# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Disintegration of Institutions: A Requiem for Order and Discipline</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Constructions of Femininity: Conforming and Transcendence</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Plot and Narration: A Medley of Voices as Narrative Strategy</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Summing Up</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annexure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter I

**INTRODUCTION**

The term ‘feminist’ seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in the development of the sexual organs and
characteristics in male patients who were thus suffering from feminization of their bodies. Politically it was used by Alexandre Dumas, a French writer in connection with the subject of adultery, to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine way. Thus, as Fraisse points out, although in medical terminology, feminism was used to signify a feminization of men, in political terms it was first used to describe a virilization of women (qtd. in Freedman 2). It is interesting to note that feminist was not at first an adjective used by women to describe themselves and there was what one would call feminist thought and activity long before the term itself was adopted.

Religions all over the world have defined or been made to define the female as inferior. Women’s bodies are declared to be inherently inferior and sinful and fit to be controlled by men. Men’s bodies and souls are claimed to be the measure of humanity. That is, man is the norm, the rule; woman is a derivation and as such is included in man. Men are granted the power to define, interpret, judge and represent the world on their own terms, while women are to be defined, interpreted, judged and represented by men. Certain Hindu scriptural texts claim that at the very dawn of creation, women emerged as sinful creatures, fire, snakes, and poison all rolled into one. The ancient Greeks who worshipped both Gods and Goddesses were convinced that men were the measure of perfection while women were fundamentally imperfect. The philosopher Aristotle holds that women are naturally lacking in intelligence and rationality.
Buddhist texts argue that women’s innate nature is bad. Christianity maintains that God created man first, and woman next. And therefore man is the exemplary human whereas woman is a secondary and dependent being. Islam too believes that men were created to rule over and manage the lives and affairs of women.

On the other hand and for all their devaluing of women, most of these world religions also appear reverential and in awe of women’s ability to sustain life in their wombs. Either they possess a tradition of Mother Goddess worship or they celebrate the virginal woman, whose purity lies in the awesome power she is able to exert over her body.

Worshipping women as mothers while devaluing them in every other sense thus, became a way of displacing as well as managing fears about female power and sexuality. Valuing women’s essential nurturing qualities of love and compassion as most scriptures do, confirmed the idea that they were naturally and fundamentally meant to be mothers. It is clear that religion prescribes, promotes and justifies as well as contains, in an imaginative way, certain notions of the ideally masculine and the ideally feminine. Occasionally allowances are made to enable a reversal of the equation but never a questioning of it. Thus, women are considered loving and compassionate. Yet there is no valid reason as to why these qualities should be associated with the particular female role alone, that is with motherhood; or why the possession of these attributes should automatically
disqualify women from laying claims to others, such as strength and ambition, which conventionally are described as male.

Sherry B. Ortner in her analysis of gender says that her primary concern is with the universal devaluation of women. She points out that sometimes claims are made to a superior status to women in certain societies, taking into account the actual, though culturally unrecognized and unvalued powers in a given society without first understanding the overreaching ideology and deeper assumptions of the culture that renders such powers trivial. She puts forward her ideas on what would constitute evidence that a particular society considers its women inferior (18-19), including the attribution of defilement to women and the existence of social rules that deny equal participation of men and women in societal activities.

Ortner observes that on any or all of these counts, women are found to be subordinated to men in every known society. The search for a truly matriarchal culture or at least a truly equal society that has had no gender bias has proved fruitless. Even among the matrilineal Crowe tribe, among whom women had highly privileged places in the Sun dance, Tobacco ceremony, etc. there were beliefs of defilement with reference to women. During menstruation, women rode inferior horses and were not permitted to touch certain objects. Here one would do well to think of the Indian culture which has also had the idea of defilement attached to menstruating women, even though it has given pride of place to several Goddesses and even though there are records of Vedic women scholars and women poets which provide compelling evidence on the positive side. Therefore
the devaluation of women relative to men is a cultural universal. Certain cultures have given some privileges, powers and rights, more than the others. But at some point, the line is drawn.

In the Aristotelian tradition, a woman is not a woman, but a man ‘manque’, an animal ‘occasionatum’ who is defined by what she lacks (Ruthven 44). Created second according to a Hebrew myth which Christians inherited as holy writ in the book of Genesis, every woman enters history with a piece missing, whether it is a head according to St. Paul or a penis according to Sigmund Freud. Whatever the deficiency, men think of themselves as uniquely qualified to supplement it, provided women show their gratitude by submissiveness.

Indeed the male gaze has always imaged women as objects of both pleasure and use. Women’s bodies are to yield to men’s needs. In colonial India, in the late nineteenth century, male social reformers who actively questioned tradition and custom demurred when it came to reexamining notions of masculinity and femininity. Many of these men were engaged in worthwhile activities such as widow remarriage and the education of girls. But very few of them were willing to grant women equal rights as men. They were as convinced as their forefathers that women’s nature and talents required them, and in fact, were best served if they stayed at home, looked after the house and raised children.

Strangely, down the centuries an overwhelming majority of women have accepted the secondary status and devaluation allotted to their sex as a normal given. Cries of dissent were few and far between. Ruthven cites Aristophanes’s
comedy, *Lysistrata* as having been one of the earliest works to have documented women’s resistance. The play is about how women achieved social change by withholding sexual favours from their men (16).

Modern, organized, feminist activity in the world is usually categorized into three waves. ‘First-wave feminism’ refers to a period of feminist activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries especially in Europe and America. It focussed primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage, the right to be educated, the right to better working conditions and the abolition of double sexual standards. In America, leaders of the feminist movement took part in the anti-slavery campaign, prior to championing the rights of women. The Woman’s Rights convention held by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton at Seneca Falls, New York, occurred during this period, in the year 1848.

Beginning in this period and continuing into the period of the “Second wave” of feminism, there was a sudden spurt in the writing of feminist science fiction. It emerged as a sub genre of science fiction and tended to deal with women’s roles in society. Clare Winger Harris and Gertrude Barrows Bennet published science-fiction stories written from female perspectives. Most of the feminist science fiction works studied the social construction of gender roles, power equations of men and women and the role of reproduction in defining the above, by depicting utopias in which gender power imbalances did not exist or dystopias in which gender inequalities were intensified. *The Sultana’s Dream*
written by Bengali feminist Roquia Sakhawat Hussain of this period depicts for example, a gender-reversed purdah in the imaginary future.

‘Second wave feminism’ refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the early ’60s and continuing through the late 1980s. ‘Second wave feminism’ has existed continuously since then, and continues to coexist with what some people describe as ‘Third wave feminism.’ Second wave feminism saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of a sexist structure of power. If first-wavers focussed on absolute rights such as suffrage, second-wavers were largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination.

Third wave feminism, which is supposed to encompass the current feminist trends in its fold, began in the early 1990s. Its proponents seek to challenge or avoid what they deem the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which according to them over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology. Third wave feminists often focus on “micropolitics” and challenge the second wave's measuring standards as to what is, or is not, good for females. As the third wave emerged, feminist leaders rooted in the second wave like Gloria Anzaldua, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Morraga, Luisa Accati, and many other feminists of color, called for a new subjectivity in feminist
voice. They sought to negotiate a prominent space within feminist thought for consideration of race related subjectivities.

