Chapter-I
The Feminine Sensibility: A Critical Analysis
The Feminine Sensibility: A Critical Analysis

"Sensibility" is the fragrance of an artist’s personality. Just as a flower is distinguished by its fragrance and colour or a bird by its song, an artist is identified and distinguished by his sensibility. It’s not child’s play to define sensibility which is either feminine or masculine. As we are not able to draw a dividing line between when winter ends or when the spring begins, but we feel the change of season when it fully blossoms with its warmth, fragrance and temper. Similarly, during the deep emotional turmoil, the feminine or masculine becomes distinct. The different scholars, thinkers, psychoanalysts and sociologists have the different opinions and their studies show that men are transculturally the more dominant, aggressive and sexually active while women are the more expressive, the more submissive, possessive and nurturent. Even in birds, it had been observed that nest-building and caring of the young ones are the specific biological functions of the female.
Freud, the world-known psycho-analyst, points out femininity as a biological phenomenon and absence of external genitals in a woman arouses in her the feelings of inferiority, a sense of contempt for her own sex and that of envy of man’s greater freedom. Freud thus establishes women “as weaker in their instincts than men”.¹

Carl Jung, on the other hand, accepts ‘the inner unity of the self’ and interprets that the feminine and the masculine are the two faces of the same coin. One is incomplete without the other. He argues, “Just as the man is compensated by a feminine element (the anima), woman is compensated by a masculine one”.²

Sociologists believe that the subordination of woman to man had been the history of the so many communities in world. But the process of industrialization has changed the face of women in society and in the

---

modern scenario and their sex identities are clearly underlined in the world.

In its comments on sex roles, Encyclopaedia Of Psychology strikes attention to "increasing equality of woman, sexual emancipation, a lessening of dual moral standards, i.e., in a reduction of all male privileges".3

Apart from it, the feminine character as an artist and as an individual has been beautifully shown by Virginia Woolf who writes:

"It is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or the failure".4

Simone de Beauvoir interprets the place of woman in light of her condition which determines what is called "the character of woman".5

The feminine sensibility thus deals with the experience of the world from a viewpoint of a woman. The woman as a woman and the woman as an artist will be the integrated self in which feelings of love, sex and power will be evoked inclusively. Actually, the feminine sensibility is the fragrance of the woman's personality which shines with a touch of genius in her poetical works. The woman artist not only suffers but she also creates her art sensitively and spontaneously in the light of her ideas.

A study of Indian women poets in English demands, at the outset, a clarification of a few issues related to it. The very term “women poets”, implies an attempt to isolate “women poets” from “men poets”, and consider them in a group only on the basis of sex. This inevitably raises the question whether there is anything like “feminine sensibility” or feminine ways of expression. We can assess it at the scale of psychological and sociological paradigms.

Psychology studies the feminine and the masculine concepts from biological as well as psychological
points of view. The investigations about the behaviour of animals regarding sex, child-bearing and the care of the young emphasize, in particular the biological differences between males and females. Maslow speaks of male-superiority in size and strength among monkeys, whereas Yokes finds a general tendency in the male chimpanzee to lead and control and in the female to follow and assume a subordinate role. The experiments of Kinder and others on albino rats, and of Avery and on others on guinea-pigs point out that nest-building and caring of the young are specific biological functions of the female. The general biological differences between males and females are confirmed by the later psychologists, such as Tinbergen Schaler and Moswatt. They provide a basis for similar sex differences among humans.

Apart from the biological differences, there are well-established sex differences in several mental abilities. Masculinity and feminity are, in view of, Terman and Miles "important aspects of woman personality ... The masculinity–femininity contrast is
probably as deeply grounded, whether by nature or by nature, as any other which human temperament presents”.

According to the results of attitude-interest analysis of M-F test, males have greater self-assertion, aggressiveness, more hardiness and fearlessness and more roughness of manner, language and sentiments. On the other hand, the females are, in general, more compassionate and sympathetic, more timid and submissive, more fastidious and aesthetically sensitive and more emotional. In her survey of literature about sex differences Anne Annastasi observes that “a greater degree of awareness, achievement, drive and emotional drive” characterise the female.

