CHAPTER - IV
FEMININE ETHOS AND ITS IMPACT ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

1. Emergence of Feminine Ethos
2. Impact of Feminism on Marriage and Family
3. Feminism in the West

EMERGENCE OF FEMININE ETHOS

The term 'Ethos' means a characteristic spirit of a community or a system — a disposition, a natural tendency, a temperament or an inclination. 'Feminine ethos' means an inborn quality of woman which distinguishes her from man. It is the very core of her femininity. There are several aspects of feminine ethos like kindness, gentleness, procreation, sacrifice, tolerance, and so on, which are the ultimate qualities of a civilised society. Generation after generation these qualities become stronger and richer in women. These qualities become instrumental in making women achieve newer spiritual heights. Thus 'Feminine Ethos' means some special traits in women, which not only distinguish them from men but also tell the story of women's cultural and spiritual progress.
On the contrary ‘Masculine Ethos’ means man’s spirit of adventure and aggressiveness — a tendency towards dominance, ruthlessness, physical and mental toughness to sustain or diffuse tension and the capacity to think high and act bold.

These separate sets of characteristics are not watertight compartments in each group of human beings. Sometimes some qualities of masculine ethos can be found in women also and vice versa. The point to be noted here is that, these are not two contradictory sets of values found in man and woman but rather complementary. For a successful human life, both the sets of qualities of the respective individuals should get equal opportunity of exhibiting themselves in words and deeds.

Genetically speaking, man and woman have different characteristics, habits, tendencies and the like, but nowhere in Sociology or Anthropology is it stated that a human being, possessing particular types of physical and mental qualities, establishes precedence over another human being having different characteristics. In spite of this, man has been considered to be naturally superior to woman who has been treated as a second grade human being in all the civilisations of the world.

Patriarchal society always considers woman as a lesser creature because she is physically weaker than man. Physical strength cannot be
the criterion to determine woman as being inferior to man. This consideration holds good only in the animal world. The strong and cruel animals become the predators and those that are weak and timid end up being the victims. On the same footing, based on its strength and ferocity, the lion is considered as the King of the forest. However, man has crossed that savage era long back. So, greater physical strength or brute force cannot be the criterion to decide that man is superior to woman.

According to another opinion, woman is intellectually inferior to man and therefore no Socrates, Aristotle, Alexander the Great or Einstein are born among women. This bias made against women is based on incorrect observations. History is witness to the fact that women of great intellectual abilities have been born amongst every religion and society, but arrogant men have refused to take note of them. Many women-saints have appeared amongst the Christians, the Muslims, the Hindus as well as other faiths. The woman philosophers like Gargi, Maitreyi in Hinduism, Saint Ursula in Christianity and Bibi Qansa and Umme Salma in Islam are some of the examples.

There are many women Nobel laureates like Madam Curie and her daughter Irene, who achieved distinction in physical sciences. Gerty T. Carl won Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1947, Maria Geoppert for Physics in 1963, Dorothy Hodgkin for Chemistry in 1964. Even in Literature there
are many Nobel Prize achievers like Selma Lagerl (1909), Grazia Deledda (1926), Sigrid Undest (1928), Pearl S. Buck (1938) and Gabriela Mistrol (1945). The world renowned figure, Mother Teresa, won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979 and in the most recent times Arundhati Roy, an Indian, got the prestigious Booker Award for her novel, "The God of Small Things".

This dichotomy cannot put one gender above the other. The differences in achievements of men and women are the inevitable dialectics or the dynamics of life. Biologically the two sexes are equal and equipotent, for both play absolutely equal part in the reproduction of life. Hence their biological differences are only complementary. So the 'tragedy' of being a woman is not biological but also sociological and ideological.

Female emancipation is, indeed, an uphill task against centuries of male domination and the woman's willing acceptance of inferiority to man. The patriarchal restrictions and distinctions have become hoary and stiff with the passing of time. Men have created an atmosphere of mistrust and prejudices, which are hostile towards women's participation in social activities and also a deep seated contempt for their achieving capabilities. These man-made restrictions have become Swish-cultural and historical impediments to woman's creativeness and transcendence..
Only in modern times, the male dominance tended to diminish a bit, due to an increase in the rate of female education. Education gave women an opportunity to seek employment. Thus women got economic independence. With the help of their education and newly acquired economic status, women are achieving more and more in all walks of life. This awareness of their capabilities to work as hard as men could do and to achieve all that men could achieve, is basically feminine ethos. Time and again it has been proved that a woman can match a man in his intellectual endeavours. Having accepted all this, men are still asking why women have not produced great generals and wrestlers among themselves. If women ask a similar question such as why men have not produced great mothers like Jijabai (mother of Shivaji) among themselves, it would similarly not sound absurd.

Feminism is the awareness among women, that they have their own individuality and their own problems, which require a different set of laws to determine the position of women in the society. Chaman Nahal describes feminism as "a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome".1 Sushila Singh defines feminism as the "struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression".2 She

concludes saying that feminism "is necessarily pro-woman, but this does not mean that it has to be anti-man".3

IMPACT OF FEMINISM ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Feminism, as has been described earlier, is an advocacy of women’s rights in the society. It is awareness on the part of women about their individuality. In other words, feminism is the knowledge of women about their own values, the measures of their goodness and their ability to stand at par with men in a given context. Enlightened due to education and courageous due to her economic strength gained through employment, the woman of today revolts against the age-old customs, traditions and superstitions which were the instruments of her subjugation in the patriarchal family system. In this way the awareness of one’s own natural rights, trampled over the centuries, brings women to the forefront. Therefore, feminism is nothing but a revolutionary global ideology. It is a way of trying to find out the reasons and solutions to the deep-rooted cause for the oppression of women.

Today’s woman is a moral dilemma. However, the awareness of one’s individuality and importance is not an apocalypse war cry or an instrument of revenge against the other. It is an awareness of the

3. Ibid., p. 65.
woman of her own importance, her worth and her inevitability in the welfare of the society. Feminism is a kind of torch that leads women from darkness to light. Women should use it as an instrument of progress. On the contrary, if feminism sows the seeds of confrontation with men or threatens to walk out of the wedlock, then such feminism is dangerous for women themselves. Such confrontational attitude, either on the part of man or of woman, destroys the very basic concept of the institution of marriage - "durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation". Peaceful co-existence is the first requirement of marriage.

Marriage is one of the ancient and universal social institutions, established by the human society to regulate the sex-life of men and women. ‘Marriage’ has different implications in different cultures. Its purpose, functions and forms may differ from one society to another, but it is present everywhere as an important social institution.

There are many definitions of the term ‘marriage’. Broadly speaking marriage is “socially sanctioned sex-relationship involving man and woman, whose relationship is expected to endure beyond the time required for gestation and the birth of children”. This explanation does not seem to cover all the aspects of marriage. Marriage is not just an

institution whose function is merely to bring man and woman together to produce children, but to bring up those children into being good citizens.

The most important functions of marriage are regulation of sex-life, establishment of family and providing economic co-operation. Marriage aims at social solidarity and it also offers emotional and intellectual stimuli to the partners. In this way marriage not only brings man and woman together for their physical needs but also for the satisfaction of their emotional and intellectual urgencies as well.

Though the purpose of marriage was basically good, the male dominated society has put many unnatural restrictions on woman. Centuries downwards, how the institution of marriage has squeezed woman beyond recognition, is not a matter to be repeated here. The silent sufferings of women seem to have come to an end finally due to Women’s Liberation and feminism.

Thus feminism is an awareness of a woman about the women. It is an escape mechanism or the guiding force that unravels the horrendous past of woman and leads her to a new dawn. However, feminism in literature is not a war-cry or a dissent, because mere remonstration cannot become literature. It is an anguish of the woman. It is an expression of her new found sense of liberty and equality. It is her freedom and her feeling of being a free bird. If feminism is not a war-cry
but only an assertion of freedom and equality of women with men, how then does feminism harm the ancient institution of marriage, as feared by some patriarchs? Does feminism undermines marriage, family, society and so on? What does feminism do to the institution of marriage? What is the relation between the two? Whether it is contradictory or complementary? All these questions are required to be answered.