As for the place of feminist literary criticism in feminism, there are those who would argue that the time and energy of feminists should be devoted to address the numerous practical, pressing problems of women rather than to a study of literature. But as Coward points out, “Reading a novel can be a political activity” (55) and could revolutionize thought processes and attitudes, with as much if not more efficacy than other, political activities.

Feminist literary criticism can be viewed as one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. Feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has marginalized women. According to Gayle Greene and Coppelia Khan, feminist scholarship has two concerns: “It revises concepts previously thought universal but now seen as originating in particular cultures and serving particular purposes; and it restores a female perspective by extending knowledge about contributions to culture” (2).

Feminist critics find that the critical tradition reinforces – even when literature does not, images of characters and behaviour that encourage women to accept their subordination, either by ignoring or degrading women or praising them for such virtues as obedience, meekness and humility. Moreover, they point out that literary history has canonized, designated as great, certain texts which are
claimed to embody universal human truths but such truths appear so only because of their congruence with the dominant ideology. Feminist criticism takes it upon itself to question the values implicit in the great works, investigating the tradition that canonized them and the interests it serves. Greene and Khan quote Kolodny saying that feminist criticism exposes the collusion between literature and ideology demanding that the reader understands the ways in which “structures of primarily male power have been reified by literature and by literary criticism. It is alert to the omissions, gaps, partial truths and contradictions which ideology masks – it attends to the silences” (22).

Elaine Showalter, one of the leading feminist critics in the U.S. has identified three historical phases of women’s literary development in her essay titled “The Female Tradition”. They are the Feminine phase, Feminist phase and Female phase. In the Feminine phase (1840-1880), “women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature” (274). The Feminist phase (1880-1920) was characterized by women’s writing that protested against male standards and values, and advocated women’s rights and values, including a demand for autonomy.

The Female phase, which according to Showalter has been in existence since 1920, is one of self-discovery. Showalter says that in this phase women have rejected imitation and protest, recognizing both as different forms of dependency, and have turned instead to “female experience as the source of an autonomous art,
extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature” (285).

Elaine Showalter observes that the early women writers’ relationship to their professional role was uneasy. The act of writing was considered so much a mark of unwomanly assertion that many wrote either anonymously or assumed a pose of helplessness. Showalter cites the example of Elizabeth Inchbald, who prefaced her book, *A Simple Story* with the lie that she was a poor invalid who had written a novel despite “the utmost detestation to the fatigue of inventing” (276). Indeed, for Victorian women, writing was not an easy vocation to take up. They were not accustomed to choosing a vocation. “Womanhood was a vocation in itself” (278). As far as men were concerned, “in pursuing their ambitions, they fulfilled societal expectations.” But for women, “work meant labor for others.”

The Feminine phase included writers like Mrs.Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, the Brontes, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Charlotte Yonge, Margaret Oliphant and others. They worked amidst inhibitions caused by Victorian training in “repression, concealment and self-censorship.” Many of the writers had to overcome their own deep-seated guilt about their writing.

Though the Feminist phase did not produce very important artists, their contribution marks an important stage in the female tradition. The phase registered an outspoken hostility and a rejection of self-sacrifice in its enthusiastic declaration of independence. Sarah Grand, George Egerton and Olive Shreiner are a few of the authors belonging to this period.
According to Showalter, the fiction of Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf marked the beginning of the creation of a deliberate female aesthetic in the female tradition. The trend has continued to result in a new renaissance in women’s writing in the fiction of writers like Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt and Beryl Bainbridge.

Virginia Woolf’s concern with feminist thematics is dominant in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). In it she makes her famous statement: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). Woolf examines the obstacles and prejudices that have hindered women writers. She separates women as objects of representation and women as authors of representation, and argues for a change in the forms of literature because most literature had been “made by men out of their own needs for their own uses.” In the last chapter Woolf touches on the possibility of an androgynous mind. Here, she refers to Coleridge who has said that a great mind is androgynous and states that when this fusion takes place the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. “Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine...” (98).

In her outlining of the female tradition, Elaine Showalter laments the lack of a continuous literary history for women, because of the effect of “residual Great Traditionalism” that reduced and condensed the range and diversity of English women novelists to a tiny band of the great, comprising four or five writers like Jane Austen, the Brontes, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf. She insists that an inclusion of minor writers in the female literary history is important to understand
the links between time periods and the gradual evolution. She states: “it is only by considering them all-Millicent Gorgan as well as Virginia Woolf – that we can begin to record new choices in a new literary history, and to understand why, despite prejudice, despite guilt, despite inhibition, women began to write” (286).

Kristeva was regarded as a key proponent of French feminism together with Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, Kristeva had a remarkable influence on feminism and feminist literary studies in the US and the UK, as well as on readings into contemporary art. Her views of feminism are best represented in her essay “Women's Time” in *New Maladies of the Soul*. In this essay originally published in 1979, Kristeva argues that there are three types of feminism.

She rejects the first type because it seeks universal equality and overlooks sexual differences. She implicitly criticizes Simone de Beauvoir and the rejection of motherhood; rather than reject motherhood, Kristeva insists that what is needed is a new discourse of maternity. In fact, in her essay, “A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident,” Kristeva suggests that “real female innovation (in whatever field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood” (298).

Kristeva also rejects what she sees as the second type of feminism because it seeks a uniquely feminine language, which she thinks, is impossible. Kristeva does not agree with feminists who maintain that language and culture are essentially patriarchal and must somehow be abandoned. On the contrary, Kristeva insists that culture and language are the domain of speaking beings and women are
primarily speaking beings. Kristeva endorses what she identifies as the third phase of feminism which seeks to re-conceive of identity and difference and their relationship. This current phase of feminism refuses to choose identity over difference or visa versa; rather, it explores multiple identities, including multiple sexual identities. In an interview with Rosalind Coward, Kristeva proposes that there are as many sexualities as there are individuals.

The French feminists including Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray further propound in their writings the theory of ‘l’écriture feminine’ or feminine language and associate such feminine writing with the female body. This kind of emphasis on feminine writing as an expression of the female body is criticized by a few other French feminists however. They argue that an emphasis on the body either reduces “the feminine” to a biological essence or elevates it in such a way that shifts the valuation but retains the binary categories.

