educational, legal, economic rights as men. Modern woman today is no longer a pet, a baby under the control of man the protector, the master, the guardian. Particularly the position of Indian woman has been paradoxical. She has been the key person, the important figure in the family, and yet she has lived the life of slavery, subjugation, suffering, and suppression.

The issue of empowerment of women from the Buddhist perspective: The Buddha preaches his disciple:

Women are soon angered, Ananda,
Women are full of passion, Ananda,
Women are envious, Ananda, women are stupid.
That is the reason, Ananda, that is the cause,
Why women have no place in public Assemblies, do not carry
on business, and do not earn their living by any profession.26

Even the Jews made their morning prayer in the following manner:
"Blessed be God...that he did not make me a woman."27

Jaina philosophy traces out that the denial of woman's individuality
and of her rights in the material and spiritual realms that we find here. The
women of India share a history of not more than one hundred years. A close
examination into the gynecology of the 'woman' would reveal the facts of
the typical Indian woman- the Bharatiya Nari. It does not in fact bear traces of
an ancient civilization, running back to more than four thousand years. The
struggle of Indian women for equal treatment has made them conscious of
modern theories that endorse the inferior status of women. It also gives an
opportunity to reconstrue all those theories and has created a possibility of
discovering new theories. Indian woman had a different status in society; a
daughter was considered as a burden, a wife was regarded to be a non
person, for her only obligation was to cater to the needs of her husband and
his family. The status of a widow was even worse, for the social norms did
not permit her any relief or deliverance.

In the Rigvedic period, the description of the female body was within
the limits of decency but these limits were transgressed in later years. The
high status and position of woman slowly became less important and the Vedic insights were totally ignored. The complimentary role of woman in Vedic rituals was rejected in the period of Shatapatha Brahmana. The primitive, simple form of life did not contain any derogatory references to womanhood. But the ritualistic pattern of life enforces the degrading forces and that resulted in the lowering of the status of woman. However, now she has become aware of her rights and responsibilities. But this is not going to be easy or short-lived. And she has miles to go. Equality and liberty cannot be attained through constitution and legislation alone but through mutual understanding, mutual love, mutual respect and dilution of the egos, which are also important. Even in the contemporary scene, the master visionary among Indo-Anglican novelists, Raja Rao appears admirable for having attempted to render the ideal woman by comparing her with mother Ganga. In his masterpiece, *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao quotes:

Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound: woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge. Woman is fire, movement, clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama, she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, the touch, art; woman is 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 gcd’s inherence; the woman is
death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules,
for it is she, the universe.  

The eminent personalities like Mahatma Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy,
Agarkar, Maharshi Karve, Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar
made unique contributions to the feminist discourse of India. The rebellious
spirit of three medieval woman saints Auvaiyyar, Akka Mahadevi and
Mirabai was socially appropriated in such a manner that their dissent was
subsumed within the tradition of the Bhakti movement.

There is a good deal of truth in what Mrs. Deighton Pollack says in
her book, Women of Today: ‘In spite of much progress towards equality, life
remains and will probably always remain more difficult for a woman than
for a man.’ In India, the battle for women’s equality is won. But practice is
far from theory. The poor standard of living, the age-old traditions,
illiteracy, and ignorance may have been retracting factors in this regard.
However, the position of women in India as compared with the position of
women in other countries of the world is better. Indian women enjoy greater
privileges and are given their due in all spheres of life. India has produced
distinguished women like, Akka Mahadevi, Meerabai, Rani of Kittur, Rani
of Jhansi, Kastur Ba, Sarojini Naidu and many others.

From the beginning of the 1920s the independence movement,
Gandhian ideology and the spirit of patriotism liberated woman from the
kitchen. In this particular phase of Indian history, women left their homes
and joined the freedom struggle in large numbers and one can hardly visualize a more obvious violation of the then existing social norms. It seemed that women had been sanctioned temporary relief from the social restrictions normally imposed on them and they engaged in the pursuit of the freedom of the nation. In the fifties were to be seen the effects of modernization, industrialization and of the exposure to western life style on traditional Indian women.