Feminism is not an axe to grind but a torch to quell the darkness surrounding the lives of women. It is an instrument of filling women with courage of conviction. Thus feminism does not teach women to fight with men or to run away from marriage but to run into it and that too efficiently. A woman, breaking away from marriage, unless her life so inevitably warrants, invites more trouble for herself. Therefore, feminism plays or should play a complementary role to marriage.

**IMPACT ON MARRIAGE**

The impact of feminism on institutions like marriage needs to be studied in detail. To begin with, feminism provides woman an opportunity to revolt against the accursed dowry system. Feminism might encourage women to say 'no' to dowry or to any other kind of exploitations by man in the name of marriage.
Feminism would encourage woman to choose her life partner according to her wish. Naturally, the hold of caste, religion, region, and ‘kundali’ (chart of position of stars, etc.) would be loosened. Among the Hindus, the marriage rites are said to be more complicated and lavish. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 is the result of the feminist women like Ramabai Ranade and some men like Mr. Sarada who were active in the field of social service. The Act prohibits second marriage and fixes a minimum age for marriage.

The Hindu religious scriptures considered marriage a bond never to be broken in life. The wife was to worship her husband as God and hence divorce was not permissible then. The Act of 1955 did recognise the right of a Hindu woman to divorce her husband. Feminism does not allow woman to accept her husband as lord and master and disallowed her position as his slave. By shunning a master-slave attitude, there would be more lively relationship between the two.

Feminism is a dynamic power in the hands of women which removes the cobwebs of the past superstitions and earns a respectable life for them. It is said that power corrupts a person. When power loses its concern for humanity it becomes an instrument for human sufferings. Chauvinism, arrogance and other kinds of negative qualities do not suit woman’s temperament. Sometimes perversion of mind might create
problems of maladjustments as is noticed among some female characters in the novels of Anita Desai.

In a similar way, an apprehension exists in the minds of elderly people regarding selection of life partners under the influence of feminism. They feel that young women often do not have the maturity of mind to make the right choice. Temporary physical attraction prompts them to make wrong selection. Though the role of parents and elders in the selection of partners is minimised by feminism, the privilege of elders should not be totally eliminated. As unsuccessful marriages invite unimaginable woes and worries on the part of women, some supervision by the elders is therefore essential. One can also be sure that feminism would certainly avoid criminal waste of money and vulgar show off at the time of marriage of the upper class people. Feminism encourages simple civil marriages.

There is another area of dubious distinction in Hindu culture regarding the birth of male or female child. In order to nullify its impact on society, feminism would be called into play. Feminism should shatter the age-old misbelief that the son saves his parents from going to hell whereas daughter creates never ending anxiety for them. In order to analyse this theory one can look at the Sanskrit phrases that describe the role of ‘putra’ (son) and ‘kanya’ (daughter). The maxim goes as such, ‘Punnam Narkat Trayate, Putra’, meaning ‘putra’ or son saves his parents
from hell and 'Ko Iyam Niyate' expresses that daughter creates anxiety. This malafide thinking is based at the root of distinction created between the son and the daughter. Feminism should shatter this wrong degree of comparison.

The feminist woman of today wants her husband to be a friend rather than a master. She does not like the veneration of husband as was done in the earlier days nor does she like herself to be treated as Devi or Goddess. Sometimes the aggressive qualities in woman might make her a female chauvinist. This is also not admirable. Male chauvinism is opposed by women and in doing so, if female chauvinism emerges as an inevitable corollary, it should also be rejected. A husband and a wife cannot live like two fighting warriors.

Modern women are gripped by tensions, worries, stress and overwork. Even house-wives at times are unable to cope with their over-busy husbands, who hardly find time to attend to their needs. This results in women’s loneliness and frustration and this sense of being neglected also makes them feel more miserable. Women feel that they are unwanted and uncared for due to the busy schedule of their male partners. Men too fail to grasp the emotional needs of their wives. All these become a bone of contention hampering the smooth relationship between a husband and a wife. The pent up feelings slowly give rise to emotional outbursts, causing cracks in the marriage bonds.
Today feminism is operational not only through women’s organisations but also through legislative wings. Every state of India and the centre have established Women’s Commissions. They promptly tackle the cases of atrocities on women. Besides, the Indian Parliament has passed several laws like the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the Hindu Succession Act (1958), and the Muslim Marriage Act (1986). All these laws protect women from atrocities at home and in their work place.

Some political parties in India are contemplating on an ambitious bill of 33 percent reservation for women in state assemblies and Parliament elections. If this legislation comes through it will go a long way in pulling Indian women out of the ancient quagmire and they will have more say in Indian politics. Thus, feminism as a constructive instrument in the hands of women has done a good job in the institutions of family and marriage.

Modern women are educated, career-minded and economically independent. Sometimes the money power which is newly acquired by the working women can purchase comforts for them, but at other times the very money power may cause disruption in the husband-wife relationship. Moreover, under the impact of the West through literature, the print and the electronic media, the women of the East have started realising and demanding their rights. But when their desire is not fulfilled, the marriage
knot is likely to be snapped. Many Indian English novels depict the influence of feminism on the institution of marriage.

II

In Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s "To Whom She Will" (1955), Amrita though westernised, tries to follow the traditional ways of Hari Sahni, whom she loves. On the other hand Hari tries to follow the westernised way to adjust to Amrita’s life style. Hari Sahni and Amrita work together at a radio station. When love blossoms between them, they decide to get married. Hari, belongs to a lower middle-class family and Amrita to an upper class. It is an inter-caste marriage that is not liked by both the families. Hari has a very peculiar notion of love based on the romantic movies he has seen. He does not get involved in this love sincerely. He fears the sophisticated upper class life style of Amrita. Hari appears to be fickle minded too. That is why when his parents propose the relation of Susheela Anand to him, he wavers.

The irony of the story is that Amrita too accepts another proposal without any remorse. Amrita, who has used Krishna Sen, the paying guest in their house, as a tool and confidant to convey her messages to Hari is the suitor liked by her family. "From her calf love for Hari she progresses
towards a genuine affection and sincere love for Krishna Sen.  

"Amrita too yields to marry Krishna and waits to hear from him when he is away in Calcutta. Hence it is "an emancipated heroine's search for a proper partner but ends with her gloating on the least attractive proposal"." 

_Amrita_ is a broad minded and emancipated feminist. She is willing to cross all limitations for the sake of her beloved Hari. Unfortunately, _Amrita_ too resigns to her fate like R.K. Narayan's _Savitri_ in "The Dark Room". _Savitri_ returns to her children and accepts life as it is, whereas, _Amrita_ too accepts the choice of her parents without tantrums. _Amrita_ is depicted bold, but the boy whom she loves is not courageous enough to face the situation. When Hari gets married to some other girl, _Amrita_ accepts her fate and shows her willingness to marry according to her parent's choice.

In another novel "The Dark Room" by R.K. Narayan the anger of the feminist _Savitri_, is so strongly given vent against her husband Ramani, because he is involved with his office assistant Shanta Bai. When _Savitri_ learns about her husband's affairs with an office lady, her not-so-pleasant relationship with her husband gets completely shattered and disrupted. When reasons fail to bring Ramani back to his senses, _Savitri_ is forced to walk out of the house. _Savitri_ leaves the house to commit

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suicide, but she is rescued by Mani, the locksmith. Though the man and his wife offered shelter to Savitri, she does not want to be a burden on them. She works in a temple, where she is provided a room to stay. Here too she is looked with suspicion by the society. According to the society, the mistake is with Savitri and not with her husband. She returns home dejected and there is a change in her attitude. She wants to be independent and earn her own livelihood. However, she finds herself too weak to challenge or discard the society in her effort to be independent. The thought of her children draws her towards home, but she returns to continue in the same old circle.