The experiments of Katherine Nelson, Matheny Poole and Templin have shown that language plays greater role in the intellectual development of women than that of men. Seward, for instance, argues

“Differences at the Psychological level ... are largely the products of our culture and reflect roles assigned to the two sexes”.

Psychoanalysts have also contributed to the study of feminine and masculine traits. Freud treats femininity as a biological phenomenon which highlights masculinity that differentiates woman in absence of external genitals and it is a central factor in his analysis of feminine character which is primarily the outcome of girl’s discovery of her own “castration”. The feminine character is expressed in her feelings of inferiority, a sense of contempt for her own sex and envy of man for his external genitals. It is a sort of hunchback in the personality of a woman that psychoanalysts find out as a part of their studies.

Sociology offers more important insights into the nature of ‘femininity’ since it correlates sex differences in abilities, temperament and motives with the sex roles in society. Sociologists attempt to study the position of

women in different societies of the world from a historical point of view in order to gain a clear idea about the "feminine" character in a particular social context. They trace that subordination to man is one of the common factors of a woman's position in the social history of a number of communities. The general condition of women in society in various parts of the world is thus summarized in *Encyclopaedia of The Social Sciences* "The core of social structure, the closely-knit patriarchal family in which property was transmuted through the male line, institutionalized the dominance of men over women."\(^9\)

The psycho-sociological approach to the "feminine" character encourages a new awareness about woman as an artist and as an individual. Ashley Montague, for instance regards the biological functions of re-production as the most significant feminine quality, and interprets woman as an artist in its light. He believes that women have comparatively less

---

achievements than men in the field of art because art involves artificial creativity. Women are naturally creative as mothers and “for the most part women are busy creatively living the life that men can only point or write about”.  

of course, it must be admitted at the same time that the modern technology with its birth control measures had brought about...“the separation of sex from procreation”.

Patricia Spacks thinks that a woman’s point of view in literature is “doubtless the result mainly of social conditioning...Women writers have written books only during the eras of their social subordination”.

Psychology and sociology, on the whole, validate the concept of “femininity”. Psychology tries to decipher certain components of “femininity” in terms of degree. The psychologists interpret certain personality

---

traits being more dominant in men than in women. Certain differences of interest, if not of ability, and possibility of certain specific traits, are to be found only in women not in men, and vice-versa. Sociology stresses further how the "feminine" character develops in a different manner from the "masculine" because of the operation of social forces. "The feminine" character is thus made up of certain instructive psychological traits as well as socially conditioned ones.

After arriving at a broad concept of femininity, it is possible to gain a proper perspective of the development of Indian feminine poetic tradition only if it is considered with reference to the changing position of women in India. For this purpose the Indian social history may be reviewed briefly in three broad stages: The first stage covers the Ancient period including the Vedic and the Post-Vedic or the Epic times. The Medieval period, which marks the second stage, encompasses the centuries of Muslim rulers in India. The third stage—usually known as the Modern period,
begins with the establishment of the British power and covers the years of Indian History up to the present.

But as Dr. A.S. Altekar observed ...

"The position of women was fairly satisfactory in the Vedic Age. Women enjoyed considerable freedom, and they were supposed to be eligible for the study of the Vedas and also of the highest type of Mantra or Knowledge."  

Their active participation in the intellectual life of the period is evidenced, according to Bhagwat Saran Upadhyaya, from the *Anukramani of Rigveda*, ascribing to them a number of hymns. He refers, for instance, to such women as Vach, Ghosa, Apala, Vishwavara, Surya and Yami. The hymns are full of vigour and their writers appear to have eagerly participated in the life around them. *The Post-Vedic or the Epic-Times*, however find a general deterioration in woman’s position. Will Durant writes, “Her (woman’s) high status in *Vedic days* was lost under priestly
influence...The code of Manu set the tone against her”.  