Women in the family have always been traditional rather than rebellious. The main reason, according to Meera Shirwadkar, is:

Traditionally, the Indian woman accepted the framework of the family with a blind faith and rarely showed a rebellious trend. She continued to be docile, self-sacrificing; patient, loving, and capable of suffering...they suffer, submit, and adjust themselves to circumstances. This aspect of the woman's life has been portrayed by the women writers with sensibility and instinctive understanding.29

Thus, the recent novelists have shown the woman in a favourable light. She is courageous and independent. The Sita image is now slowly replaced by 'the woman as rebel and the woman as power.' It is very difficult to replace a model in feminine fiction. One cannot escape the myths with which one has grown up. We revere Sita and Savitri. They did something out of loyalty, out of dedication. Chaman Nahal observed that the first generation of Indian English writers such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao,
Mulk Raj Anand missed out to portray women characters, who had actively participated in the freedom struggle movement. In Mulk Raj Anand’s *Gouri* and Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow*, the emergence of independent womanhood is perceived to have attained a level of reckoning. Anand explores the rural setting reeling under superstition, irrationalism, ignorance and male-chauvinism, graphically indicating the helplessness of illiterate women. Nayantara Sahgal portrays the upper-crust glitter in metropolitan India beneath the superficial glamorous trapping woman reduced to an object of exhibition and no more than a commodity. In Indian history during the freedom movement from 1915 to 1947, Indian women played such a glorious role, especially, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu and others.

For example, Sarojini Naidu led the *Satyagrahis*, when Gandhiji was arrested in the *Salt Satyagraha*. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers* is a good feminist novel. His character, Kajoli, shows great courage throughout the novel. She fights against social system without any support of her father or her husband. Particularly Indian woman is conditioned by traditions and conventions. She has to accept the responsibility of being the custodian of the family honour and prestige. Usually an Indian woman never thinks of her own, personal happiness and comfort. She engrosses herself in the task of making others happy and upholding traditions and conventions. Modern woman does not accept the traditional beliefs blindly. She feels the need for self-expression. She wants to defy existing moral codes and social norms.

This either in theory or in practice had relegated women to a secondary
place. Modern women challenge the injustice and demand individual freedom and happiness, which sometimes results in the breaking up of family and relationships. In the latter half of the last century, many reformist movements raged war against orthodox and superstitious practices. But the new laws failed to reform social inertia. Consequently, the conditions of women, particularly of widows, continued to be pitiable. Child marriage was still practiced, education was not considered to be a necessary asset to women, remarriage for widows was not thought of, though a few bold reformists ventured into it.

Meanwhile a reformist Hindu association Aryasamaj, founded in 1875, or Brahmosamaj founded in 1828, encouraged education for women. Innumerable novels, songs, poems and other artistic creations glorified the Indian mother and the ideology of motherhood became one of the most significant emulsions of the emerging nationhood of India. Rabindranath Tagore in *Ghare Baire*, Bharatendu in *Bharat Durdasha*, Chandra Chatterjee in *Anandmath* and numerous writings of Aurobindo and Subramaniam Bharati are striking examples of the use of the ideology of motherhood to invoke and inspire the spirit of nationalism.

At least during the Freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi had discovered that social injustice, be it based on caste or sex, was inconsistent with the goals of the freedom movement. And his open stance against suppression of women ought to be mentioned here. During this important phase of Indian history, a large number of women left home and joined the
freedom struggle. In the 21st century the Indian parliament still hesitates to pass the bill of reservation of 33% for women, but Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was very clear in her opinion. She asserted, "...at the turn of the twentieth century it should be necessary for Indian women to pass resolutions demanding education when in the very first century India was already a great civilization and had produced women of the highest genius and widest culture."30

