CHAPTER - II

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One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature.

(Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*)

Woman’s Image

A woman is always defined in respect to man. She is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a relative position. According to Aristotle, she is always thought of as lacking in certain qualities, as being marked by a ‘natural defectiveness’. Even St. Thomas had declared woman to be ‘an imperfect man’, an ‘incidental’ being, this being bolstered by the symbolism in ‘Genesis’ where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called ‘a supernumerary bone’ of Adam. (Selden, *The Theory of Criticism* 534). In the context one can understand the (increased) marginalization of Indian women at the hands of patriarchal society.

In patriarchal society, the standard of womanhood was set by men for men. Far from being regarded as an individual in her own right, a woman was ‘dictated’ to by man. The traditional role assigned to her was that of dutiful wife and mother. The whole code of morality for a woman was laid down by men (and one of them was the total subordination of her interests to those of her husband’s). Marriage and the ideal of family life were reinforced as a moral and social institution. Kate Millet points out that patriarchy “subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male” (Selden *Contemporary Literary Theory* 131-132).

In patriarchal set up the role of women is confined to be passive and as sexual objects in order to please men’s minds or bodies. Toril Moi believes that “the patriarchal traditions imposed certain social ideals and standards on women” (Moi 209). Those who
confirmed were termed ‘feminine’ but those who failed to do so began to be called ‘unfeminine’ and ‘unnatural.’ In Indian society a woman is a non-person, an appendage, a slave to the master man. In Indian culture she is not an individual in her own right but a medium through which man aspires for self-affirmation and self-realization. The culture that created Sita and Savitri has denied the rights of existence to woman save as daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. She is yet to achieve individuation and an authentic self-identity.

Vern Bullough observes:

The very word Woman . . . emphasized a passive anonymous position. It derives from the Anglo-Saxon wifman literally ‘wife-man’, and the implication seems to be that there is no such thing as woman separate from wifehood. As individuals, with few exceptions, women did not count. They were mothers, wives, daughters, sisters (3).

A woman rarely leads an independent life. She exists in a bipolar world: on the one hand, she is subordinated to the masculine world of her husband and on the other, committed to the assertion of her womanhood, her female ego. A woman is seen in terms of male-oriented world. Her identity is seen in terms of the identity of her male counterpart and as such the female world is not one with the male world but adjacent to it. They run parallel. Raman Selden refers to Aquina’s theory that the “form is masculine and matter feminine” and that “the superior, god-like, male intellect impresses its form upon the malleable inert, female matter” (Contemporary Literary Theory 128). Selden points out five areas biology, experience, discourse, the unconscious and social and economic conditions in which woman under patriarchal value system was considered inferior to man.

The Indian woman has been living in the male dominant, patriarchal, traditional, religious, caste and class ridden society. She has been living a life of being oppressed, exploited, victimised in the name of social and cultural restraints. The system of patriarchy hardly gave an individual identity to the Indian woman leave apart recognition of her talent and entity. She has had to maintain the tradition of tolerance, patience and persistence. She has had to endure all kinds of exploitation – physical, mental, psychological, emotional apart from social, religious, cultural, economic and political exploitation. But even in oppressive conditions she has kept intact the ideals of
womanhood and has survived and so this symbolizes her strength and her unique culture of survival.

In India woman has been ‘woe-man’ from the beginning barring the Vedic period when she enjoyed the pride of place with Gargi, Maitreyi, and Lopamudra, etc., who walked shoulder to shoulder with men. Even Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala and Draupadi who appeared at a later period could not be said to be passive, submissive, docile and servile for while Sita in the Ramayana resisted the demoniac aggressiveness of Ravana, Savitri snatched a century from the grim grip of Yama, Lord of death, Shakuntala in the Mahabharata proved the strength of her nerves by meeting the challenge of Dushmanta, Draupadi displayed the female ferocity by washing her hair in the blood of Dushasansana who had attempted to disrobe her in the court of the Kauravas.