According to Altekar there are three main causes, viz. “the discontinuence of Upnayana, the neglect of education and the lowering of the marriage age” which are responsible for down gradation of status of women. But Buddhism which came into being during this period as a reaction against the rigid codes of Hinduism, became a means of freedom for a number of women. It regarded woman eligible for admission to Bhikshuni-Sangha, the order of Nuns, and opened to them “avenues of culture and social service”.

The position of women seems to have deteriorated with the advent of the Muslim period because of rigid measures like the Purdah-System and the system of child-marriage. M.P. Srivastava also adds, “As a daughter, a woman lived under the wardship of her father, as a wife under the tutelage of her husband and

---

as a widow under the care of her son”. 17

Yet the Bhakti Movement, which flourished during this period gave an opportunity of expression for the Indian feminine poetic psyche. The Indian woman poets are born and brought up under such circumstances which build up their poetic temperament.

The modern period begins with the establishment of British power in India which has strengthened the British educational system in 1814 and it brought the concerns of the modernization in Indian woman and which is regarded as the Indian Renaissance and introduced Indians with the Western culture. The most important achievement of this Renaissance was a dramatic change in the attitude towards women. A considerable impetus was given to the female education by the Christian Missionaries as well as by the Indian social reformers, like Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, Pandita Ramabai, the Ranades Jyotiba Phule. The social organizations like the Brahma Samaj,

The Arya Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj also displayed a vital role in the society. The Gandhian movement gave an opportunity to women to participate in the social and political activities of the country on the basis of equality with men. Gandhi stood for the concerns of women and thus uttered...“removing those blemishes which are represented in our Shasstras as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women”.

Indian poetry in English by women can be described as the boldest assertion of the modern Indian woman. These women poets have come directly under the influence of the West. But, in spite of it, they remained traditional in their poetic sensibility because they belonged to the early stage of the process of modernization. An Indian woman poet in English was identified as a “modern” woman during the post-independence period.

The variety of new tensions encountered by contemporary women stimulate Indian feminine poetic

psyche which is demarcated by the progress from tradition to modernity in case of poets like Monika Verma, Mary Erulkar, Indira Devi, Gauri Deshpandey, Kamla Das, Shree Devi Singh and Tillottma Rajan.

The general pattern of life of an Indian woman poet in English is almost typical in respect of the family background, the type of education received, all the opportunities for the independent careers gained. All of them belong to the highly modernized urban, often, affluent families with exceptional social status and unusual achievements in the intellectual field. It differentiated them from the rest of society.

Thus, the Indian woman poets in English deviate from the traditional pattern of Indian womanhood as may be understood with reference to the situation of a vast majority of woman in contemporary India. For instance, the national committee which studied the position of women during 1971 and 1974, reports, “In the cultural understanding of the people, home-making like child-bearing and child-rearing, is identified with
femininity”19 and this leads to “an inevitable effect on girls’ personalities and identities. They learn early in life the need for flexibility, adjustment and subservience, and hesitate to develop strong opinions and commitments which they may not be allowed to pursue after marriage. Apart from the economic reasons, there is also a lurking fear that education may alienate girls from their conventional roles and make them less submissive in the family”.20

They rebel against the conventional role of woman in the society and struggle for a new identity as an independent, individualistic woman which brought a remarkable change of the evolution of the Indian feminine psyche from the tradition to the modernity.

The poetry written by foreign women receiving Indian identity through marriage with Indians calls for a special attention in the study of the English poetry by Indian women. It is true that a non-Indian woman poet

20. Ibid, P. 30
may not respond to Indian life in a specifically Indian way, yet her transplantation to the Indian cultural pattern generates a unique set of tensions which are immediately relevant in the Indian context. Her relationship with the two cultures serves a dual identity and her poetic feelings seek a reconciliation with the mounting tensions in a more urgent, varied and intense manner which encounters Indian feminine sensibility. They crave to build their identity with such, “Indian women in English” and their poetic identity offers a useful basis of comparison for the analysis of poetic works of Indian women. Their poetry is studied as an independent category of “Outsider–insiders”, but their sparks of poetic flame can be easily realized by readers.