The woman's movement in India was both a necessary antecedent and a consequence of the changing social and political environment. Educational and social reforms for women formed an integral part of modernizing the country and society. Women had organized themselves in a variety of ways in an effort to improve their position within Hindu society. Women writers have been extending their range, pushing forward into new areas of women's experience. It has often been believed that women's writing is by nature limited and domestic. Women are not able to handle the 'big' issues such as war, politics and crime. Today's Indian woman writers are attacking the whole structure of sex, distinction with its implicit hierarchy of superior or inferior. As Simone de Beauvoir in her The Second Sex quotes: 'To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man.' Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India proved herself a poet and patriot. She showed much interest about women's liberation and feminism. She addressed the Indian social conference in Calcutta on "Education of Indian women". She questioned, how could a man dare to
deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? And yet, man has so dared in the case of Indian woman. That is why you men of India are today what you are, because your fathers, in depriving your mothers of their immemorial birthright, have robbed you, their sons of your just inheritance. Therefore, I charge you, restore to your women their ancient rights, for as I have said, it is we, and not you, who are real nation builders, and without our active co-operation at all points of progress all your congresses and conferences are in vain. Sarojini Naidu’s poem *The Pardah Nahiin* shows the woman with a veiled face behind the Lattices. She portrays the picture of her fellow women behind the pardah. She also points the temptations of the outer world. It shuts them off from its interests, and it robs them of sunlight and fresh air. Indian women are unemployed, superstitious and victims of all sorts of exploitation. Jawharlal Nehru, one of the keenest observers of women’s problems, said: “We talk of revolutions, political and economic, and yet the greatest revolution in a country is the one that affects the status and living conditions of its women. It is important that revolution has affected our women.”

Thus, Indian woman is a part of the process of the political and social change that came to India in the first half of the twentieth century. In India, many writers especially Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das took up the problems of women in their writings. Recent Indian English fiction reveals that the female protagonists are quite conscious of their identity and no longer submissive. Social environment has changed since
then, women writers in the contemporary world enjoy a greater freedom, no area of life remains the exclusive male preserve now, and women started exploring the hitherto prohibited regions of experience with an unusual sense of boldness. In *My Story*, published in the 1970s Kamala Das makes a deeply personal protest against the subordinate position of women. It is also her self-assertion and a plea for the equal rights of women in modern society. In a patriarchal society, a woman can only pretend to be satisfied and happy. One of Kamala Das's poems entitled *Suicide*, reflects woman's feelings:

But
I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
Of a happy woman,
Happy wife.

Mulk Raj Anand once remarked in an interview: 'Woman in our society has been so much humiliated that there is no way in which you can restore her dignity.'

Thus feminism provides a wide spectrum for the creation of a new sensibility to understand feminism and will remove our prejudice to look at it as an imported, fanciful ideology borrowed from the west. The central concern for feminism is the issue of empowerment of women with the concepts of identity and freedom.
1.3 Image of Woman in Indian Fiction:

The word 'image' is used in many different ways and contexts. The words rupa, bimba, murti, pratima are synonymously used in different contexts. The image of woman as we know is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of 'the otherness' of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is 'other' or alien. The literature has always held up a faithful mirror to the society under investigation, and men and women are among the subjects of an extraordinary study in literature, whether as victors or victims, as protagonists or mere creatures of a plot.

The image of woman is constantly defined in terms of male desire and male imagination. Woman is considered to be the object of male subjectivity. The traditional image of womanhood was imagined as the complementary of man in the context of the family. Not only is woman imaged as the half of man, she is also imaged as mother who gives birth to the new generation and is its first teacher. On the other hand, the image of the independent worldly woman was not esteemed in conventional society.

The novels written during the last two decades of the twentieth century give a full range of feminine experience and female psyche. The portrayal of women in tradition bound Indian society could not remain impervious to the new forces that had started impinging on the minds of
Many women writers reflect the social changes, which Indian society is undergoing. Their novels deal with the position of woman and her relationship with her husband. Modern women writers give a picture of women, which is totally different from the image of women of earlier days. But the image of an ideal woman rooted in a pan-Indian ethos is not woman as she is, but woman as she ought to be, e.g., Sita or Savitri, the ideal projection of a woman when viewed through the restricted frames of vested interests in society. An Indian woman, in the past, had restricted opportunities to come up professionally in life. Some of the images of women and femininity from ancient to modern times are reflected in epics, literature, art, classical and folk traditions. Another way of imaging woman was to regard her as the embodiment of spiritual power, of light and love or pure bliss. So the deity was imaged primarily as feminine. Early marriage and Purdah system confined her to her home. Her image is deeply embedded in the entire family and her roles as wife and mother were given importance.

A new image was heralded in the development of women during the British rule in India. The introduction of education for women, constitutional provisions, and social reforms like abolition of sati, possibility of widow remarriage helped in a big way in the professional development of woman. Today, women are coming forward in every walk of life with their fellow men. The new woman is trying to balance family and career life in such a way that their profession does not affect their married life. To quote
Dr. Radhakrishnan: “The general Hindu view of women is an exalted one. It regards the woman as the helpmate of man in all his work—Sahadharmini.”