American feminist critics of the later part of the 20th century have been mixed in their reactions towards the concept of feminine writing. Annette Kolodny observes that certain aspects of style like reflexive constructions and certain recurrent themes are a characteristic of women’s writing. Yet, she also cautions that the richness and variety of women’s writing will be missed if only its feminine mode or style is seen in it (78). Some of the American feminists feel that their focus should be on analysis of literary texts rather than on philosophical abstractions on language. They advocate a revisionist re-reading of literary tradition. Such readings have given rise to two different approaches.
The first one was labelled “the feminist critique of male-constructed literary history” by Elaine Showalter in her essay “Toward a Feminist Poetics” (128). It involves the examination of the portrayal of women characters in literary works and the exposition of the patriarchal ideology implicit in them. Kate Millett, Carolyn Heilbrun and Judith Fetterly among many others created this model. The other model was evolved by a group of critics including Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Patricia Meyer Spacks and Elaine Showalter. The aim of this model is to study the writings of those women, who against all odds have produced “a literature of their own” and to examine the female literary tradition to find out how great women writers across the ages “have felt, perceived themselves and imagined reality.”

Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe this kind of literary criticism based on a feminine perspective. She defines gynocritics:

In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. (“Poetics” 131)

Showalter admits that it might not be possible for gynocritics to ever successfully understand the special differences of women’s writing or establish a distinct female tradition. Yet, gynocriticism would be “a way to learn something solid,
enduring and real about the relation of women to literary culture” (“Wilderness” 249).

Even though quite a number of exemplary female authors like George Eliot, Virginia Woolf had already made their contributions to English literature, Elaine Showalter equates the development of feminist literary criticism and the beginning of the contemporary women’s movement with Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Betty Friedan. In their writings these critics have examined the female self as a cultural idea promulgated by male authors and their analyses of literature and culture concentrate on how male fears and anxieties have been portrayed through female characters. In her epoch-making book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir questions, what is woman? How is she constructed differently from men? She answers her own question, saying that woman is constructed differently by men. She argues that all along man has defined the human not woman.

Beauvoir elaborates on how the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. She compares how woman has been defined in relation to man, exactly as early men would have first looked upon the absolute vertical and then defined the oblique with reference to it. There is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman is not an autonomous being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to woman; she is the incidental,
the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is “the Other.” Beauvoir goes on to point out that the category of “the other is as primordial as consciousness itself.” She follows Hegel in asserting that “we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only by being opposed. He sets himself up as the essential as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object” (17).

But in every such set of absolute and other, the other ego, sets up a rival claim. The native travelling abroad often finds himself considered the stranger by natives of neighbouring countries. “Wars, festivals, trading treaties and contests among tribes, nations and classes tend to deprive the concept “other” of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity; willy-nilly, individuals and groups are forced to realize the reciprocity of their relations” (17). Beauvoir raises the question as to why such a reciprocity has not been recognized between the sexes alone. When no subject will volunteer to become the object, how is it that woman alone has submitted to being the object, the inessential? It is not the other, who in defining himself as the other establishes the one. “The “other” is posed as such by the other in defining himself as the one. But if the other is not to regain the status of being the one, “he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view” (18).

Gayle Greene and Coppelia Khan in their essay on “Feminist Scholarship” say in this regard that women present a special case to the historian: “neither class or caste nor minority, they are more closely allied to the men in their lives than
they are to women of their classes and races and so are more closely integrated with the dominant culture than is any other subordinate group” (14). They add further that women have in some sense internalized the ideology of the oppressors and have not only accepted their own subordination, but have also impressed upon their children of both sexes, the very values by which they themselves have been made to accept subordination.

Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out this strange predicament of women, a victimized class who are however more closely bound to their oppressors than with other members of their class. She goes on to say, “The woman who is shut up in immanence endeavours to hold man in that prison also”. The prison is interchangeable with the world, and for the woman confined there, the words, mother, wife, sweetheart and the roles suggested by them are the jailers. As society is codified by man, she can do away with the inferiority only by destroying the male’s superiority. This has in turn been responsible for the woman’s urge to mutilate and dominate man. She contradicts him; she denies his truth and his values. But in doing this she is only trying to defend herself. It was not a changeless essence or a mistaken choice that doomed her to immanence and inferiority. They were imposed upon her. “All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception. The existent who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty” (726).

In today’s world, the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put a man in a prison, woman endeavours to escape from one; “she no longer
seeks to drag him into the realms of immanence but to emerge herself into the
light of transcendence” (726). But the male creates a new conflict here. He lets
go only with “very bad grace.” He wants to remain the sovereign subject. He
refuses to accept his companion as an equal in any concrete way. She replies to
his lack of confidence in her by assuming an aggressive attitude. Simone de
Beauvoir sums up her observations on the situation of modern woman coming out
of the submissive pose imposed upon her down the centuries. “It is no longer a
question of a war between individuals, each shut up in his or her sphere: a caste
claiming its rights, attacks and is resisted by the privileged caste” (726).

Seeking to find an explanation for the universal devaluation of women,
Ortner theorizes that women are seen as being closer to nature than men while
culture is equated more or less unambiguously with men. Ortner cites three
reasons for this state of woman:

1. Her body and its functions, more involved more of the time with
‘species life,’ seem to place her closer to nature, as opposed to men,
whose physiology frees them more completely to the projects of
culture.

2. Her body and its functions put her in social roles that are in turn
considered to be at a lower order of culture, in opposition to the
higher orders of the cultural process.

3. Her traditional social roles, imposed because of her body and its
functions, in turn give her a different psychic structure- and again
this psychic structure, like her physiological structure and her social roles, is seen as being more ‘like nature’. (18-19)

The same idea of woman being seen to be closer to nature has been anticipated by Simone de Beauvoir. She points out that many areas and processes of the woman’s body serve no apparent function for the health and stability of the individual woman. While menstruation is often painful and interrupts a woman’s routine, pregnancy depletes the mineral resources of the mother. Childbirth itself is painful and life-threatening for several women. The breasts and the uterus are irrelevant to a woman’s health and the ovarian secretions are mostly for the benefit of the egg, she produces. Therefore Beauvoir states emphatically, “the female is more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest” (4).

Beauvoir goes on to explain how and why, the female species that has the power to create remains undervalued. The biological creation in which woman plays a major role, results only in repeating the life in more individuals. But man, not only assures the repetition of life, but also transcends life through existence, which according to him involves goal-oriented, meaningful action. Sherry B. Ortner also elaborates on this idea. The male, “lacking natural creative functions must, or has the opportunity to exert his creativity externally, artificially through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables, namely the human beings” (23).
The puzzle of why male activities like hunting and warfare which involve the destruction of life, have always been glorified while the female ability to create life and give birth has not deserved mention as a feat, is explained by both. Beauvoir states, “It is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills” (95-96). Ortner says that woman is as much involved in and committed to culture’s project of transcendence over nature as man. It explains woman’s “nearly universal, unquestioning acceptance of her devaluation” and her “celebration of the successes and victories of the males” (23).