The distinction between the “feminine” and the “masculine”, from the points of view of psychology, psycho-analysis and sociology emphasizes the need for a critical approach to poetry by women as an independent phenomenon. Feminism has provided a new dimension to the world of woman’s identity. It has changed the whole scenario of society. If we scan
through books on literature that are being published or take note of the papers presented at academic meets, it becomes crystal clear that feminism is the only vital area of the contemporary thrust of deliberation. The impact of this newly-developed area has given rise to a curious phenomenon like “men in feminism”, or conversely “feminism without women”.

Feminist theory thus, articulates a new kind of knowledge and is constructed by component of “gender” in all discourses of humanities and social sciences. During the second half of the twentieth century, feminist theory has emerged as the major conceptual developments like Marxism and psycho-analytical interpretations.

Feminist concept has constructed specific languages and bodies of literature. As a result the strong wave in 1960s and 1970s helped theorize a woman’s discourse. In 1980s feminism concentrated on transplantation of the intellectual aspect of life and in the 1990s, it began playing a vital role in building the
concerns of “otherness” and questions of marginality of women in society.

The concept of woman is radically problematic because it is crowded with the overdeterminations of male supremacy invoking in every formulation on the limit, contrasting other, or mediated self as a reflection of culture built on the control of women. Recent theorists resist the universalizing tendency of cultural feminism and highlight the differences between women and men on the basis of gender discrimination.

Feminism raises fundamental question about women in literature and operates as an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural analysis as a political practice. It has changed perceptions of life and literature. By adding “women” to literature, feminist criticism helps to expose the incompleteness of woman and Simone De Beauvoir has rightly remarked, ...“One is not born a woman, one becomes one” 21

She further adds,

“The situation of woman is that she ... a free and autonomous being like all creatures — nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other”.\textsuperscript{22}

Since the dawn of civilization, woman has been fighting for her independent identity from the male created oppression and feminism is neither her fad nor a legal recognition of her civil rights. She has to face legal, economic and social inequities as well as restrictions when she had claimed for her rights. The right to vote in America in 1920 brought dreams of ultimate victory of women but it subsequently toned down when the social pressures mounted up to restrict the freedom of women like constitutional barriers which had alone earlier. A feminine mystique proved fatal which was paradoxically more oppressive. In 1960s, there came a rebirth of feminine consciousness and awakening of feminist feelings.

Joan Kelly brilliantly demonstrates, in a study\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{22. Ibid. 13.}
"Women, History and Theory (1984)", a solid, four hundred year old tradition of woman thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French Revolution. Most of Anglo–American studies of the women’s movements have acknowledged some forerunners of the English Revolution as well as the French Revolution and Anne Hutchinsan has figured as the underlined personality. Seneca Falls continuously contributed to developing body of feminist thought. The French feminism claims a history of longer past and identifies Christine De Pisan (1364–1430) who emerges first to have held modern feminist views. She was the first feminist thinker to spark off the four century–long debate on women which came to be known “Querelles des femmes”. Joan Kelly writes,

“If Petrarch can be called the first modern man, then Christine De Pisan, the poet and author who introduced her countrymen Petrarch and Boccaccio to Parisian culture in the early 1400 is surely the first modern woman”.

term “Feminism”. Had they given any name to themselves, possibly it would have been something like “defenders or advocates of women.” Since the period of pro-women writers from Christine De Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft define an outlook about women where ideas come to a conceptual vision. But the querrelle theory was essentially oppositional to the dominant culture in three specific ways:

1. The querrelle is almost totally polemical. The early feminists’ defences of women were responses to specific published attacks on them. Their educational writings were equally polemical, arguing, against cultural and social–constraints on women that published attacks justified. These women writers took a conscious dialectical stand in opposition to male defamation and subjection of women.