In India women are socialized according to the Sita, Savitri syndrome that stresses obedience and selfless devotion to their husbands. The sati dimension of femininity proves subordinate position of woman to her husband. Manu’s prescription is, ‘Women never deserve freedom,’ Yet woman has to play a role of wife should advise like a minister, be a slave, have the appearance of Laxmi, feed like a mother pardon like the mother Earth, and in bed be the celestial prostitute Rambha. The lives of professional women have changed the picture of the Indian families. Now the modern woman questions the values and politics behind matrimony. She refuses to accept the role of the traditional woman, the embodiment of tolerance, and suffering. However, she is tending to become the modern egotistical, self-assertive and rebellious woman. In family life, woman appears as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and grandmother; her status in the social framework (extra-family and extra-marital) is as a worker, a beloved, a companion, a maid servant, and a prostitute etc. Man woman relationship, her numerous other roles, struggles and achievements—all these aspects are studied in terms of predicament of women within the comprehensive bounds of society at large.

There was a time when woman was a prey to such social evils as purdah, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, enforced widowhood, and denial of education. Though these evils have been partially
removed, women continue to be treated as inferior creatures, a pleasure giving commodity or a child-bearing machine. A woman is made to act the part of an unpaid domestic servant with a marginally superior status. She is subjected to perpetual torture by a demanding husband, a ruthless mothers-in-law and nagging sisters-in-law. The Hindu concept of a woman emerges from the dual concept of femaleness, i.e., woman as shakti symbolizing energy and power and woman as prakriti symbolising nature. Nature, with her conjoined image of earth symbolizes fertility and prosperity, on the other hand, nature represents uncultured power. Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Sri Aurobindo, 'found in motherhood the supreme concept of a new god head...'. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekanand linked this traditional image of sacred motherhood to the modern concept of motherland. Even Gandhi tried to make "equation between womanliness and political potency..."34

The images of woman are described in terms of the mother-protector, the inspirer and the motivating force, as the object of desire. The image of Indian womanhood is embedded and is clearly laid down at the bottom of traditional beliefs and mythology. The image of an ideal Hindu woman is presented by *the Ramayana*, the most popular religious text in India. Sita follows her husband Rama into exile for fourteen years, then proves her wifely virtue by fire walking and finally joins the mother earth. It is observed that, "The wife is the woman under male control; the mother is the
woman in control of herself. These two figures dominate the Hindu thought
about women."35

We have other characters as well: Savitri, Damayanti, Draupadi, Gandhari, Arundhati and a long list of Pativrajas (chaste wives). All of them
create a trend as to what makes an Indian woman and a true wife and lays
down her duties and obligations to her husband. The image of the Indian
woman is based on legends, epics and other stories of folklore. So the Indian
women are named after the names of various Goddesses and named as
Devi. In India, marriage is considered to be the destiny usually offered to
women by society where arranged marriages are more or less the rule. The
wife has to obey her husband all through her life. As Simone de Beauvoir
observes in her book The Second Sex; 'the whims of a man, chosen for her be
others'. Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed he requires
her to be wholly his and yet no burden.36

The expression 'Working Woman' has become common only in recent
years. She shares the financial responsibility, equally with the man, in
addition to accepting the traditional burden of 'women's duty' as it has
come to be recognised all through the centuries. A lack of adequate
appreciation of this equality of financial responsibilities and inequality in
social and family responsibilities is at the root of the special social
environment that puts a working woman under undesirable stresses and
strains. Most of the novelists, it is complained "appear not to have paid
much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family.”37

When we think of Indian woman, we conjure up images of the wife walking meekly behind the husband, never daring to walk along side him. We also think of such painstaking and devoted women as Sita and Shakuntala. But the days of subservience and passivity in Indian women have been steadily changing, much to the bewilderment of India and the rest of the world. Indian women novelists have captured the vitality and changing roles of contemporary Indian women. Fiction by women writers creates a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. As O.P. Bhatnagar says: “The novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general.”38

Many of the Indian women Novelists write on women’s issues. Through their writing we can see a different world. Women writers have delineated the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human predicaments and emotional affinities. Their attention is focused on feminine suffering in Indian society.