This reasoning also goes to explain why men have been the natural proprietors of art, religion, law etc. Ortner explains “Family represents lower-level, socially fragmenting, particularistic sort of concerns as opposed to inter familial relations, which represent higher-level, integrative, universalistic sort of concerns” (25). As women were thought to be naturally suited for child care because of their lactating ability, it was stated categorically that a woman’s place is in the home. Even when a woman’s primary role in the socialization of children is considered, for it is she who transforms the new-born infant, teaching it manners and the proper ways to behave, in order to be a true member of the culture, she is seen as having only an intermediate status with regard to culture. “A member of culture, yet appearing to have stronger and more direct connections with nature, she is seen as something in between the two categories” (26).
Having analysed the thought processes that have ascribed the kind of intermediate position to women, which has in turn led to the pan-cultural devaluation of women down the centuries, Ortner asserts vigorously that the whole scheme is a construct of culture rather than a given of nature. Woman is not in reality any closer to or farther away from nature than man. “Various aspects of women’s situation lead to her being seen as close to nature, while the view of her as close to nature is embodied in institutional forms that regenerate her situation” (31).

Ortner’s suggestion for a way out of the vicious circle is for men and women to be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. It would involve society’s allowing women to participate in and women actively appropriating the fullest range of social roles and activities available within the culture.

Primarily feminism responds to sex and gender differences in which those differences signify, justify and ratify one sex’s domination of the other (Stimpson xvi). A minimalist position declares that men and women are pretty much the same. They need and deserve similar rights, opportunities, responsibilities and joys. A maximalist position declares that men and women may demand similar rights and opportunities but they are not pretty much the same. Women may have special values, a culture and even vulnerabilities that all must respect.

Betty Friedan, an important contributor to the American feminist movement in the later part of the twentieth century sums up in her writing, the resentment and
disquiet in women’s minds in the kind of restrictive social set-up existing in those times, even in America. She calls it “the problem that has no name.” It is part of the book titled, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963 and is worded thus:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning [that is, a longing] that women suffered in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries … she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — ‘Is this all?’

(Chap I)

The book was an instant bestseller and the spirit of the question, “Is this all?” so profoundly and unequivocally reflected both the devalued state of women and their growing awareness of it that many historians believe that the impetus for the “second wave” of the Women’s Movement and several world events that ensued came chiefly from the impact created by the book. In 1966, Friedan co-founded, and became the first president of the National Organisation for Women (NOW). Under Friedan’s leadership “NOW” advocated fiercely for the legal equality of women and men.

Kate Millett, another eminent American feminist writer and activist, made an impact with her book, *Sexual Politics*, published in 1970. It has been described as “the first book of academic feminist literary criticism.” In her book, Millet argues that “sex has a frequently neglected political aspect” and goes on to discuss
the role that patriarchy plays in sexual relations, looking especially at the works of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer. Millet argues that these authors view and discuss sex in a patriarchal and sexist way.

Toril Moi, another eminent feminist critic, opposes Showalter’s views on gynocritics. She particularly criticizes Showalter’s ideas regarding the Female Phase and its notions of a woman’s singular autonomy and necessary search inward for a female identity. Moi claims that there is no fundamental female self. Her argument is that the problem of equality in literary theory is caused not by the supposed male character of the literary canon but by the existence of such a canon itself. Even if an alternative female literary canon were developed, it would be no less oppressive and limiting than the male one. Moi further elaborates that the female tradition is extremely diverse and would vary widely, depending on class, ethnicity, social values, sexuality etc. Therefore a literary canon, representative of a particular female tradition or in other words, representative of a particular socio-demographic class of women would be limiting and unsuitable.

Nancy Chodorow, a US based sociologist, psychoanalyst and educator is the author of four books, one of which titled, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* was listed by Contemporary Sociology in the 1990s among the ten most influential books of the past twenty-five years. In this book, she challenges the traditional view that females are biologically predisposed toward nurturing infants. She argues that mothering fulfills a woman’s psychological need for reciprocal intimacy. Chodorow also
describes the difference in the mother's relationships with their sons as opposed to their daughters. She states that mothers are close with their infant sons, but they view their male children as different and do not share with them the same sense of “oneness” that they experience with their daughters (109). She claims that mature males who are unaccustomed to a psychologically intimate relationship are, therefore, content to leave mothering to women.

According to Adrienne Rich, a contemporary American poet, feminism is the place where in the most natural organic way, subjectivity and politics have to come together. This kind of stand allows feminism to protest the exclusion of women from the literary canon, to focus upon the personal, such as diary literature, to exhibit a powerful political orientation and to redefine literary theory itself. Feminist literary criticism is not as critic Toril Moi observes, just another interesting critical approach like a concern for sea-imagery or metaphor of war in medieval poetry. Feminism represents one of the most important, social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times.

As for the sheer mass and variety of thought and work that goes by the label, “feminist”, it would be good to recall that an important feature of some feminist criticism is its resistance against the development of a coherent theory. The historical experience of all women is so complex a matter that no single methodology or conceptual framework can be worked out to hold it all, says Gerda Lerner. It is further said that, “Feminism is a diverse field and hence would demand diverse methods. Methodological tidiness leads to oversimplification and
reductionism” (Ruthven 25). According to Ruthven, Annis V. Pratt even claims that the insistence upon a single method is not only dysfunctional but an attribute of patriarchy.

A synchronic study of the different activities that would constitute current feminism leads to a mind boggling array of different versions of feminism. Sociofeminism prompts studies of the way women are represented in literary texts. Semiofeminists study the signifying practices by which women are classified and assigned social roles. Psychofeminists examine literature for unconscious articulations of repressed feminine desire. Lesbian feminists favour “a somatic theory” of writing, exploring the connection between sexuality and textuality by looking to the labia as the source of a distinctively feminine writing. Again there are Black feminists who feel that they are doubly oppressed. Marxism is also a significant branch of feminism. And there are versions, which do a bit of everything. Even the antifeminist Parisian feminist group which objects to the term, feminism, but favours the term “feminine” as “the signifier of a force which has always been excluded from the patriarchal order of things” finds a place under feminism. Ruthven opines that such a diversity of aims and practices “enables current feminism to advance on several fronts at once, which is generally thought of as a strength that would be lacking in a monolithic feminism” (20).

Marxist feminists identify capitalism as the material base of a class system which is the source of all oppression and hold that the specific subjection of women will end necessarily with the general destruction of capitalism that would
end oppression. According to them women make up one of the dependant and exploited classes. But many women disagree with this view. The New York radical feminists wrote in 1969 that “We do not believe that capitalism or any other economic system is the cause of female oppression, nor do we believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of purely economic revolution” (qtd. in Ruthven 28). They believe that patriarchy is the problem and not economics.

Women who call themselves Marxist feminists consider capitalism and patriarchy as two separate but interlocking sets of social relations, each with a material base, each with its own dynamic (Ruthven 28). In comparing the status of women to other underprivileged sections, so placed because of class diversions, the denial of opportunities to women is variously compared to apartheid, colonialism etc. The analogy with slavery is also vividly presented by some writers. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) deals with this analogy. “No slave is a slave to the same lengths and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is” writes John Stuart Mill (qtd. in Ruthven 29).