2. The early feminists focussed upon gender. The sexes, according to them, are culturally, and not just biologically formed. Women formed a social group. They directed their ideas against the notions of an inherently defective sex that flowed from the
misogynous aspect of the debate, and these notions are set against the personality of woman in the societal design.

3. Their immediate aim was to oppose mistreatment of women. By exposing ideology, it opposed the prejudice and narrow-mindedness as it stood for a general conception of humanity.

The ideas of the early feminists bear the marks of their social and intellectual climate. Early modern Europe was in the process of state formation. Princely rule, rank, and hierarchy co-existed both with the bourgeois modes of life and work and with a developing republican (liberal) ethos. On the other hand, the feminist theory was shaped by the new pressures of society which created for women. On the other, aristocratic women lost considerable economic, political, and cultural power as compared, not only to their feudal forebears, but to men of their own class. Simultaneously, a class of women had emerged under a new gender construction of the domestic women of a society. The contents of the early feminist theory
reflect the declining power of women in rank and enforced domestication of middle-class women. We can find the feminist traits in the Beguines of the late medieval cities opposing misogyny and male subjection of women. These women sought to live in their own communities, and supported themselves collectively. Thus they tried to escape the two major institutions of male power—the family and the church. This movement, however, did not gain the social acceptance and the state and the church jointly succeeded in crushing it.

In the 1630s and 1650s many of the radical English sects supported religious equality for women. In this climate, there were women who effectively liberated themselves from the male clerical authority. They sought to control their own conscience to preach, and to improve women’s educational and economic opportunities. These women, like Anne Hutchinson, were “feminists in action”, rather than theorists. In stead of elaborating their ideas in writing, they used them to modify or organize social forms in
which women might be free from male power and authority over them. Their custodians emerge out of the women of the later 19th and 20th century revolutionary movements. By that time feminist activity had stimulated theoretical reflection and gave rise to a woman's movement for democratic change and social reorganization. The early feminist theorists had carried the long intellectual resistance and the struggle was carried on mostly by the female members of distinctively modern, literate class, representing the upper reaches of a classed society. They were the forebears of what Virginia Woolf called "the daughters of the educated men".24 These daughters were in revolt against the fathers who schooled some of them for a society strictly forbidden and gave them a separate identity within a class.

The feminist of 19th and the early 20th centuries brought the dawn of political rights and liberty for women, which highlighted rights of the married women

---

to own property and enter contracts, the right of defendants to have women or juries, and the crucial right to vote which came into existence in England in 1918 and in America in 1920.

But Mary Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) and J.S. Mill (1806-73) played a significant role in this crusade of emancipation of women. Mary Wollstone who happens to be the wife of philosopher William Godwin and mother-in-law of poet P.B. Shelley, struggled a lot for rights of women and set a milestone in acquiring the identity of women in equality with men. She knew problems of women who were set in an image of female sex. She was highly influenced by the revolutionary ideas of radical writers, artists, philosophers like, William Godwin and Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*. She also wrote *A Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) which initiated a violent response and Horace Walpole determined not to go through it and nicknamed her "*a hyena in petticoats*".25

J.S. Mill, the son of utilitarian philosopher, James Mill and author of *The Subjection of Women*, played a vital role in arousing the feminine consciousness by focusing on the potentialities of women as a vigorous force to share any trade as profession. He also accentuated on their rights to vote and their rights to practise arts. He felt the importance of feminism as a tool of women's progress in society. He believed in the concept of liberty as a necessary means of individual progress and therefore says, "The principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes. ...the legal subordination of one sex to the other...is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other".26

Mill held the view that women's position was made unnatural by intervention of political oppression

by male dominated society and maintained that masculine dominance made families as a centre of corrupting influence by making boys to be selfish and by making girls an object of exploitation. He also raised the issues of women's suffrage as the second Reform Bill of 1867. Though the motion was defeated in the parliament, yet made rays of influence in the subsequent years. As a result his step daughter, Helen Taylor, formed Women's Suffrage Society in England and persuaded eminent women to joint it. He left the ideals of women's education before his death, which provided them an intellectual image in the society which built up the feminine consciousness.