Savitri "has to swallow her pride and come back humiliated to compromise with her infallible husband". Savitri feels that woman’s position is submissive, because she is economically dependent on man. She leaves the house but has to return, for the thoughts of her children pull her back. The individuality and femininity in Savitri is short-lived, for she has to return to her home. "The Dark Room" depicts Savitri’s struggle against the domineering husband Ramani. She carries on her struggle but cannot go on for long. The traditional role allotted to her by the society forces her to come back. R. K. Narayan tries to voice through his novel, "The Dark Room", though there is a tinge of women’s individuality and feminism in Savitri, this gets stifled by the male dominant society. "The rebellion of Savitri against the callous, rock-like hard and cruel husband

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Ramani in *The Dark Room* remained ineffective as she lacked the stamina that Ibsen’s Nora in *A Doll’s House* (1879) had.9


*Rosie*’s husband did not bother about her interest in dance and often insults her. *Rosie* loves dancing but cannot pursue it because of her husband’s hatred towards it. *Raju*, the guide, knows the dissonance in the relationship between them. He acted as the mentor of *Rosie* and encourages her to practice dance. That is enough to enkindle the drooping spirits of *Rosie*. She becomes a part and parcel of *Raju*’s life and responds positively in his advances.

*Marco*, *Rosie*’s husband, is an archaeologist. He is very much interested in the dancing damsels carved in the caves of Mempi Hills rather than a dancer in flesh and blood, his own wife. He calls her dance an acrobat, while he builds big theories regarding the dancing posture of the stone figures. The hypocrisy of *Marco* and *Raju*’s calculated encouragement widens the gap between *Rosie* and *Marco*. *Rosie* comes out of her home, practices dancing and earns name and money. *Raju*

tries to treat her, as his valuable personal piece of property, whereas Marco sends a copy of his book that never reaches Rosie because of Raju's trick. Raju is caught for forging Rosie's signature, but Rosie continues her life independently.

In Mulk Raj Anand's novel, "Gauri", the character of Gauri deserves a critical attention. Gauri's marriage is fixed with Panchi who is an orphan and an independent peasant with a small land holding. Gauri's mother Laxmi, wants a well-off match for her daughter. Her relationship was broken thrice earlier due to the existent hostility between Panchi's uncle and aunt and Gauri's mother and uncle Amru till finally the negotiation was accepted. Parting after the marriage ceremony, Laxmi tells her daughter to live like Sita of the "Ramayana". The docile Gauri is driven out from her marital home, because she happens to stay once in another man's house. Unable to bear the humiliation, she goes ahead to earn her own livelihood. Thus, one may observe that in spite of her rural background, she breaks all barriers and social conventions to lead an economically independent life when circumstance so demands.

Kesaro, the aunt-in-law of Gauri, does not get on well with her and is on the look out for finding fault. She tells Gauri's husband-

*Control her, if you can!...This bride of yours! ... She has begun to answer me now, when she was meek and obstinately silent before!... From the day that*
this witch from big Piplan set foot in our house, we
have had bad luck. You know the crops have
withered and burnt up. The bullocks have fever. And
there is no sign of rain!\textsuperscript{10}

Thus, Kesaro tries to poison his mind against Gauri. To add to it, she instigates falsely that Gauri keeps her head uncovered before Raj guru who happens to be a friend of Panchi. Gauri prefers to stay away from her in-laws. She tells Panchi, "Why did she have to marry you off to me, if she – if she wants two husbands?"\textsuperscript{11} Panchi is surprised when Gauri reveals her mind openly. After a prolonged silence he admits his approval to her accusations. He adds that his aunt used to dote on him like a son when his uncle was away in the army. "Perhaps, she is jealous now that another woman has come to the house . . ."\textsuperscript{12} Later on Gauri and Panchi leave their aunt-in-law and go to live with Rafique Chacha, a trader of pots.

However Kesaro visits their house, and instigates Panchi against Gauri. She claims that everything happened as predestined which foretold the breaking of their home with the entry of an inauspicious girl. Gauri, who overhears this, cannot take it any more. She tells her aunt-in-law,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.49.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.50.
Get out of my house, witch! Get out. You oppressed me enough when I first came as a bride. Until you and your husband turned us out. Now don’t come interfering in our lives. If you have no husband, go to someone else, but do not lay hands on my husband!... Go, get out!... Evil woman! You want two husbands! Your own for beating you and mine for loving you. Acha, I won’t give you my husband! So go!... 13

Gauri symbolically known as the ‘meek cow’ no longer remains the same. She holds Kesaro’s hair and forces her out of the door. Panchi, who is a mute witness, is stupefied to see his wife in the incarnation of Kali, the divine destroyer. Thus Gauri manages to pay back to her aunt for all the harassment meted out to her.

Gauri is compelled to return to her mother’s house as Kesaro repeatedly instigates Panchi against her, as a result of which he beats her and orders her to go back to her mother. Due to bad economic conditions, Gauri’s mother and Uncle Amru sell her to Seth Jwala Prasad, a banker of Hoshiarpur with whom they had mortgaged their two houses and a cow. At this juncture she happens to meet Col. Mahindra and works as a nurse in his clinic. It is here that a lot of change takes place. Dr. Mahindra gets

13. Ibid., p.95.
her reconciled to her husband, but the village gossip makes Panchi to question her chastity. Gauri is, after all, not 'Sita' to be rescued by the mother Earth. The humiliation she has suffered is enough to make her stand on her own legs. She decides to go back to Dr. Mahindra's hospital to work as a nurse and to be economically independent.

Anita Desai began a new era of psychological writings in Indian novels in English. She tries to project through her novels the agony of women in a male-dominated society and their predicament in a conservative and superstitious atmosphere. The women undergo a strange psychic experience and suffer from failures, frustrations and hypersensitivity. Anita Desai's women characters depicts the depressed woman who tries to fit herself in the role that she has to play but finds it very difficult to adjust herself to the situation. M.Q. Khan in one of his critical writings on Anita Desai tells,

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\text{In almost all these works, women, who are portrayed as the chief protagonists and who are depicted as suffering in a meticulous world dominated by man, who in the guise a father, a brother, a husband or a lover, presents a constant threat to their integrity, intuition, peace and happiness. These characters are painted in various colours and portrayed in varied roles – starting from the role of housewives to that of enlightened...}
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professionals in educational institutions; in each and every changing situation, they have reacted sometimes violently and sometimes silently, unheard, unknown by others. The restricted surroundings have treated them as helpless birds of cage.\textsuperscript{14}

The novelist, Anita Desai tries to probe into the inner psyche of woman and tries to feel the very pulse of her existence in the cosmos of male suppression. Most of her novels dwell into the psychological trauma faced by her women characters. Bidulata Choudhury says about Anita Desai that –

\textit{Her involvement for the upliftment of women who are seen as worst sufferers, highly suppressed and oppressed by social ‘tantalisation’ or marital discord. Such sympathetic material perhaps drifts into the mind and is collected silently and almost unconsciously.}\textsuperscript{15}

In Anita Desai’s novel, “Cry, the Peacock”, Maya’s unhappiness is triggered on by the death of her pet dog, Toto. Her husband, Gautama’s


indifference towards the death of Toto makes Maya neurotic. When Gautama does not understand her feelings, due to his insensitive ways, it makes her highly reactive. Maya who leads a protected life under the care of her father, tries to find a father figure in Gautama.

"Cry, the Peacock" also deals with the incompatibility between the husband and wife. Gautama's professionalism and utter neglect of Maya's mental make-up, drifts her away from her husband. She is unable to strike a note of compromise between her inner self and the realities of the outer world. Her tragedy is solely due to her not being able to come to terms with life. This temperamental incompatibility brings disharmony in their lives. Her psychological imbalance develops an unbridgeable gap between her husband and her. Maya's misfortune is worsened as a result of her father-fixation, coupled with the haunting fear of the prophecy of the albino astrologer that either of the partners would die in the fourth year of their marriage. Maya cannot lead a normal life with Gautama as she is obsessed by this childhood prophecy. Her overwrought state of mind makes her to withdraw completely from practical reality.