The key feature in Marxism is its analysis of a social system with the aim of getting it changed. Feminists are attracted by this aspect that clamours for change. Marx wrote “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point is to change it.” Echoing the idea, Andrea Dworkin says, “We intend to change [the world] so totally that someday, the texts of masculinist writers will be anthropological curiosities” (qtd. in Ruthven 30).
In India, the birth and early growth of the feminist movement was inextricably coupled with the nationalist movement. In ancient India, women led lives of reasonable dignity, even if not ones of complete equality and opportunity. In fact in the pre-Aryan societies, there is evidence of the existence of the matrilocal system, whereby the son-in-law stays with the wife’s family, so there is a continuity of mothers and their daughters. This system is still found among the Muslims of Lakshadweep islands, under the early Dravidian influence. Certain other communities like the Nairs of Kerala, Shettys of Mangalore, certain Maratha clans, and Bengali families also exhibit matriarchal tendencies, with the head of the family being the oldest woman rather than the oldest man.

In the Vedic period too, women occupied positions of prominence. They had the right to choose their marriage partner and were given education. Several hymns that are a part of the Vedas are attributed to Gosha, Gargi and Maitreyi, who were highly regarded women seers and philosophers of the times. The rise of Buddhism, which propagated the principle of equality and which had greater freedom in its religious principles was responsible for encouraging many women to write. Religious escapism was a way out for many women who were frustrated with life inside the home. “So free am I, so gloriously free, free from three petty things—from mortar, from pestle and from my twisted Lord,” sings Mutta, one of the Therigatha nuns credited with one of the earliest anthologies of women’s literature in India (qtd. in Tharu and Lalita 68). In Tamil Nadu, of the several authors of the recovered literary treasures of the Sangam Age, dating from roughly
300 BC to 3rd century AD, there were at least twenty seven poetesses. Avvaiyar, Ponmudiyar, Adhi Mandhiyar and Koperundevi are a few of them.

But after the Sangam period in the south and in the later Vedic period in the north, there began a gradual degradation in the status of women. A few women writers are found here and there like Andal of Tamil Nadu who composed the widely acclaimed Thiruppavai and Nachiyar Thirumozhi around the 8th century AD. In the neighbouring Karnataka state around the 12th century AD, at least thirty women poetesses wrote ‘vachanas’, the brief prose like poetry pieces, each ending with one or the other local names under which Lord Shiva is invoked, and dealing with a variety of themes ranging from the religious to the revolutionary. Githa Hariharan’s use of the vachanas of poets Devara Dasimaya and Basava as Prologues to her books, The Thousand Faces of Night and In Times of Siege is significant here.

During the Mughal period, one of the earliest to write was Princess Gul-Badan Begum, who wrote the biography of the Mughal emperor Humayun, under the title, Humayun Nama. In the south, Madhupalini and Ramabhadramba were well-known poetesses in the Nayak kingdom of Thanjavur. Women’s writing came to a standstill around the 18th century, when princely kingdoms were all brought under the control of the British Empire. The trend of educating women began again in the late 19th century with the rise of the reformist movement. Savithribai Phule, teacher and writer, started the first school for girls. A little later Sarojini Naidu published her first set of poems. In that period, a wave of
passionate nationalism was sweeping the country. It became inevitable that feminism as a movement should be taken up ironically by men, who as social reformers and freedom-fighters also became concerned with the social evils that were plaguing women in the form of superstition, custom and tradition.

Therefore unlike the Western feminist movement, India’s modern feminist movement was initiated by men, and later joined by women. Men like Dr. Ambedkar, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshav Chandra Sen and Malabari Phule worked hard at freeing women from social evils. The efforts of these men included abolishing sati, the custom of child marriage, abolishing the disfiguring of widows, banning the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, promoting women’s education, obtaining legal rights for women to own property, and requiring the law to acknowledge women’s status by granting them basic rights in matters such as adoption.

Gandhi legitimized and expanded Indian women’s public activities by initiating them into the non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British empire. He exalted their feminine roles of caring, self-abnegation, sacrifice and tolerance; and carved a niche for those in public space. Women-only organizations like All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged.

The spirit of the movement spread through all parts of the country. In Tamil Nadu, for example, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, affectionately called Periyar by the public was responsible for bringing out a revolution in the lives of Tamil women.
An ardent social reformer born in 1879, he was ahead of his time in his views. He not only fought against the dowry system, but also scoffed at the idea of chastity for women alone, arguing that it should either belong to men also or not at all for both sexes. He advocated birth control, not only for the health of women and population control but also for the liberation of women.

Poets like Kavimani, Bharathi and Bharathidasan actively championed the rights of women in their poems. Bharathi visualized the “new woman” who would walk straight, with her eyes lifted, in contrast to the older, prescribed image of Tamil women, with their eyes downcast and head bent. Bharathidasan remarked emphatically that mere political freedom would do no good if it is not clubbed with the liberation of women and if women are not treated as equals of men. His narrative poems like ‘Kudumba Vilakku’, ‘Pandian Parisu’, ‘Kurinchi Thittu’, ‘Kannaki Kappiam’ and ‘Tamizhachiyan Katthi’ centre around heroic women characters who are in no way inferior to their male counterparts.

Coming to the recent past, it should be said that women's writing in the past few decades has moved towards a medium of modernism in which feminist statements are combined with political messages. The writings of women such as Hamsa Wadkar convey an honest impression of a world of professional women whose careers in television and stage segregate them as a class apart, yet subject them to the same brutality and force of patriarchy. Mahasweta Devi’s women characters are activists though Mahasweta Devi is not professedly a feminist. Men and women in her novels fight neck to neck against a common foe, the
establishment. “The women break through the tradition of home, hearth and veil to fight this establishment with whatever weapons they can wield - the sickle, the hatchet or with sulking detachment” (Ray 5). Arundhati Roy is credited with bringing the idea of “personal is political” to bear upon Indian feminism. “Her feminism is about articulating a voice and a sensibility which is authentically feminine and offers no deference to a largely male-determined status quo.” (Bunting: 7 Mar. 2002).

Others, such as Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai, present the universal female experiences in their writings. Writers like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi), Kusum Ansal (Hindi) and Sarojini Sahoo (Oriya), who count amongst the most distinguished writers, make a link between sexuality and feminism and advocate writing for the idea “a woman’s body, a woman’s right” in Indian languages. V.Geetha, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Leela Kasturi, Sharmila Rege and Vidyut Bhagat are essayists and critics, who write in passionate favour of feminism in Indian English literature.

Now, for a brief discussion on the views of a few Indian feminists on key issues regarding the predicament and problems of the Indian woman:

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak is credited with being one of those, who ushered in postcolonial feminist literary criticism in the West with the publication of her book, *Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*. In her book, Spivak re-visions the characterization of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. She argues that, in the novel, the white woman, Jane Eyre and
the Creole, Bertha Mason Rochester become heroine and ‘less than human’ respectively because of the politics of imperialism.

In her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak ponders on the question of how, if at all, disenfranchised women can represent, speak and act for themselves, despite oppressive conditions. She notes how the sporadic occurrence of “sati” in parts of India was made use of, by the colonial rule to show it as “white men saving brown women from brown men,” thereby indirectly justifying their presence as rulers in the country. She points out how one never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness. “Such a testimony would not be ideology transcendent or fully subjective, of course but it would have constituted the ingredients for producing a counter sentence.” (93).