America is the centre for Women rights which began with The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions in the obscure village, Seneca Falls, New York, in the summer of 1848. There was the radical demand of sufferage at Seneca Falls which carried the social and political revolution and the professional and vocational equality which included the resolution of Lucretia Mott.
During the next 72 years, the quest for sufferage was found to be the one strong bond uniting three generations of women who believed in Elizabeth Cady Stanton and found that only with the exercise of the franchise, they could eradicate the existing legal economic and social inequalities affecting women.

The period from 1920 to 1960 is known as the period of intermission in the history of women’s rights movement when a sense of complacency prevailed. The reality belied the sense of so-called victory on the issue of the sufferage and a new Feminist movement started in the late 1960. It was popular as a period of protest movements: civil rights, peace, the New Left, anti-poverty. But the revival of feminism made people of traditional views who stood aghast and felt that there must be sick, unbalanced women, or bored housewives. They were puzzled about the meaning of “liberation” or “oppression” of such women.

About the new feminist movement, Maren Lockwood Carden rightly remarked:
The press and the other mass media had a field day making fun of the 'Women's libbers'. The reactions they reported were often highly charged, emotionally negative and frequently contradictory. These women were sexually promiscuous and deprived. They hated men, wanted to take over the world, or wanted to subordinate men to women. They were portrayed variously as rejecting both marriage and motherhood, they were unhappily married or divorced or single. Physically attractive, they were compensating for their "failure" as women. Strident, hostile, hysterical and maladjusted, they looked human compassion and perspective.27

But now it had become clear that women's liberation was not just a fad and made it a serious reform movement.

Carden further adds,

"The New Feminism is not about the elimination of differences between the sexes, nor even simply the

---

achievement of equal opportunity, it concerns the individual’s right to find out the kind of a person he or she is and to strive to become that person”.

The contemporary feminist movement sharpened the cause of equality of woman in comparison with spirit of the nineteenth century feminism. They concentrated on demarcation of nature of sex on the basis of biological categorization i.e. ‘male’ or ‘female’. The 19th century feminists dreamt for woman as a queen of kitchen and childcare but the 20th century feminists protested against a process of heavy socialisation which claimed women in maintaining the cultural values that belittled the role of woman in society. It also fixed the human potential.

A member of Board of Directory of “National Organization for Women” has rightly expressed his feelings in this context:

“I want to have part in creating a new society. I want women to have something to say in their own

28. Ibid.
lives...have never reached my potential because of social conditions. I am not going to get the rewards. I have been crippled...I want to see the kind of system that facilitates the use of potential”.29

‘Feminism’ has a multidimensional meaning to freedom of woman in the different ways. Oxford Dictionary has defined it as ‘a state of being feminine or womanly’ and ‘The Dictionary of Philosophy’ in its edition of 1906 found it as ‘a position favourable to the rights of women’. The Webster’s Dictionary has also defined it as “the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men” and ‘the movement to win such rights for women’. Toril Moi, a feminist critic, treated ‘feminism’ as ‘political labels’ indicating support for the aims of the new woman’s movement which emerged in the late 1960s.30

Simone De Beauvoir a realistic feminist, has clearly defined ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and writes in The Second Sex:

29. Ibid, P.12
"The terms ... 'masculine' and 'feminine' are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality 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... A man is in right in being a man, it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine". 31

According to the feminist doctrine, the subjection of women is a central fact of history, a key to most of our social and psychological disorders. Western civilization has emphasized the masculine rational faculties to the exclusion of the feminine faculties of institution.

According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, feminism has a strong fundamental case as "women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex."