In India, gender disparity or sex inequality is a social reality and to understand it in the Indian situation it is important to grasp the reality in its traditional framework. Manu, whose philosophy occupies an important place in the mainstream of Indian ideology and culture, does express some noble sentiments about women: “where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased; but where they are dishonoured, there all religious acts become fruitless”. Yet he too constantly stresses the inferiority of women to men. According to him, a wife must ever remain devoted to her husband (Manu 68). Though in the Bhakti movement between 12th and 16th century, the ideal of equality between man and woman flourished, but still woman was considered as a great obstruction in the way of spiritual realization. But slowly with Manu’s male-dominated code of conduct enunciated in Manu Samhita, the woman in India was dislodged from her pedestal until finally during the Muslim rule, she disappeared behind the Purdah. It was only when Gandhi gave his clarion call for India’s independence that women broke their chains, walked hand in hand with men, raising their little fingers against the unmitigated autocratic rule at home.
In India saints, reformers, rebels, poets and novelists have championed the cause of women’s rights. Gandhi acclaimed the fact that man and woman complement one another and one is never whole without the other. Women have been treated by men as property that can be owned, controlled, disposed of the way they liked (until Gandhi came). Gandhi gave a new direction and dimension to the Feminist Movement in India. He freed women from passivity, servility, domesticity. He held that men and women were partners, sharing equal duties in social life and equal rights in political field. Though Municipal vote for Indian women was acquired as far back as 1885, it had not been properly utilized by them for lack of education, lack of opportunity for self-development, lack of interest in social problems. The social reform movements tried to remove this lack. The National Council of Women in 1922, All India Women’s Conference in 1927 and 1930 protested against the Feudal forces which kept Indian women under subjugation, kept them cleaning or scrubbing or washing or ironing or cooking. Sarojini Naidu who was in the forefront of the Indian freedom struggle did much to redeem Indian women from the clutches of slavery and superstition. Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant led the movement to gain voting rights for Indian women which was got in 1920-21. Many laws passed after 1947 gave a wide spectrum of rights to Indian women.

In the colonial period in India, many reformers questioned the subordinate position of woman in Indian society. With Raja Ram Mohan Roy many other social ameliorates came forward to annihilate injustice meted out to women. They tackled social evils such as sati, fate of widow, widow re-marriage, polygamy, child-marriage, denial of property rights and education to women. Though such social reform movements of the 19th century and the nationalistic movement of the 20th century helped a lot in improving the condition of Indian women yet “for society as a whole, sex roles, stereotype images and the Indian woman’s conception of herself and her role in life remained virtually unchanged” (Agnew 16).

Traditionally, Indian culture is a male-dominant culture. Indian woman ‘covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention, ignorance and reticence’ in life (as well as in literature) had no autonomous existence. She was what Sylvia Plath calls her,
“the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow effacement at the wind’s hand” (157). With the influence of western education and culture, in the twentieth century the Indian woman has re-emerged as a new being. The Indian woman today is no longer a Damayanti. She is a Draupadi or a Damini or a Nora or a Candida or a Joan of Arc. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and political revolutionaries like Gandhi and Nehru lent a new dimension and a new direction to the Indian woman.

It is true that men have almost always held women to be somehow inferior to them, treating them as if they belonged to a different species altogether. Even when they walked romantically lyrical over them they never regarded women as equal to themselves. All important spheres of life were controlled and managed by men, women being relegated to the position of mere housewives, mothers, daughters etc. This anomaly was bound to be resisted. The industrial revolution and feminism ushered in a changed outlook on life and raised the level of human consciousness and women were not left unaffected by the developments. The new circumstances forced them to raise their voice, with growing awareness more and more women came forward to champion their cause.

In India, since ages a woman’s role in life was strictly compartmentalized; she was a daughter, a wife or a mother. In all these roles she had to adhere to certain appointed norms; she had no separate identity as a human being. Things are changing now-a-days especially amongst the sections where education and material prosperity have ushered in a degree of enlightenment. Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, woman’s place, position and especially the question of her identity are the major issues in India also. With feminism as a new way of life, a new perspective came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s role in the society.

The American, British and French feminisms have overlooked the dimensions of class, race, nation, empire, along with gender. Therefore the task has been taken by the
Third World Sisters. That’s why the Black Feminists have established a separate canon for themselves. The problems of women in various Third World countries differ from the First World countries, according to their national, historical or local contexts. Suma Chitnis in her article, “Feminism: Indian Ethos and Indian Convictions” expresses “the situation of Indian women is, in many ways, worse than the situation of American and European women” (8). One of the main reasons for the poor status of woman in India is the value system by which women abide. Devotion to the husband is cultivated among girls of all religions, but it is particularly idealized and firmly institutionalized in the Hindu concept of “pativrata.” The images of Sita, Savitri or Ahilya – women known for their exceptional devotion to their husbands – still proliferate in popular media.