Their consciousness seeks to analyse and understand the material conditions through which gender has been constructed. As Sarla Palkar says;

For a long time, woman has existed as a gap, as an absence in literature…. This is not only true of the fiction created by men,
but also by women, who have mostly confined themselves to writing love stories or dealing with the experiences of women in a superficial manner... (which) represses the truth about the majority of their sisters and their lives.39

Literature is indeed the most powerful record of the human spirit. It is a medium through which the essence of our living is made paramount by imaginative experience. Fiction being the most characteristic and implicit form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian literature. It was not until the 1920s that Indian writers started making contributions to what is now labeled as Indian English fiction. These pioneers were confronted with the problem of giving expression to an Indian experience or describing an Indian situation through an ‘alien’ tongue. Apart from this, the novel in English had to evolve and develop within a relating short span of time, whereas in the case of fiction in the regional languages, this process had taken over a hundred years.40

Thus, the early Indian English fiction portrayed the ideal of womanhood as motherhood - that marvelous, unselfish, all suffering, ever-forgiving mother. Today the women writers depict a large number of woman characters including prostitutes, nuns, pativratas and women employed in variety of professions. These women characters dare to fight with social evils and male superiority. Indian novels represent two types of women; women who are willing to submit to the custom bound restrictions of matrimonial life and women who, when humiliations and injustices do
seriously affect their self-respect, do not hesitate to rebel and revolt. One does find authentic portrayals of women in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, but these women characters are part of the narrative and are not central to it. In Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Old Woman and the Cow*, a story is woven round a woman protagonist, Gouri, who cannot be dubbed as a conventional prototype of the suffering, passive woman. At the beginning, she is shown as a Sita-type ideal woman, and several developments confirm the continuance of the parallel. The rise of a new woman out of the old one is a great event of immense historical significance. R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and Manjeri Isvaran present woman in the traditional image of the ‘Pativrata’, she is an object of pity and has no will of her own.

Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *Ghare Bhaire* (The Home and the World) (1919), deals with the issues of women’s freedom and Indian nationalism. The female protagonist Bimala is perceived by Sandip, the revolutionary, as ‘Shakti’ the goddess, the symbolic ‘Mother India’ of the radical Swadeshi Movement. For the first time Bimala emerges out of the Zenana, the women’s enclosure plays a role of a companion wife educated, liberated, and free to choose, the role of participation in the Swadeshi Movement.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Raj Mohan’s Wife* (1864) is the first melodramatic story of the trials of a typical, long suffering Hindu wife. The widow as a protagonist reappeared at a later stage in Rabindranath Tagore’s and Sarat Chandra Chattarjee’s work adopting an increasingly bolder
approach to the actualities of life. The predicament of the Hindu widow which was to become a major concern in Bengali and Marathi fiction found expression in Philip Meadows Taylor's novels *Tara* (1863) and *Seeta* (1872). Not only did he seek to describe the pathetic condition of a Hindu widow, but he also sought to show a way out of her misery. The solution offered in his novels, were education, conversion to Christianity and remarriage. In Bengali fiction, there were a few stray and scattered efforts towards a realistic and authentic projection of the Indian women of this period. These efforts which focussed on the topic of the suffering wife or the widow. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *The Poison Tree* (1873) and Krishnakanta's *Will* (1878) were both concerned with the plight of the widow. In Kannada fiction, one could appreciate in the celebrated novel *Maimanagala Suliyalli* by Shivarama Karanth. Manjula the heroine of the novel is a cultured prostitute of the old traditional type. S. L. Bhyrappa's *Vamsha Vriksha* points to the mixed blessing of remarriage of young widow when she has already a son. M.K. Indira's *Gejje Pooje* presents a prostitute's daughter who opts for a respectable marriage with the man she loves but is forced into the detested profession and tragically dies.

While feminist criticism has a definite ideology, it does not have a methodology. Despite extensive and significant work being done by feminist critics, certain questions remain still unanswered. Some limitations apart, feminist criticism has been a major critical revolution. It has helped women writers to write about their own emotions and experiences, which were
earlier considered to be personal and trivial boldly and without self-consciousness. It also gives a brief note on the image of woman in Indian fiction. Thus the Indian novels act as a mirror to the contemporary society.

The position of women in the earlier days, later its degradation and how education brought about a perceptible change in them - all are reflected in the novels. The image of the woman too tends to change along with the changing times.
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