Feminism has highlighted the realistic scenes of exploitation of woman and has mirrored a history of women's oppression, the differential behaviour between girls and boys in name of sex, women's role in children's books, a viction of male sexual fantasy, anthropological studies of women and political status of women. Donna Hawxhurst and Sue Morrow (1984) have treated 'feminism' as a dynamic ideology and a call to action for betterment of woman in society.

'Feminism' has changed the view of looking at the conditions of woman. It has originated a perception, an idea about the state of woman which confirms, that something is wrong with society in the treatment of women. It highlights the liberation of woman from the chains of oppression in the male-dominated society. Liberation is defined as a social equality with men.

which other critics considered it as 'the class bias' and categorized it as 'bourgeois feminism', 'career feminism', 'mainstream feminism' or 'liberal feminism'.

But Hester Eisentein has questioned the originality and revolutionary characteristics of modern feminism,

“Ought one to castigate feminism because it is...Insufficiently revolutionary and geared to the concerns of the working class? Or ought one to take a longer view, and ask, what would become of present social arrangements, in the Capitalist West and, indeed, in most societies, capitalist, and communist, if all the demands of the women's movement were met with respect to all women?\textsuperscript{33}

Although the specific targets of feminist attack are laws, prohibitions, social institutions and have varied from country to country and generation to generation. The resistance to woman's demands has strengthened from three specific factors in America and England.

\textsuperscript{33} Eisentein Hester, "Contemporary Feminist Thoughts", London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984 P. 23
The first factor lies in the fact that there has been a brutal and unabashed misogyny, which has appeared sporadically in the outbursts of individual men like Jonathan Swift in the 18th century and Norman Mailer in our own time. However, this kind of misogynous attitude has always evoked shock marked by flagrant emotionalism.

The second and more notable factor has been the recurrent glorification of the wifely and maternal role that Betty Friedan named 'the feminine mystique'. It flourished in the 18th and 19th century as the 'feminine ideal'. Both 'ideal' and 'mystique' derive their authority from the belief that woman's nature, whether divinely ordained or biologically determined, 'requires to seek her fulfilment in submissive domesticity.

The third factor, weightier than the other two on the basis of its apparent objectivity, has been the scientific confirmation of a negative feminine stereotype. Scientists are as much influenced by cultural biases as anyone else, and even an accurate finding may give rise to conflicting
interpretations. For example, the 19th century doctors, prevented by the Victorian prudery from careful study of the human reproductive system, believed that certain biological factors rendered women temporarily insane and made them life-long invalids. Simultaneously, anthropologists, thought that they detected a particular kinship between women and animals, and in general believed that women could be classified physically and intellectually somewhere between children and men.

We can also witness the different aspects of feminism in the varied situations. Kate Millett, the chief architect of new feminism, has found a deep relationship between men and women with a viewpoint of ‘politics’ and named it as ‘Sexual Politics’.34

Conservatives believe that differential treatment of women as a group is not unjust and admit that some individual women do face hardships. They rationalize the social roles of men and women in two ways:

(i) The female role is not inferior to that of male.

(ii) The women are inherently better adapted than men to the traditional female sex role.

The Liberal Feminism, fathered by John Stuart Mill, determines the liberation for women in society on equal terms with men. The liberal feminists do not feel to make a necessary change in the whole social structure in order to effect women's liberation. They also believe that it is not possible for all women simultaneously.

The Classical Marxist feminism has another viewpoint of labour power as a class society where oppression is a tool of exploitation and where small class of individuals has a source of production and dominates the lives of the majority. People have no other option except to sell their power of labour in order to survive. Women struggle with men in order to eliminate such a society.

Women are worst hit of special oppression which results from the traditional position in the family. They are deprived of public production and they have to work in the private world of home. As a result, the
monogamous marriage perpetuated in the society for consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few who are certainly men as a privileged class. Friedrich Engels has rightly remarked:

“From the very beginning of surplus production, the sole exclusive aims of monogamous marriage were to make the man supreme in the family, and to propagate as the future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own”. Such marriage is “founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife.”