Shobha Venkatesh Ghosh points out that if silence were powerlessness, then the act of writing itself is resistance. She actively champions the recovery of works by women, calling it “an important strand of the critical project” (73). She however insists on the bringing together of the aesthetic and political to bear upon each other, so as to move beyond the celebration of the fact of women’s writing towards an analysis of its actual achievement.

Nilufer E. Barucha observes how the androcentric world has turned a biological virtue into a societal handicap. She points out that female space is biologically recessed. But the enclosure of the womb protects the foetus and is therefore a positive factor. But the androcentric world “has extended the analogy of female inwardness to create a feminine reductiveness.” She also adds to the
postcolonial discourse on feminism, commenting that as it would be wrong to lump together white, middle-class women with those belonging to the underprivileged nations of the world, so also it would be simplistic to categorize all Indian women as a “hegemonic sorority” ( “Inhabiting” 93).

On the question of how and why, women are partners in the patronage of restrictive female roles prescribed by patriarchy, V.Geetha makes interesting observations in her article titled, “Gender Practices”. She points out that the beauty ideal for women in men’s eyes translates itself into two distinctive yet paired types: the wife and the concubine, the lover and the vamp, the good woman and the bad woman. “Licit beauty is tame, regular, passive; illicit beauty, wild, sensuous, seductive and aggressive” (115). This kind of male gaze that images women as objects of pleasure and use has had such a profound influence on all major social, cultural and religious institutions that the paired idea has been used to define the standards of femininity, even though in real life, “women’s roles and functions are diverse and answer a variety of male and female needs” (115).

After the French Revolution with its ideas of democracy, equality and the gradual formation of a class of women workers and trade unions and co-operatives that helped them connect, suddenly there were different kinds of roles and functions available to the women. Now the women were able to challenge the beauty ideal that men had set for the women, and were able to replace it with newer ideas of worth. But the new ideal was not willingly embraced by many women. It appeared threatening to them as supportive men folk are only
exceptions and many a time, “intelligent and self-confident women stand to lose the love of the men in their lives” (117).

Geetha sums up her views on the paired ideal of womanhood saying that women are fundamentally anxious, tentative about themselves. They are haunted, troubled and compelled to adhere to those functions and destinies that they also believe nature has allotted to them. Geetha points out rightly that even those men and women who are convinced that women need to be educated and economically independent, or who feel that men can and must share housework and parenting, seldom interrogate what is commonly regarded as destiny of the sexes: that Nature intended women to be mothers and men to be protectors, that a woman’s place is the home and a man’s the world; that ultimately women are responsible for the kitchen and the children, whereas men are accountable chiefly to their public roles, as wage-earners and heads of families. The threat of dishonour hangs over women. “They dare not think intimate, significant thoughts about their needs and desires for fear of becoming those ‘other’ women, who are always what they are not” (118). Thus they fall into the trap that patriarchy has cleverly designed for them over the years. They desire to please and the anxieties accompanying this desire make them actively seek out romance, marriage and child-bearing as much desired vocations.

Sarojini Sahoo claims that the patriarchal society has held control over sexuality. In the case of a married woman, she encounters many restrictions with respect to sexuality whereas her male partner is free from these restrictions.
Women are denied the right to express themselves as sexual beings. They are discouraged from taking an active role or even allowing themselves to experience the act as pleasurable. Women are taught that they should not be open to their sexual desires. Sahoo, however contends that to realize feminism, Eastern women need two types of liberation. One is from financial slavery and the other is from the restrictions imposed on female sexuality.

Gayatri Spivak states in an interview to Bulan Lahiri from *The Hindu*: “I think that gendering is a bigger institution than anything in the world. Sexual difference is the only empirical difference that everyone can sense. Gendering is our first and most persistent instrument of abstraction. That’s the most primitive theoretical tool”. Taking this tool in hand, when the researcher wished to attempt a feminist reading of women’s literature of the present times, Githa Hariharan appeared as a suitable choice.

The researcher has attempted a study of four of Githa Hariharan’s novels. An attempt has been made to read her novels in the light of a few of the insights gathered by the feminists mentioned above and others and the various dimensions of thought that the field of feminist criticism has been steadily and copiously eschewing. How her characters fit in with or break from traditions of patriarchy, whether there is a striving towards a whole new world with a different set of ideals, values, judgment systems, that feminists speak of, the intersection of specific cultures and feminist view points as validated in the novels have all been part of the study.
Now, a look into Githa Hariharan’s place in the Indian literary scenario and the suitability of her works for a feminist reading become necessary before the actual reading is attempted.

Srilata Ravi distinguishes four different frames in postcolonial English fiction, the first three having been suggested by Aparna and Vinay Dharwadker and the fourth added by Srilata Ravi herself. The four frames generate four distinct themes. The first frame includes the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan which are described as discourses of the nation. The second could be considered as being antithetical to the first, an example being the “anti-national or transnational allegory” of Rushdie’s works. The East-West dialectic is contained in the third frame and here the works of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh are included. The fourth frame identified by Srilata Ravi has generated feminist discourse. She points out that the interaction of gender identity, and national identity is a significant aspect of postcolonial women’s fiction. Githa Hariharan is included in this fourth frame.

Githa Hariharan with her five novels, one short story collection and two children’s publications has been a noticeable presence in the field of Indian English Literature. Salman Rushdie in The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997, which he has compiled in collaboration with Elizabeth West has applauded her as one of the most welcome presences in the Indian subcontinent.

Githa Hariharan was initially uncomfortable with labels like woman writer, Indian writer, feminist writer etc., that were attributed to her, when her first novel,
The Thousand Faces of Night was acclaimed as being a good novel about women’s lives by a woman writer. Githa Hariharan elaborates on this issue to Navarro-Tejaro thus: “Somehow there was an undercurrent to this praise that said I should stick to small things: women’s business. And my life and my concerns are not limited to one part of society. I knew I did not want to be a specialist kind of writer. I resent any attempts to ghettorize writers as women, or Indians and so on” (202-203).

Githa Hariharan agrees that being an Indian and being a woman are basic facts of her existence. But to her, the whole point of being a writer is “to be able to travel to different sorts of issues, questions, landscapes, power struggles” (203). She states however in response to a question, that she has been involved with women’s issues at some level or the other for more than twenty years. In her young student years, her political concerns were almost “exclusively directed and shaped” by feminism particularly because it was the time when the “Equal Rights Amendment” was being passionately debated in America, where she had her collegiate education. But once she returned to India in 1978, she found that social change was dependent on two aspects at the same time, namely gender and class.

Githa Hariharan describes her life that includes earning a living, raising children, reading and writing as that of a juggler. In this juggler’s life, activism has also remained a part. Long before her fame as a writer gave her a corner of the public stage, she had “served her time backstage, addressing envelopes, editing pamphlets, writing leaflets, and marching in rallies” (207). She is currently a
member of MIND (the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament) and
professes a lifelong commitment to two causes, one to work for a better, more
equal deal for more Indian women and the other to oppose and counteract in every
way possible the growing fundamentalism in India, in every sphere of social life
ranging from school textbooks to the security of minority communities.