Alienated from her husband Gautama, a cold rational lawyer who fails to understand her sensitive nature, Maya withdraws into a morbid frame of mind, aggravated by her memory of a prediction made by
an astrologer that after her marriage, either she or her husband would die.16

Maya wants Gautama to love her sincerely. Gautama advises her to practise detachment, as attachment only leads to self-destruction. Maya is governed by strange obsessions and becomes hypersensitive. Her desire is to live, but the fear of predicted death makes her to push Gautama down the parapet to his death.

Like Lady Macbeth, she becomes a victim of hallucinations which speed up the process of disintegration of her consciousness.17

The words ‘Maya’ and ‘Gautam’ speak volumes about Vedant philosophy. Maya means ‘illusion’ and Gautam was the first name of Buddha, the Enlightened Soul. Maya herself becomes a victim of illusions, whereas Gautama believes in detachment. The hurt psyche of Maya mingled with loneliness widens the gap between her and Gautama. She is too sensitive and expects her husband to understand her feelings, but he is indifferent to her needs. Here Maya’s delicate sensibility creates a psychological chasm which virtually results in an emotional breakdown. The feeling of neglect, heightened by the astrologer’s prophecy drives her

to believe that her husband was destined to die and not she. Her feminist attitude becomes too calculating, violent and disastrous leading to incompatibility of temperaments.

In Anita Desai’s novel, "Voices in the City", Monisha, an educated girl, is married into a family that is not to her standard. Therefore her marriage to Jiban is not a happy one. She lives a frustrated and isolated life. She longs for privacy and solitude, but cannot get them. As the member of a joint family she does not get much time for communicating with her husband. Jiban too fails to realise and respond to her needs.

Monisha becomes a topic of discussion among other members of the family because of her inability to bear a child. This inflicts a psychological trauma that upsets her behaviour. It is further aggravated when Monisha takes Jiban’s money from the cupboard without his prior permission. She needs the money to pay the hospital bill for her brother Nirode’s illness. When her mother-in-law accuses her of theft, Monisha realises the disadvantages of being economically dependent. She believes that as Jiban’s wife, she had a right to his money which she could use at the time of necessity. Jiban too does not intervene when his wife is accused of theft by his mother. He does not support Monisha’s claim and right to his money. Her mother-in-law’s harsh words upset her and as Monisha expresses, “I opened the door and went quickly in, and on my back felt their white-hot brands sink in and burn through my skin:
Thief.\textsuperscript{18} Monisha is sad because of her husband’s lack of support and inability to say a single word in her defence. She suffers from loneliness and realises the impossibility of having a happy future. According to Dr. Suresh Singhal,

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She represents the tragic intensity of conjugal incompatibility suffered by a woman, in the Indian context, who becomes emotionally, psychologically and physically vulnerable to her husband, and at the same time, paradoxically, that the security of the wife’s role justifies and maintains relations between man and woman on the basis of the family institution rather than on the basis of real human involvement with each other.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

This works adversely on her mind and she immolates herself. Monisha finds the institution of marriage quite suffocating. In her quest to find an escape from marriage the only way left for her is to end her miserable life. She finds adjusting in her husband’s home a big problem, thereby making disappointment to work fatally on her mind. “Her suicide symbolizes assertion of her quest for freedom and a meaningful existence”.\textsuperscript{20}

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\textsuperscript{18} Anita Desai, \textit{Voices in the City}, Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, Rpt. 1990, p.137.
\textsuperscript{19} Suresh Singhal, \textit{Anita Desai: Existential Dilemma in her Novels (An Affirmative View)}, Sanjay Prakashan: New Delhi, 2008, p.60.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 155.
\end{footnotes}
Anita Desai’s “Where shall we go this Summer?” depicts the mental trauma suffered by Sita due to continual neglect by her husband, Raman, who is too engrossed with his work at the factory. This makes her suffer from boredom and loneliness. She gets frustrated on being neglected by her husband. As a child she was neglected and after her marriage once again, she has the same unfortunate feeling of being ignored by her husband. This constant disregard makes her think that she is unloved and uncared for by everyone. In addition to this, her forced pregnancy makes her more miserable towards life. As a mother of four children and the fifth in line, Sita believes that she is merely being physically used by her husband rather than his sharing her life. She wants to visit her father’s place, the Manori Island, which she believes is surrounded by some mysterious magical aura that could help to keep the fifth child unborn. Sita escapes to the island along with her children with that purpose in mind, but when reality dawns upon her that there is no such magic existing; she understands the futility of her escape. According to R. K. Dhawan

She re-establishes her contacts with life in a symbolic manner, by taking a ritualized mud-bath and gets over her loneliness by learning to laugh.21

Before their marriage could get toppled completely, Sita accepts life's realities and returns to her husband when he comes back to get his children from the island. Sita “learns she has to flow with the flux of life”.\textsuperscript{22} Sita accepts life's realities with optimism and her homecoming represents her positive attitude to move along with the flow of life.

*Her going to the island symbolizes her making a quest for an alternative to marriage and her resolving to go back to live with her husband symbolizes her admitting that she has failed to find any alternative.*\textsuperscript{23}

Anita Desai is probably trying to suggest that feminism does not mean the woman taking arms against her husband or any other member of her husband's family or even against the society. It is at best an awareness, an enlightenment to know and assert her individuality. When this awareness dawns upon woman, she should learn the ways to smoothen, if not smother her ways to avoid frictions surfacing in her life.

Feminism is not to quarrel but to convince her point of view. Sita learns that it is not her father's magic but her own logic that is going to save her marriage. Total and blind surrender in the name of adjustment is very dangerous. There must be confidence building and the capacity to adjust


\textsuperscript{23} Brahma Dutta Sharma & Susheel Kumar Sharma, "Search for Alternatives in Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai", in *Contemporary Indian English Novel* (Ed.) Brahma Dutta Sharma and Susheel Kumar Sharma, Anamika Publishers: New Delhi, 2001, p.66.
oneself according to the do’s and don’ts of the other partner. This, according to Anita Desai, is the meaning of feminism.

In the novels by Anita Desai, the women characters are shown to have sensitive and emotional nature, too fragile to cope with dehumanised and artificial urban surroundings and with the hardened and insensitive habits of the in-laws. In this situation these susceptible women have to adjust themselves to the changing scenario—a difficult transit from the protective nest of the parents’ family to a totally different habitat of her marital home.

The woman characters of Anita Desai’s literary work are quite different in the sense that their husbands have accepted them. In spite of the fact that some of the husbands are kind, yet some of the woman characters develop a kind of fear, a sense of incompatibility, or sheer suspicion. It is difficult to understand that in spite of having everything, a considerate husband, good children, nice household, etc., still the women are unappeasable, causing rift in the man-woman relationship. Maya, Monisha, and Sita do not get emotionally bound with their husbands for which they long and are rightly entitled. But they are demanding too much of time and attention from their husbands, who do not have enough time to spare for them. All these women long for a little attention and desire to be loved by their husbands. Had there been a mutual understanding than Maya would not turn to be a slayer or Monisha a
suicide victim; and Sita would not have tried to escape the stifling environment of her home to live in an isolated island.

Dr. Suresh Singhal expresses the plight of Desai’s women characters who are said to be,

Of very delicate sensibility and who find it difficult to take the whole burden of their unfavourable circumstances, particularly that of unhappy marital affairs, upon their heads and finally totter under its burden and reach on the verge of psychological breakdown. This destroys the placidity of their emotional life and they find love, privacy and freedom virtually absent from their married life with all the mortification and pain attendant thereon.24

Anita Desai probably depicts the higher strata of society. The complexity of modern living and the inability to cope with it creates a touchy nature in woman. She develops a kind of phobia. Therefore, surprisingly she wants to revolt against her man. The man does not deserve it as he is not responsible for her mental conditions. The imaginary fear and unrealistic expectations from life lead Anita Desai’s women into trouble.

In "Storm in Chandigarh" by Nayantara Sahagal the relationship between Saroj and Inder is not very pleasing. Vishal Dubey realises the rift between them, when he watches them from close quarters. Saroj is an obedient and submissive wife. According to Vishal Dubey,

*Ideas of a successful marriage are based on truth, communication and acceptance. He feels that there should be no tight-lipped secrets between couples or people.*

Saroj is encouraged by the boldness preached by Vishal and a change comes over her. She is willing to defy Inder and go to Delhi for her confinement. She is a feminist, who wants to have her individual identity. She emerges as a 'New Woman' infused with courage and confidence. Vishal feels that, "a person’s individuality is more important than hundreds of social norms which go to bury or suppress it". Nayantara Sahagal depicts most of her women characters having their own identity.