Though Marxists do not claim that women’s oppression is a product of Capitalism, yet they believe that it intensifies the degradation of women. Capitalism and male supremacy reinforce each other. The Marxists indicate that women must move towards liberation from such exploitation. Engels emphasizes, “The first condition for the liberation of wife is to bring the whole female sex back in to public industry”. He further adds, “Within the family the

husband is bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat".37

Apart from Marxist feminists, there is a rise of radical feminism which is a recent attempt to create a new conceptual model for understanding different forms of social oppression in terms of sexual oppression. It is formulated by such writers as Tigrace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone. Radical feminists deny the liberal claim the basis of women’s oppression consists in their lack of political or civil rights. Similarly, they reject the classical Marxist belief that basically women are oppressed because they live in a class society. The radical feminists hold the view that the roots of women’s oppression are biological. The origin of women’s subjection lies as a fact during the time of child-birth and child-bearing where women have to depend on men for struggle for existence which is certainly physical survival.

Firestone rightly explains:

“The heart of woman’s oppression is her child-

37. Ibid
bearing and child-rearing roles. And in twin children are defined in relation to this role and are psychologically formed by it, what they become as adults and the sorts of relationship they are able to form, determine the society they will ultimately build."  

The feminine consciousness what understood Marxist’s Call “contradictions” in our society which played a significant role in determining the status of women. When the position of women within the social whole is altered, new conceptions of self and society come directly into conflict with older ideas about the role of a woman, her destiny, and even her ‘nature’.

Sandra Lee Bartky has remarked,

“The feminine consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order, meaning hereby that the feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable what Sartre would call her “transcendence”,

her project of negation and transformation, makes possible what are specifically ways of apprehending contradictions in the social order. Feminist consciousness turns a "fact" into a "contradiction", from the vantage point of a radical project of transformation.39

Brilliantly tracing the history of women artists — Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find that woman writer's power has been shattered and scattered. The women writers have always yearned for the lost "mother country" where they could be whole again.

Virginia Woolf in 'A Room of One's Own' has beautifully drawn the image of contradictory position of women in history,

"Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of the kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of any

boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips, in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of husband.”

We can witness a similar contradiction which exists within literary production. Women writers have a great difficulty in gaining access to literary production as characters, images, myths or symbols in writings they are richly portrayed. There lies the difference between “women’s woman” and “men’s woman” as a literary production. Women artists found women as the active, productive and historical beings while ‘woman’ as a sign is the central figure of men’s writing. Virginia Woolf has discovered in the course of looking through catalogues in the British Museum that every male writer is anxious to make his contribution to the category of “woman”, “Sex and its nature might well attract doctors and biologists, but what was surprising

and difficult of explanation was the fact that sex...woman that is to say...also attracts agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the M.A. degree, men who have taken no degree, men who have no apparent qualification, save that they are not women”. 41

In the above discussion, we can find that woman has travelled along through different ages from ancient, medieval, modern ages to the present day and has faced countless hurdles in order to get the present status as a woman. Different studies which are sociological, psychological, political, cultural, anthropological, conservative and liberal, feminist, Marxist and that of radical feminism have revealed trials and tribulations of woman, her quest for struggle for existence and desire for survival of fittest which have given a woman a name, an identity, an idea, a thought and a feminine sensibility which are certainly different from ‘male consciousness’. ‘The feminine sensibility’ is like a fragrance of woman’s personality which

41. Ibid, P. 27.
differentiates it from 'male consciousness'. ‘Feminine sensibility’ is an essential tenet of woman which is imperishable and unavoidable. As a flower born and brought up in jungle and on stone and river gives its identity with its fragrance and colour, similarly a woman either educated or uneducated, Indian or Western, black or white has her identity and rhythm of woman. But woman’s identity is in a process of making but it is not made and her real face is yet to come. We will study in the coming chapters about the feminine sensibility in light of works of Sarojini Naidu.