Media presents a new image of woman who reconciles in her subjectivity the conflicts between tradition and modernity in Indian society, but works also to deny the actual conflict that women existentially register as an aspect of their lives. These new representations of women instead of doing away with gender differences and gender discriminations perpetuate them under a new guise. Thus, the feminist critic in India on the one hand is trying to resist patriarchal ideologies and on the other is encouraging the kind of self-representations of women resulting in a conflict between tradition-bound self and the self-looking for freedom and independence.

The history and beginning of woman is as long as that of man. In the same time period man has achieved a lot, reached great heights, hence there is no question of the traditional man and the new man; but the woman is still a pitiable creature with a lot to achieve. Moreover there are two categories of women – old and new. The answer to this question is simple one. As man went on progressing day by day, there was no need of a reaction, a revolt or an experiment in the form of a New Man, but as the woman could not avail herself of any respectable position even in a long period, she thought of a change, a betterment in her lot, something remarkable to achieve, which marked the beginning of a new era resulting in the emergence of the New Woman. The genesis of the New Woman lies in the necessity to rectify the fallible traditional as well as psychological view of femininity. Carl Jung ascribed to women marginality, ignorance, subordination, silence
and repressed position in relation to men. His denial of logos to woman has been severely criticized.

Indian society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. According to Sarabjit Sandhu, “The position of woman appears to be very strange. Like a pendulum she is swinging between the contrasting forces of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality and revolt and compromise” (quoted in Pandey 46). In India, the woman is neither free nor dependent. She is lying somewhere between the two. However, the urge for identity and independence is present in Indian womenfolk. A new woman has taken birth who questions submissiveness. In common with all women all over the world, Indian woman is also voicing her desire to be emancipated, to get rid of the unjust restrictions on her and the pervasive discriminations against her. She is seeking the right to be regarded as a whole human being, not simply as an adjunct to her male counterparts. Due to rapid increase in women’s education in the last three decades, women’s thinking and mode of living in India, have undergone a considerable change. The new generation of women in India desires to assert itself. The questioning and the challenging note are found in the works of the novelists.

During the period of Indian Renaissance, multiple sections and cultures sprang that dedicated themselves to eliminate the dogmas and beliefs which subordinated women and provided them an inferior status in the society. Interestingly, most of the reformers dedicated to the cause of women’s emancipation were men of great learning. They were inspired by the rich cultural heritage of India which ascribed women respectable place in society and the western ideas. The post independent period witnesses a welcome change in the growth of woman from being a docile, domestic, passive species to a reasonable analyzing, educated individual who can take independent decisions not only for herself, but also for others. Her potentials and powers have shown that she can embrace several roles in herself. The New Woman has punctured the stereotyped fallacies attributed to female nature and demanded a position of equality for herself. The New Woman has shown that there is no inherent difference in the aptitude of man and woman.
When women writers like Woolf came to the forefront, they paved the way for the New Woman to appear on the scene. Mary Wollstonecraft had argued against the sexual discrimination and stressed that women should be educated by the same pursuits as men:

To render mankind more virtuous and happier of course, both sexes must act from the same principal; but how can that be accepted when only one is allowed to see the reasonableness of it? To render also the social compact truly equitable, and in order to spread those enlightening principles which alone can ameliorate the fate of man, women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men. For they are now made so inferior by ignorance and low desires, as not to deserve to be ranked with them! Or, by the serpentine wriggings of cunning, they mount the tree of knowledge and only acquire sufficient power to lead men astray (136).

Strong emphasis on the necessity of women’s education is another landmark in history of the emergence of the New Woman. As the degree of awareness grew more and importance for women’s education was stressed upon, women became more intelligent and reasonable. Their talent and potentialities came to light. Women were ruled for long by men. Gradually there was a reaction in the fringe of the society among those who could discern some basic weakness in the prevalent pattern i.e. patriarchy. They not only reacted to it, but also encouraged others to see and analyze the existing order so that a new line of thinking could emerge. The struggle for the ‘New Woman’ is directed at denouncing the age old gender difference entrenched in patriarchy for her priviledge and rights as a human being and seek herself new definition. Hence the appearance of the ‘New Woman’ who is learning to come to terms with her thoughts and assert herself.