One major achievement that grew out of Githa Hariharan’s commitment to
women’s issues was the Supreme Court ruling in 1999, reinterpreting a provision
of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 that said the father is always
the natural guardian of a child. When she was asked for her husband’s signature,
if she wanted to open a savings bank account for her minor child, she and her
husband decided to challenge the Reserve Bank of India. This petition resulted in
the bestowing of guardianship status to Indian mothers over their minor children.

The base for her anti-fundamentalist ideals and the background for her
literary pursuits were provided by a childhood that was influenced by different
cultures and a liberal education in Mumbai, Manila and later on in the US. She
was born in Coimbatore, India, in the year 1954 into a Tamil Brahmin family from
Palghat. A happy childhood spent largely in the company of Victorian classics
and later Japanese books and under the guidance of her journalist father who
worked with *The Times of India* must have been a period of unconscious
preparation for the vocation that Githa Hariharan chose ultimately. Her mother
stayed at home and looked after her and two other children. She was introduced to
Carnatic music at a young age. Meenakshi Bharat points out that “her training in
Carnatic music engendered a deep love for it, a love that later diversified to include jazz within its ambit and spilled over into the symphonic organization of her fiction” (111).

Githa Hariharan, in an interview given to Kala Krishnan Ramesh from “The Hindu” acknowledges the impact that Salman Rushdie has had on Indian Writing in English and names as her favourite authors, “Amitav Ghosh, Mahasweta Devi for the life and the writing, Paul Zacharia for his whimsical lyricism and the way he sticks his neck out, Arundhati Roy for her passion which speaks to a whole generation of young people and then J. M. Coetzee and Andre Brink.”

Though Githa Hariharan wants no gender based restriction in the themes and subjects, she should handle, she states emphatically that she is a feminist and that in her life, her choices have been dictated by what she perceives as the feminist choice. She is against the common tendency of women who take care to assert that they are humanists, not feminists. She argues that if the word “feminist” has been misused and misunderstood by many, so have a lot of other words too. She feels that it is important to take a stand and continue to stick by it at all cost. She says to Arnab Chakladar, “I don’t think I could write a single page that would not be informed by my beliefs or for that matter, my confusions.” The researcher is particularly interested in finding out, if Githa Hariharan is indeed the combination that a journalist has described her to be: “the academic, activist and creative contained in one” (Interview by Ramesh).
This researcher attempts a feminist reading of four of Githa Hariharan’s novels to find out the sync if any between the woman and the writer. The women’s world presented in the novels, the equations that exist between man and woman, and between woman and woman, the roles that her women characters fit into or bounce away from, the questioning or the conforming, the acceptance of or rebellion against institutions promise interesting study. While the novel form itself is widely professed to be the women’s genre, how has the author made it her own? what is the author’s contribution to a ‘feminine écriture’? are the questions that the researcher proposes to deal with in the ensuing chapters. The novels taken up for study now are The Thousand Faces of Night (1992), The Ghosts of Vasu Master (1998), When Dreams Travel (1999) and In Times of Siege (2004).

Though Githa Hariharan’s creative instincts must have been lying dormant in her since her romance with stories started quite young, the actual stimulus for creation came quite ironically when she was involved in another kind of creation, the only creation that man wanted woman to restrict herself to, the only creation that both scared him and urged him to dominate her out of fear, that of the birth of a baby. Githa Hariharan’s stimulus was provided by the sheer multitude of women she came in contact with in course of her confinement during maternity leave. She came in contact with women of ages of such a range and diversity that her canvas was ready for her and Indian mythology with its rich array of women characters and stories surrounding them was what she needed to add colour and depth to her characters. She has presented a judicious mix of her real life women
acquaintances and Indian mythical women figures in her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The result is an enthralling mosaic that got Githa Hariharan, the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the best first novel.

Githa Hariharan talks about her use of myth thus: “Almost accidentally, I hit on the solution of enlarging their lives (the lives of her characters) or their voices, with a whole plethora of voices, real and imagined, which make up myth and tales, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, both prescriptive and subversive myths” (Navarro-Tejaro 202). While using myth to add substance and depth, to her characters, Githa Hariharan also reinvents the myths themselves. It is as if it is not only past that can move into the present and influence it, but present also can move into the past and reinvent it.

The blurb on the paperback declares that *The Thousand Faces of Night* is the story of three women. But as the story progresses, it is found that it is at once the story of three women and the story of a whole lot of women. Angry, avenging women, gentle, loving women, women who marry snakes and warrior women rise from the age-old legends and myth of ancient India to fill the background as the story of Sita, Devi and Mayamma unfolds on the canvas.

Sita, a talented veena player, who could make the listeners forget themselves with her soulful music had nevertheless given up her veena in a fit of suppressed rage at societal prescriptions that viewed her pleasures in the veena to be incompatible with her duties as a daughter-in-law. Her husband, Mahadevan
and daughter Devi, now become new veenas in her hand. She relentlessly pushes Mahadevan hard, leading him from promotion to promotion. When he dies in Africa, she takes his death calmly and returns to India. Meanwhile, she has sent their daughter, Devi to America for her higher education. Devi had been a dreamer from her childhood and had been greatly influenced by the stories, her grandmother had told her from Indian myth and legends. Sita had decided that it was time her daughter stopped dreaming and had sent her abroad. She was holding the strings firmly in her hands, however. Though Devi has a brief fling with Dan, she gives it up and returns to India in response to the gentle pull of the strings in her mother’s hands.

After a few embarrassing encounters with prospective bridegrooms that Sita arranges for Devi to meet, Devi marries Mahesh. Mahesh is away on tours for one half of every month. Devi finds solace in the affection of her wise father-in-law, who tells her stories from the lives of saints. Mayamma, the old family retainer in the house tells her the story of Devi’s mother-in-law, who had left the house in search of spiritual salvation. Through it all, Devi’s relationship with Mahesh remains unsatisfactorily superficial, as he takes her for granted. Though Devi tries to get closer to him, and makes attempts to understand his work, Mahesh doesn’t care to see beyond her role as wife. The dreams that she had dreamed, inspired by the stories of her grandmother, of a fulfilling life with an equal partner, who would respect her and be ready to share his load with her are proved fruitless.
Mahesh’s insensitive treatment of Devi, when she doesn’t become pregnant, makes Devi seek a space for herself through rebellion. She leaves Mahesh and joins Gopal, whose music had attracted her first. But she soon finds that the space she craved was not to be hers in Gopal’s company also. She realizes that he sees her only as a reflection of himself and leaves him too. Towards the end of the novel, Devi is found returning to her mother’s house with a firm resolve to stay and make sense of it all. A pleasant change greets her at her mother’s place.

The methodical, neat, well-laid garden of Sita’s is in an unaccustomed state of lush, wild growth and sonorous strains of music from her veena reach Devi, as she walks in. The novel ends with the promise of a new future for mother and daughter, when both would learn to live lives on their own terms.