Sahgal’s "Storm in Chandigarh" deals with the husband-wife alienation, which arise due to lack of proper communication between them and also due to their temperamental incompatibility. The alienation between Saroj and Inder, grows, when Inder learns from her about her

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premarital intimacy with a friend. *Inder* does not forgive the pre-marital affairs of his wife *Saroj*, though she confesses it. Her confession itself leads to breaking up of their relationship. *Inder* cannot forget her pre-marital affair, but time and again, he reminds her of it. *Saroj* who wants to be recognised as an individual to be loved and understood, does not get it from *Inder*. She finds refuge in her children and does not despair.

*Saroj* feels better in the company of *Vishal Dubey*, but *Inder* does not like her friendship with him. Her relation with *Vishal* is just to vent out her suffocation, caused by deteriorating relationship. She knows very well that she has no chance of reconciliation with *Inder*, though she longs to establish good relationship with him.

On the other hand, *Inder* seeks consolation in the company of *Mara* and establishes physical intimacy with her. She too wants to build the same relationship with *Vishal* as *Inder* has with *Mara*. At last, *Saroj* leaves home to gain personal freedom. She does not want to live the life which *Inder* expects of her to do. Despite having an affair with *Inder*, *Mara* loves her husband *Jit*. What all she wants is that her husband should be a bit more aggressive. Neither she wants to cut off from her husband *Jit* nor does she want to resist the attraction towards *Inder*.

*Leela*, *Vishal Dubey*’s wife has an affair with one *Hari*, though she has enough love from her husband. In this way there is an interesting
criss-crossing of illicit love affair in the good name of individual freedom. According to Shyam Asnani, who says that,

*Mere living together under the same roof, only the accumulating of a life-time’s living habits, without any real bond of intimacies in spite of sex and children, the human substance between them dwindling is nothing but the mockery of marriage. True living lies in understanding each other, in mutual respect and trust, honesty and freedom, without a thought of domin ance.*


The novelist wants that the same code of morality be applied to both men and women. Men cannot digest the wife’s pre-marital affairs, whereas he can carry on with it. Hence feminism raises its voice against this indifference meted out to women.

The following example of *Simrit* and *Som* in Nayantara Sahgal’s novel, "The Day in Shadow" speaks volumes about the impact of feminism on the institution of marriage. Woman’s awareness lent her the courage to say ‘No’ to man and back out from her man when she felt that she could not carry on any more with him in the suffocating atmosphere created by him. Non-agreement between husband and wife had recourse in divorce which could sometimes mean another good beginning. This
change could not have been possible without enough awareness among women. According to the observation made by Meena Shirwadkar on Sahgal’s women characters she says that,

There is a curious metamorphosis about the wives who are part of both the worlds, who hover between the Sita and Nora images.28

“The Day in Shadow” deals with the husband-wife estrangement. Simrit tries to build a lasting relationship with Som, her husband, but gets separated from him due to his strong desire for materialistic power. She is unable to build a good relationship with him because she does not consider material prosperity as an important criterion for happy life. But Som does not value Simrit’s feelings. Her desire for individuality precipitates her parting from her husband. Som is after material prosperity as he thinks that the money accumulated will help to give them all the luxuries of the world. It is when Som and Ruddy Vetter finalise the new deal for making armaments; Simrit gets disappointed by the unscrupulous ways of her husband and decides to leave him. He takes her withdrawal as a great humiliation. He is more concerned about the gainful end rather than the means to achieve it. Simrit does not like this at all and it is the clash of ideals that leads to their alienation. Som tries to uphold his ego and it is his self-esteem that,

He does not hesitate to drop out a friend or even his own wife - if he feels he or she no longer serves him any purpose.29

Simrit does not appreciate his armament deal, for its destructive potentials, but to Som it is linked with material prosperity. Due to the differences in their attitudes, the physical relationship between the two gets strained. Simrit withdraws from her husband because she wants to be treated as an individual at par with him. When Som differs from her views completely, there is a breakdown in their relationship. His egoistic behaviour and treatment of his wife as his personal possession, mars the relationship between the husband and wife. It affects the marriage to such an extent that the remedy is sought for it in the form of divorce. At this critical juncture she meets Raj, a Christian political worker. Love develops between them and they decide to get married. When the divorce formalities are achieved, she marries Raj. Som’s terms of divorce settlement were intended to harm Simrit further. It was settled in a way to maintain the husband’s money wholly for his son, whereas the major part of Simrit’s money got drained off, as a part of the settlement.

Nayantara tries to portray that the man-woman relationship should be based on reciprocal goodwill. It should be like a partnership based on equality and respect. When channels for proper communication between

the husband and wife get disrupted, friction is bound to arise in their relationship. If women are not allowed to assert their individuality, it leads to stifling of their desires, which in the long run affects their marriage. The women characters in Nayantara’s novels are, “finally emerging from the chrysalis, and whose urge toward freedom is symbolic of the need for freedom in every living being”.30

These women try for self-fulfilment by rejecting the existing social set-up. In doing so, they land themselves in further hardship and sufferings in the form of divorce. These women realise that both within the framework of marriage or outside of it, the experience is a painful one for which there is no easy remedy.

In “The Dark Holds No Terrors”, Shashi Deshpande gives us glimpse of a marriage on the rocks. The novel depicts the decaying and unhappy conjugal life of Sarita (Saru) and Manohar (Manu). Saru, as a child, is engulfed by sibling jealousy and inferiority complex when she observes the discrimination in treatment between her brother Dhruva and herself by her parents. Her childhood experience leaves an indelible impression on her mind. Her marriage to Manohar, a fellow student, is just an act of rebellion and vengeance against her parents.

*I had come away from my parents in a fever of excitement after the last battle. The die was cast,*

the decision taken, my boats burnt. There could be no turning back.31

Saru severs all ties with her parents and her detachment from them is without any regret or pain. But time does not heal her wounds and she is haunted by nightmares. She feels as if the umbilical cord is severed to separate the baby from the mother. She tells her husband Manu—

Ligate, cut and its done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It’s as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding.32

Marriage to Manu opens the gate for all happiness and has taken Saru to the seventh heaven. She, deprived of love in her childhood, finds a saviour in her husband, a life-jacket to which she can cling and drift safely ashore.

I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.33

Saru becomes a successful doctor and earns a good name but her economic independence destroys her married life. Her earnings and status

32. Ibid., p.39.
33. Ibid., p.40.
is greater than that of her husband. *Manu* suffers from a feeling of inferiority as he is dependent on his wife for the luxuries of life. The double responsibility of professional life and household needs disturbs their marital life. *Saru* realises that her married life was developing cracks because of her professional pursuits. Being busy with her career as a doctor, she is left with very little time for her husband and children. Sometimes she reaches home late due to the pressure of work. All these have a telling effect on *Manu* who feels frustrated for being neglected. *Saru* begins to grow impatient with him or just ignores him when he sulks. She suffers the travail and anguish of married life and feels trapped due to oppression, discord and male chauvinism.

She changes her mind in regards to love which she thinks is something to be looked down upon, to be mocked, despised and abhorred. She finds it incredible to think that there is anything as 'love' between man and woman. She feels that this man-woman relationship is founded not on love, but merely on physical attraction and need. This thinking brings contempt for love in her mind.

*Love...how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called 'love'. It's*
only a word, she thought. Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away.34

Manu’s wounded ego takes the shape of sexual sadism. He remains complacent of her fame during the day, but at night he becomes revengeful and surprises Saru with his beastly behaviour. She is wonderstruck to see Manu in his usual cheerful self again the next morning. She finds it difficult to compromise with his two opposite characters, that is, a terrible stranger at night and a cheerful person in the day. The relationship develops a crack at an early stage of the marriage. Saru’s fame creates a feeling of jealousy and inferiority in Manu. Marriage does not provide joy to them and the initial happiness gets dissolved in the complexities they face. Saru, deprived of happiness and love in childhood, tries to seek them from her marriage but only to be disillusioned. Their maladjustment in conjugal relationship mars their marriage. Saru tries to escape from this altogether and goes to her father’s house only to return when Manu comes to take her home. Thus in their relationship, the sinking marital ship is saved in the nick of time and brought ashore.