From the feminist angle with reference to Indian situation, only a woman knows what she experiences, so only she can speak of it. Everybody lives his or her life individually and differently; pain differs from person to person. Nobody can speak for anybody. The reality of the situation is that in Indian situation, a woman in general, still retains the required patience and courage, to avoid any disequilibrium in the family relationship and this relationship remains maintained only through her subordination by
man. Family still exists in India despite many blows to it and the credit for it goes to the Indian woman.

In the changing pattern of society, because of the spread of industrialization, new scientific invention, rapid spread of education; a woman – particularly the educated one – has started to feel the uneasy burden of suppression or subjugation. She has become vocal in defining her identity. She is multifaceted and identity is no longer linked with the man’s she’s with. But at the same time the social perception goes on hammering into her unconscious, weighing her down mentally. She experiences a conflict between her personal values and larger social practices. The social and cultural assumptions prevent her from making contact with her own self. And this has resulted in her schizophrenic tendency. A woman in general feels insecure, in a male dominated atmosphere and Indian woman’s psyche faces alternate moods of hope and despair of glow and gloom in her odyssey for identity and freedom. Women “have very limited freedom . . . Either society, religion or tradition control them and more often than not religion, traditional morality are used to exclude women from power and knowledge and reinforce patriarchal authority” (Jain 2001, 84). Thus an overview of the image of Indian woman reveals that she has always been at the receiving end in India. Even in the present times the lot of an economically independent woman is no better. She has to perform double duties (burden). She is never thought of as an independent individual taking her own decisions.

In the post-colonial period many women writers have staged their protest against the double responsibility of women. This protest was and is voiced in many forms in Indian English fiction. Not only women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Despande, Ruth Jabavala, Jai Nimbkar, Shobha De but male writers like Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar etc dwelt on tortured womanhood. Women’s fiction gives clear picture of the changing woman in the Indian society. A pathetic image of Indian womanhood was presented in Mulk Raj’s fiction. Tagore brought woman out of the kitchen into the parlour. His women characters, some, show the feminine strength who throw a challenge to the orthodox, hide-bound society. Many writers have proved their mettle in presenting the picture of woman and the
thorns which prick her in the society preventing the required necessary growth. Society lays impediments in front of women that restrict her from self-realization. Given a chance, a woman can prove to be the best warrior to fight against the adverse situations and proceed towards the heights of social dimensions. The image of Indian womanhood is found in all the novelists’ works.

**Image of Woman in Indian English Fiction**

The history and culture of Indian women comes out of the institution of suppression and servitude. Women have been both valued and devalued for their capacity to be mothers, valued and devalued for their sexuality, for their physical and psychological strength in a society where strength was a masculine word. Women have been forced to deny their essential aspects of self as woman, as human. All definitions and explanations have been by men/male dominant culture. The Indian woman has had and is undergoing oppression and exploitation and survive harrowing conditions and degradation. This had a great effect on all aspects of her life.

To know, discuss and evaluate the role and status of women in literature, one must probe into the real status of women in different societies at various times of history. As Mary Ann Ferguson claims, a keen perception of history is inevitable to identify women’s images in literature. She writes, “We must know something about women in history, about the psychological and sociological viewpoint that have existed and... Literature both reflects and helps to create reality” (10). Exposure to reformist movements, economic independence and influence of Western feminist movements played significant role in bringing a change in the attitude and position of women in India. Impelled by an urge to seek a new and just way of life, women began to voice freely their feelings and experiences. However such women were a few in number, while a majority of women still conformed to the tradition-bound concept of womanhood mainly for the fear of ostracism. T. D. Brunton describes the Indian scene thus:

India had many of the cultural conditions favourable to the novel before she came into contact with the Europe. But now she has social forces actively favourable.
To the production of fiction – a large audience, an Educated class, a new questioning of age old socio religious Dogma and a consuming urge for knowledge and interpretation of society . . .” (214).