Mayamma is the old family retainer in Mahesh’s house. She looks after the running of the house. When Devi seeks her out to fill the empty hours of her married life with something, she is introduced to the cruelties inflicted on Mayamma by her mother-in-law and her husband. She learns of the long years of penance which had given Mayamma only a wastrel son and the grief of that only son’s death. Mayamma had come to Mahesh’s house, as his mother Parvatiamma had been a relative of hers. Since then Mayamma had found shelter in the household. The story of Mayamma’s life tells Devi of the survival mode to which most women’s lives are tuned.

*The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the second novel of Githa Hariharan is the boldest. She describes it favourably as the most autobiographical of her novels.
Vasu Master and his special pupil, Mani are the two major characters. Vasu Master has retired from a committed service at PG school and the prospect of spending his time waiting for death, literally doing nothing either staying at Elipettai itself, or as his sons suggest, with them, daunts him. His mental disturbance expresses itself as a stomach disorder which leaves the doctors clueless as to its cause. He decides that he would write down all that he knew about teaching and being a teacher. He also continues with his teaching to a handful of boys who come to his home for private tuition. In the process he finds his whole life transformed.

When Vasu Master had thought that his writing would be informed by all that had gone into his thirty-three years of teaching at PG school, he finds himself discovering new things, in the assignment that he has taken up in his post-retirement life. The teacher-pupil relationship that evolves between him and his special pupil, Mani shatters all his previously held notions about teaching, notions that had been held as sacred precepts by him and other fellow teachers at PG school. While this is the main strand of the story which itself moves forward through fables from the Panchatantra and the Jataka tales, there are a few minor strands branching out from the main one giving us glimpses of Vasu Master’s wife, Mangala, his father, who had been an ayurvedic doctor, his bold and practical grandmother, Mangala’s childhood friend Jameela, and Mani’s brother Gopu. The stories that Vasu Master tells his silent pupil, Mani in an effort to both reach out to him and draw him out, enlarge the canvas of the novel mingling
fantasy and fable with gently unfolding psychological action that nevertheless builds up to a scintillating climax.

Githa Hariharan’s third novel, *When Dreams Travel* draws on *The Arabian Nights*. In Githa Hariharan’s own words, it takes off from where the original novel ends. The original book titled *Tales from1001 Arabian Nights* talks of the master storyteller, Scheherazade who spun story after story to protect herself and other women of her kingdom from death. Her sultan husband Sharhryyar whom the maniac notion of marrying a bride every night and killing her the day after had seized because his previous wife and queen had cuckolded him with his own slaves, is redeemed through her clever stories which take him through fantastic uncharted lands and which leave him thirsting for more. Where, the original novel ends with the redemption of the Sultan, Githa Hariharan’s *When Dreams Travel* starts with the morning after. The novel is divided in two parts.

Part one is the main narrative. It comments on the original, *1001 Arabian Nights*, whose plot is described in a short first section entitled, “In the Embrace of Darkness.” In the next two sections, Githa Hariharan presents her version of Shahryar and Shahrzad’s myth, “talking back” to different aspects of the original narrative presented in the first introductory section. Part Two has a small introduction and after that, seven couples of short stories are narrated. These stories are however told by Shahrzad’s sister, Dunyazad and her companion Dilshad to entertain each other, in contrast to the original version, where the tales
are told by Shahrzad to her husband, Shahryar. The tales related in Githa Hariharan’s novel are all allegories of modern issues.

Githa Hariharan’s fourth novel, *In Times of Siege* takes head on, a burning issue of the current times. In her own words, she breaks away from the magic of fantasy and prefers to deal in the magic of life to try and represent the problems of communalism, and its associate evils like hatred, violence, intolerance and also attempts at homogenization and domination, all of which are issues that the author feels strongly about.

Shiva is a university professor who prepares educational modules to teach students of the distance learning programme. His lesson on the life of Basava, a medieval poet is due to be sent to his students, and he prepares it in all sincerity. He talks about the reforms that Basava wished to introduce in the caste ridden society of Kalyan, his brief success and later on the trauma he faces because all that he had worked to build in Kalyan is laid to waste in the fire of hatred and communalism that springs up in the wake of a marriage between a cobbler’s son and a high caste Brahmin’s daughter.

A fundamentalist group takes exception to the way Shiv has presented Basavanna’s life with its successes and failures. The Ithihas Suraksha Manch as it calls itself is not happy with the association of failure with Basavanna who is one of the saints of Hindu religion. They prefer a glossing over of facts so that Basavanna would come through as a Hindu saint who was saintly from beginning till end, and not as a human being with courage who had doubts and who tasted
both success and failure. So hell breaks loose, and everything starts with an innocuous phone call from the Press.

Hate mail pours in, his room at the University is ransacked and Shiv is suspended from his job. Meanwhile Meena, a student of Kamala Nehru University to whom Shiv is the local guardian in Delhi, lands in Shiv’s house with a broken leg and a cast. Shiv’s wife, Rekha is away in the U.S. with their daughter. Storms crowd round in Shiv’s life. The external storm blows about furiously and closer home, Shiv is caught in an unexpected, wholly new whirlwind of attraction for the bold, unconventional beauty of Meena who challenges him with her eyes and enthralls him with her spirit.

The passionate thrill of his feelings towards Meena somehow seem to be coupled with Shiv’s courage in maintaining the quasi-hero status in the external world which entails a rebellious refusal to apologize or to bow down in any other way to the demands of the Manch. Other free thinking, intellectual groups rally behind Shiv, all by the efforts of a bunch of student friends of Meena and at last the storm in the external world peters out. The day comes when the storm of passion also has to peter out as Meena says a casual goodbye and walks out with her leg healed, to go back to her friends and her college hostel.

The four novels presented a challenge to the researcher, each varying from the others, with a completely different kind of canvas and plot structure, but with certain interesting common features too.
Now, for a brief discussion on the specific features of feminist thought and enquiry against which the researcher has attempted a reading of the selected novels of Githa Hariharan:

Institutions are a major source propagation and continuance of patriarchy. It is the prerogative of the resisting female to question institutions, which in their manner of establishment itself stand for sameness and confinement within prescribed standards. Marriage and its corollaries, romance and motherhood have been particularly identified by feminists as major factors facilitating women’s oppression. The response of Githa Hariharan’s characters to marriage, heterosexual love and motherhood are studied in the second chapter. A rebellion against various institutions, as reflected in the four novels is also studied as are the alternatives presented if any, to patriarchy espoused traditions and prescriptions.

The third chapter explores the women’s world as presented in Githa Hariharan’s novels. A study of “images of women” has been a major feature of feminist readings of literature. Here the women characters are studied against their ethnic backgrounds so as to truly study the specific achievements or the failures of women pitted against the visible and invisible means of oppression inherent in every culture over and above the general, universal consensus on the devaluation of women.

The fourth chapter examines the validity of the popular feminist theory of “féminine écriture,” with reference to the novels of Githa Hariharan. The different techniques of narration used by the author along with the tropes and images used