34. Ibid., p.72.
IMPACT OF FEMINISM ON FAMILY

Family is a group of people defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children. Though the instances of matriarchal family, wherein woman dominates, are found in some places, it is the patriarchal family system that is largely prevalent in all societies. In the patriarchal family, the male head of the family possesses exclusive powers. In India, too, the family of the Vedic times was strongly patriarchal. In reality almost total subordination marked the position of the wife. It was her duty to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage and her son during her widowhood. In spite of this, at times even in a patriarchal family, an occasional woman may achieve great fame. However, this is a rare event.

The foremost consequence of feminism was a destruction of the roots of the patriarchal family system. Under feudalism the position of woman was more subordinated and that of the male more strengthened. This was a necessary corollary of the authoritarian mores of feudalism.

Feminism – a kind of social philosophy in the age of democracy – provided a breather for the modern woman. On the one hand the economic factors, industrialisation, urbanisation and social mobility broke the autocratic trend of the patriarchal family while on the other hand the
cultural changes, the spread of democratic ideology, and the decline of religious orthodoxy also did enough damage to patriarchal family.

Due to industrialisation, the earning capacity achieved by the women made them independent of men. As members contributing financially, their opinions were heard in family matters. The technological development affected the family in another way also. It introduced labour saving devices in the performance of domestic tasks. Thus, women got more time to devote to children and for their own welfare.

The emergence of democratic institutions in political field undermined the authoritarian mores of feudalism. The right to vote, which was given to man of property, became gradually an individual right. So woman wielded the same political power. This empowerment helped her a lot in the family. The female voters got their work done through their elected representatives. They themselves contested elections. These women played a decisive role in establishing Women’s Commission in the states.

The view that the family was the divine creation and that the patriarch was the symbol of God in the family, became less acceptable. The religious functions in the family had diminished and the marriages were made as simple as a one-day affair. Thus, marriage no longer is a dedication of woman to man but a social contract to live together on
equal terms. All this wrought the death knell to the patriarchal dominance and men in the family began hearing women’s voice.

In the modern families feminism has made still deeper inroads. The parents, in the atmosphere of male dominance and female obedience, arranged traditional marriages. In the modern families often the partners themselves arrange their marriages. But serious concerns are voiced about the permanence of such marriages.

Feminism brought changes in the man-woman relationship. A woman is not the disciple of man but an equal partner. A husband can no longer dictate his wife to do any chore that she is unwilling to do. Men have learnt to request their wives for any work that needs to be done. Divorce is a mutual decision and a woman can sue a man for violation of her rights and likewise be sued by him too.

Women in modern families have attained an increasing degree of economic independence. Their rate of employment increases year by year. Today women occupy the most coveted posts and even women belonging to lower classes have become wage earners or professional workers. Formerly a woman had to find a male partner who could marry her and support her economically. That is why sociologist MacIver said that the whole process of modern civilisation had worked towards giving the woman a new position in society and especially in relation to man.
Feminism plays a dominant role in adopting small family norms. Urbanism and the mobility to seek employment resulted in lesser time to attend to the demands of the joint family. This in turn ushered in the need for having a small family. Therefore the rigidity traditionally associated with sexual relationships no longer characterise the modern family. Moreover, in smaller families both the partners are free to practise birth control.

Feminism introduced secular attitude in the family. The religious rites and functions are no more followed very seriously. Even marriage is a civil contract rather than a religious sacrament. Hence it can be dissolved at any time. Religion has been bypassed in the matters of marriage and divorce. In the traditional families divorce was a rare phenomenon.

Thus the family has been subjected to profound modification of an economic, social and biological nature. The size of the family has been reduced. Its functions have been taken over by specialised agencies like child-care home, pre-primary education, etc. The modern family is more individualised and democratic where women enjoy high prestige and position.

Feminism has also affected the family in a yet different way. It brought freedom to women from the control of the patriarchal society, but
there is still some adverse criticism about the modern family. The joint family faced the problems of the world as a unit. There was more affinity among the members of the old family system. Social mobility was slight and the members of combined families were subjected to discipline and obedience towards the head of the family. All this has changed today.

The control of the patriarch on the household members has decreased. The younger generation no longer likes the interference in their affairs by their elders. In the name of liberty the younger generation wants no interference by their elders in whatsoever affairs. The marriage bonds have weakened and the pre-marital and extramarital relations have increased. There is no longer any family craft or profession being pursued. Every member of the family works independently. The modern family has shrunk both structurally and functionally.

About a century back the family was more like a community, but today it has become an association. It is evident that it has completed its transition from institution to companionship. The family has lost some of its important functions like careful nurturing of children under elders’ supervision and so on. Despite its structural and functional changes the family still plays a significant role because it is an inseparable part of human existence.
So far feminism and its impact on the social institution like family have been discussed. In the following part of the chapter suitable examples from different novels are taken to illustrate, the impact of feminism on family. At the end of this chapter a brief discussion is recorded about feminism in the West, for the sake of comparison.

II

Rama Mehta’s, "Inside the Haveli" depicts the life of women of Udaipur in Rajasthan. The purdah system, has been weighing down on women since ages. The women living behind purdah have been hiding their plight behind the age-old piece of cloth. Thus they suffer and accept subjugation without raising their voice.

Rama Mehta in "Inside the Haveli" throws light on the life of tradition-bound women of Udaipur. Only the close male relatives were allowed to enter the women’s apartments and that too after proper announcement. On the contrary the maids-in-waiting were better off than the women in the Haveli. They were free to talk and did not have to observe purdah before their male counterparts, nor did they have to wait for nightfall to share their thoughts with their husbands. "... the maids are free to talk to their husbands; they don’t have to wait till the darkness of night settles over the haveli to share their thoughts with them".35

Free mixing of men and women during the day was considered a taboo. Only during night the wife could converse with her husband freely. Thus her life remains closeted within the four walls of the haveli. Women too adhere to the traditional custom as if it is a necessary part of their lives. They never realise that it has been thrust upon them by the males to keep them subjugated.

Geeta, the female protagonist, who came to the haveli as a bride, tries to niche an identity of her own, but her exploration for her individuality is lost due to the prevailing customs and traditions of the haveli. Geeta is sophisticated and self-conscious city-bred girl from Bombay, where men and women mingle freely. Her marriage to Ajay, a professor of science, finds her imprisoned inside the web of an aristocratic family of Udaipur. The upper class women in Rajasthan observe purdah. Even Geeta’s parents are anxious as to how she could cope with the age-old tradition of purdah and other customs. They are concerned about their daughter as to, “How would such a girl learn to live in the constricted atmosphere of a world of women, to give her elders the traditional deference?”

Geeta’s mother-in-law wants her daughter-in-law to cover her face to prove that even a city-bred girl can be moulded and that her choice for her son’s bride was not wrong. She tells her –

36. Ibid., p.16.
I want to show them that even an educated girl can be moulded. That I was not wrong in selecting you as the wife of my only son.37

The mother-in-law, instead of allowing Geeta to live on her own, wants her to accept the traditions of the haveli. Generation after generation, the inmates would come and go, but the deeply rooted customs and traditions could not be changed. The traditions are being passed on as legacy by their ancestors, just as Tennyson in 'Brook' says "Men may come and men may go, but I shall go on for ever".

Geeta wants to educate Lakshmi's daughter Sita, along with her own daughter Vijay. Hers is a revolutionary idea, which is met with opposition. Pari, the maid servant, ascertains that Sita cannot be sent to school being the daughter of a servant. Geeta finds no change in the old attitudes. She makes her maid, Dhapu her mouth piece in order to convey her feelings to her father-in-law, Bhagwat Singh. The latter is of the opinion that though it was not a custom to educate girls in Udaipur, education was a good thing to have. However, he has to think twice before any final decision is being taken in the matter.

Sita is sent to school. There is a drastic change in the outlook on life by the people in the haveli. Slowly many women come to learn to read

37. Ibid., p.30.
and write from Geeta. Ajay stands like a strong pillar of strength and supports Geeta's endeavours which she has taken as a challenge. He is proud of her and wants new ideas to enter the haveli. He tells her, "I am proud of you. It is time for new ideas to enter the haveli." However her happiness is short-lived as some orthodox women thronging the haveli complain to Geeta's mother-in-law that education would find these women deserted by their husbands and then it would be the responsibility of the haveli to shelter them. "If these girls are not careful, they will soon find their men deserting them, and then the haveli will have to give them shelter".

It appears that the haveli is not just a residential building but a living character in the novel. It does not say or do anything but everybody is speaking about it. Everybody is doing only that which is permissible in the annals of that haveli. The 'Haveli', like an octopus, holds people tightly in its fold unaware, and throws them up, as if with a contemptuous remark, "Now, do what you can!"

From the exemplary behaviour of Geeta it becomes clear that feminism can have positive impact on the institution of family. Though she could not succeed to the extent she desired, she managed to get at least one person, her father-in-law, to her side. It was a victory to be proud of. When she becomes the first lady of the haveli, she has to coil

38. Ibid., p.137.
39. Ibid., p.162.
back to the same circle of outdated customs preserved as the special characteristics of the household. She has to uphold the tradition of purdah, handed down by her ancestors. Thus she gets caught unawares by the customs, even while trying to escape them.

In "Sunlight on a Broken Column", by Attia Hosain, Laila is a young and educated Muslim lady; she falls in love with Ameer Hussain, who is a cousin of Kunwar Raza Ali of Amirpur. Other members of her family believe that Ameer Hussain is not a man of good breeding and is lower in status than the Taluqdar family. Blood, breeding, family, status, economic position – these are some of the priorities considered at the time of marriage. Laila's aunt, Saira feels that Ameer is not up to their standard as he is the son of the second wife of the old Raja of Amirpur. She further learns that he is only a junior lecturer in the Department of History at Aligarh University.

Ameer feels that Laila's uncle and aunt will not approve of him as he does not qualify by their standards. He keeps on meeting Laila despite strong opposition from the girl's family. Ameer tells Laila, "I am poor. I am nobody, nothing. Your people would never approve of me". He instructs Laila to wait till he achieves some position and earns money. He also suggests her to pursue her studies, to enable him to improve his

own career prospects meanwhile. He asks her to take her own decision regarding her future, to which the girl says,

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ have no courage, Ameer. I have never done} \\
& \text{anything I really believed in. Perhaps I believed in} \\
& \text{nothing enough. I have never been allowed to make} \\
& \text{decisions; they are always made for me.}^{41}
\end{align*}
\]

This assertion of Laila indicates that women have no say in the family affairs. Decisions of girls' marriage are taken by the elders in the family and communicated to the concerned girls. Laila defies the conservative Muslim system and pursues her education. She has a rational outlook of life. She rejects the rigid values held by her family and protests against the restrictions imposed on her. She defies the social conventions of her hierarchal society. According to A.G. Khan and M.G. Khan,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Laila's rebellion within the context of her cultural} \\
\text{milieu reveals a progressive and slightly utopian,} \\
\text{outlook of life.}^{42}
\end{align*}
\]

There are two difficulties in the way of marriage of Laila with Ameer: first, it is the selection of a husband openly by the girl herself,

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41. Ibid., p.265.
which is against the practised norms and traditions of the family and the second, according to the Hamids, supposed to be lower in status from the Taluqdar family, Ameer is not of good breeding. This does not deter Laila from marrying Ameer against all odds. This is certainly the impact of her education and feminism. But as fate would have it, Ameer joins the army only to be killed while trying to escape from the enemy camp.

There is no communication between the two families, though a child is born to Laila. The same child becomes a bridge between Laila and her uncle’s family. The younger members of the family admire the courage of Laila, though they do not say so openly.

The bold decision of Laila to marry the boy of her choice makes many inroads into the strong fortress, which is zealously guarded by uncle Hamid and aunt Abida. The citadel of closely-knit Muslim family falls against the bold decision taken by Laila. This would not have been possible if she were uneducated. Feminism makes the institution of marriage more democratic. The old taboos regarding khandan (family), nasla (race), haisiat (economic status) are discarded and the preference of both the bride and the groom is respected. This is no mean achievement of Laila.

This part of the thesis consists of feminism and its impact on the institutions like marriage and family. Feminism is a kind of awareness
among women that they have their own individuality, their own problems and also they have a different set of code which recognises the separate status of woman in the society. This awareness among women was at different level during different period of time.

Before independence, the *Sita-Savitri* image of woman was shattered when women came out of their houses on the call of Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders. The female characters like *Rajeshwari Bai* in "Kandan, the Patriot", *Bharati* in "Waiting for the Mahatma" and *Ratna* in "Kanthapura" are typical examples of the feminine courage and conviction before independence.

If one tries to put this entire aspect of feminism in a scientific way, according to the theory of dialectics, it will proceed as follows,

- The presentation of woman before independence is thesis.
- Woman after independence is anti-thesis and
- The women in the recent past, like the ones in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, are the synthesis.

*Rajeshwari Bai, Bharati, Ratna* and the like who come under the influence of country’s freedom struggle had single minded devotion to the nationalistic cause. They had no time to think about their personal sentiments like love, marriage and so on. In spite of these restrictions *Bharati* tries to marry but with the permission of the Mahatma. It may be
an effort of the writer that personal feelings like love cannot be ignored even when great nationalistic movements are engaging human society. The thing that should not escape one’s attention is the fact that women were bold outside their homes but while inside, they could not rebel against the male chauvinism. They succeeded in revolting against the foreign dominance but once within the four walls of home, they succumbed to the domestic dominance.

Then comes about the anti-thesis as found in Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan novels, where the women show a kind of revolt against the attitude of their husbands. Savitri, Rosie and Gauri become economically independent and try to recognise their own individuality. Again in the novels by women writers like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande the anti-thesis is found in characters like Maya, Monisha, Sita, and Saru. These women characters completely thwart the male dominance and sometimes coerce men to accept their point of view. However, at times they go to the extent of antagonising their husbands. This is not a very healthy sign of female psyche. Antagonising such a strong partner as man, can create enmity which might cause a set back to the cause of woman’s liberation.

In the novel, “To Whom She Will”, Amrita is a career-minded girl in love with Hari Sahni, a colleague of hers. When Hari marries the girl chosen by his parents, Amrita resigns to her fate and marries the boy of her family’s choice and has an emancipated outlook. It is Hari who is made of a milder stuff than Amrita, and gives way to the pressures from his family.
Out of the paradoxical situation of the thesis and the anti-thesis, a new man-friendly woman is born. Some of these are the women characters in the novels by Rama Mehta and Attia Hosain. Two women, Geeta and Laila, try to bring about changes in the orthodox traditions going on since generations in their families. These traditions weigh heavily upon them with none to defy the existent customs, whereas in Nayantara Sahgal’s novel, Simrit acquires her individuality by divorcing her husband, Som.

From the literature, it appears that there are only two kinds of men – the sinner and the saint. In the first category, one finds characters like Ramani, Marco, Panchi, Jiban, Inder, Som, and Manohar. In the second category, there are the likes of Ajay and Ameer. However, there should also have been a third category which involved just good human beings; but this class is difficult to find among men. The characteristics of this category of men need to be understood and defined. Like the man, the woman is also prone to commit sin and mistakes. If the man is ready to pardon his wife after knowing that the fault committed by her was not a deliberate act, then such quality in the man is highly admired. It may be easier said than done, but this is what the third category of men is expected to be. This is the reason that there is no logical progression in the development of men characters in the Indian novels. Every man has his own nature. Thus, similar circumstances or pressures of life do not
produce similar male characters; whereas, under similar conditions one finds similarity among the women characters.

**FEMINISM IN THE WEST**

The women's movement began in the United States as an offshoot of Social Justice Movement in 1960s. Women led several movements such as the movement against Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, the new left and the Student Movement. The Women's Liberation Workshop which met in June 1967 expressed women's position as 'Colonial relationship with men'. It also said that only the independent woman can be truly effective in the larger revolutionary struggle. Thus the women's movement brought wider social changes.

This was true for Britain. It was a period of a growing working class movement, and the big conflict of that movement mainly involved men. The dispute of Ford Women workers for equal pay, the teachers' strike (1969), the postal strike (1971), Leeds Textile Workers' strike (1970) all of these brought women to the fore. Thus women's new found liberty and militancy could not be ignored. Consequently, women were indicted in the regular pay roll. The tag of women organisations as the 'reserve army of labour' disappeared and they no longer were thought as disposable workers. They became a force by themselves by the end of the last century.
By the beginning of the 21st century, 70 percent of the working women were in full time paid jobs. Both married and unmarried women went for gainful employment, which amounted to 12.5 million rise in the number of women. This boom in women’s employment became possible when more and more mothers started seeking employment. But leaving the child behind at home created problems for the parents as there was no professionally managed child-care institute. Affordable child-care became the most urgent need, particularly for the working mothers. The working women started agitating for this facility as they thought that if the government was not willing to undertake the responsibility, the employers should be doing so. Mother-workers Movement was so intensified that the Labour Party Government promised to increase the quality of child-care centres throughout England. Thus, it was an indication, that Women’s Liberation Movement had dug its roots deeply in the United Kingdom.

There are two important components of Women’s Liberation in Britain—employment and sexual liberty. From the status of reserved work force, women were on the regular pay rolls. However there was a marked decline in the sexual behaviour since 1970 onwards. Divorce rate in Britain is twice as high as any other European country and teenage pregnancies are the highest in Europe.
Women’s Liberation may mean different things in different countries, but actually very little is done in many countries to liberate woman from male dominance, sexual harassment, social injustice and so on. The woman in the West faces the problem of plenty, whereas the Indian woman faces problems like male atrocities, superstitions against the female child that she brings bad luck to the family and anti-human practices like sati system. Therefore women’s liberation in the West means improving the life conditions for women, whereas in India, it may mean freeing her from the terrible burden of the past and providing basic necessities.

America before 1800 AD was an agricultural country. Households were almost self-sufficient and there were little imports from Europe. In 1807, war broke out between England and France. President Jefferson of America, signed Embarg Act, which stopped the trade between Europe and America. The United States established her own factories. In 1814, Francis Cabot Lowell started his first textile factory. He needed unmarried daughters of the farmers to work in the fields. As production of goods moved from villages to the city, people too moved towards the urban region. However, married women had to stay back to tend to their families’ needs.

During the First World War, the men went to fight for their countries so the married women had to take their place in the factories. But the
general public opinion was not in favour of the working of married women. The media and the government began a severe propaganda crusade to change this attitude. The federal government motivated the women by telling that victory could not be achieved without their participation in the workforce. During the Second World War, working was considered part of being a good citizen and a working wife exhibited patriotism. The middle class taboo against a working wife was repealed. In the post World War II scenario, women were asked to return to their homes and hearths, making way for men. Thus women were brought out not for their freedom, but because cheap work force was needed during war time.

As wives played a big role in contributing to the family’s earnings, they felt justified in asking their husbands to share the child-care and household chores. When both the parents were working, their children grew unsupervised and thus crime among teens also increased.

Around 1970s there were three major changes which influenced women’s attitude in the West. A small minority gained access to higher education, which helped them in two ways. They started to realise about the role of woman in ways other than the conventional one. They were emboldened to think about the alternatives for marriage and motherhood. The second important change in the attitude of the educated women was to separate procreation from sexual fulfilment. It meant that they could
be free to enjoy sex without the fear of pregnancy. The third and the most significant change in the western women in 1970s and 1980s was greater financial and social independence. This helped women to question the rigid morality of the past and upsurge of sexual radicalism. Women’s assertiveness in this situation is a demand for the right to be treated equally with men—sexually, legally, as well as financially.

By the beginning of the 21st century, it was no longer the norm for people to abstain from sex before marriage. There were only a few indeed of those who ‘saved themselves’ for marriages. Sex in all its manifestations was seen as commodity to be bought and sold in the market. Today sexuality is a commercial relationship rather than a natural expression of human relations.

By 1970 the Women’s Liberation which had some ideological base and which had succeeded in putting women’s issues on political agenda was deeply divided. In fact the women’s movement was never a mass movement in Britain. Although the founders of the movements’ tended to be socialists and trade unionists, the second half of the 1970s saw the emergence of radical feminism which was characterised by too much of liberty and too less of responsibility.

Exploitation of women dominates our lives and destroys human potentials and relations. True liberation shall only be achieved when the
working class people take control and end this exploitation. Revolution is about liberation and about taking charge of things—taking control of the workplace and the work process, so that production is made for needs and not for profiteering. The sexual control means the right to have children or not, as the woman chooses, thereby controlling her own life and own body.

This should seem a basic right in the 21st century. German Lindsey writes:

*But there are women who are forced to have children they do not want because they are denied abortion or contraception ..... There should be no financial, political or moral pressure on these decisions. Women and men should have the right to divorce when either partner wants it. Women should be free from domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment. Only when we end an exploitative class society which maintains oppression at its centre can we take control and achieve these aims collectively.*

The socialist societies in history demonstrated that women’s demands came to the fore in the 1920s and 1930s, but women

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43. German Lindsey, "International Socialism Journal", Winter: 2003, p.27.
themselves fought to achieve them. Post 1917 Russia, though poor and war torn, achieved real changes for women. Thus Women’s Liberation has to be a part of the fight for socialism, to overthrow the class ridden society and to achieve any of its fundamental aims. If it is to be successful, the struggle has to involve the working class men and not keep them at bay.

The issue of Women’s Liberation in the West has always created division of opinions and war of words between people. In early 1920s the middle class feminists and working class socialists were fighting, to know whether Women’s Liberation could be achieved through capitalism. As the US socialists Elizabeth Gurley Fynn said in 1915,

The sisterhood of women, like the brotherhood of man is a hollow sham to labour. Behind all its smug hypocrisy and sickly sentimentality loom the sinister outlines of the class war.\(^{44}\)

If in fighting back against them we make the connection between Women’s Liberation, socialism and overthrow of class society then we have brought the possibility to reach changes in women’s status closer. Socialists’ societies strived and achieved some freedom for poor working class women. Capitalist society used them to enhance their capital through cheap labour.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 28.
This was the tell tale of Women’s Liberation in United States and Britain. Basically it was called a tussle between the Capitalism and Socialism. What Russia could do in 1917, Britain could not do even after the World Wars. Women were pampered as reserve work force, which meant that they ought to be employed only when men were busy at wars. However, upon their return the government sponsored propaganda was circulated in the society. It was a common place philosophy that women’s real field of activity was the home where they ought to return. Some women, educated by then, saw clearly the game plan of the government and refused to oblige them. On the contrary, they mounted offensives regarding liberty of work, sex and equality of remuneration and so on. They also demanded good child care institutions.

India in earlier times was neither a socialist nor a capitalist country, but a typical colony of Britain. Its conservative social order and its age old superstitions about woman were glaring. A woman was both a goddess and a devil rolled in one. The sati system, the child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, etc were heaped on her. So Women’s Liberation in India meant setting woman free from all these draconic conditions. It was neither capitalism nor socialism that the Indian women needed, but a bit of humanism.

There was a basic difference in the Woman’s Liberation Movement in India and the West. In the west the Liberation Movement was an effort
to lift woman from her poor economic conditions, provide jobs, better working conditions, good child-care and health care. The Western woman did not have the stigmatic position in the society as the Indian woman did. The woman of the West was not considered unholy, she was not denied education and she was not forced to work all the time and so. On the other hand the Indian woman had to over throw her dreadful past and then think of her material progress. This journey of Indian woman from her oblivion past to a better future did have impact on man-woman relationship.