Born in the later half of the nineteenth century, fiction becomes a powerful form of literary expression and has acquired a prestigious position in the Indian English literature. Rightly called as social document “the advent of the Indo-Anglian fiction coincided with a wave of patriotism and social reform including the amelioration of the status of women” (Meena 2). To K. S. Ramamoorthy the emergence of women writers during this period is of great significance and he remarks that “it marks the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian women” (66). Further, he also recognizes the fact that the lot of the average Indian women remained relatively unchanged, shackled by the superstitions and customs that are perpetuated in the name of tradition.

It is found that women write differently from men. While men write about affairs of state, war, business, espionage, and sexual encounters, women write about themselves. The main contention is that there is such a thing as a distinctive woman’s sensibility, and that it reflects itself in the literature of our times. Indian writing in English mirrors these concerns. The pioneers of the novel in English made their appearance in the last quarter of the 19th century. In the pre-independence India the picture of Indian womanhood was stale and perverted. It was either exaggerated or neglected. It was unrealistic and imitative. Woman does not occupy an important place in most of the Anglo-Indian novels. In Rudyard Kipling’s Kim there is hardly any woman character. In E. M. Forster’s A Passage to Indian, Indian women are sketched, not drawn. In Richard Collin’s The Slayer Slain, Mariam, the heroine, definite of her father, is pictured as a woman of virtue. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864), the first Indian English novel, is melodramatic tale of the trials of a typical long-suffering Hindu wife. Even women novelists of this time, Raj Lakshmi Debi (The Hindoo Wife, 1876), Toru Dutt (Binaca, 1878, unfinished) Krupabai Satthiannadhan (Kamala, 1895) and Kali Krishna Lahiri (Roshinara, 1881) were preoccupied with the suffering of women. Torulata Dutt (1856-1877) dealt with the archetypes of Indian womanhood like Sita and Savithri. Of the two novels of Toru, one is Binaca, (1878) in English, in which she gives vent to her true
feelings about the attitudes of the Indian women and the other in French, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers*, (1879). Her creation of women characters in English reinforcing the conventional myth in a patriotic manner was a necessity in contemporary society. She followed Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the social backwardness, stifling conformity and cruelty of Indian caste-society in the middle of the 19th century.

The thematic concerns of the early women writers led to the emergence of the Indian woman in the fast changing social milieu. Rajlakshmi Debi’s *The Hindu Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876) raised a banner of revolt against the prevailing social conditions. Mrs. Krupabai Sathianandhan’s (1862-1894) *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Wife* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) were autobiographical. Saguna was portrayed as a very bold young girl who encountered women missionaries of Zenana School and S.B.Nikambe’s *Ratnabai*, was a semi-autobiographical sketch with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience. Since these novelists lacked literary models, their work sometimes descended into sentimentally and didacticism. Rockey Sakhawat Hossain’s (1880-1932) *Sultana’s Dream* presented topsy-world in which men were kept behind purdahs. Man takes the status of a woman and the narrator had a caustic laugh at man. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922) is described as . . . “The greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all history – the one who laid the foundation for women’s liberation in India.” Ramabai wrote a book on the *High Caste Hindu Woman* in which she described a typical arranged marriage and aptly commented on the conjugal satisfaction of women in terms of their marriage. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha observe: “When the conjugal relation is brightened of mutual Love, the happy wife has nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known from the beginning what freedom is, they are well content to remain in bondage” (Vol II 247).

Swarna Kumari Ghosal, (1856-1932), elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore, was a novelist, poet, playwright, songwriter, and a journalist. *The Fatal Garland* (1910) *The Unfinished Song* (1913) and *An Indian Love Story* (1910) were her major works. Her works mainly reflected the middle class milieu and as editor of the journal *Bharathi*, she
was mainly publishing scientific articles to educate the non-English speaking Indian Women in new scientific concepts. She was one of the most distinguished literary figures of the time, and a torchbearer in the tradition of women’s writing in Bengal. The advent of Swarna Kumari on the literary scene of Bengal heralded a new era for women. She was the first writer to show up the strength of women’s writing and raise women’s creations to a position of respect. Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954), the Oxford-educated lawyer, with a spirit of adventure and missionary zeal, fought for the cause of women, especially widows and women in purdahs. Her works, *Love and Life Behind the Purdahs* (1910) *Sun-Babies, Studies in the child-life of India* (1904). *Behind the Twilight* (1908) *India Calling* (1935) and *India Recalled* (1936) served as instruments of social reform.

Women in most of the early novels are essentially Indian in sensibility, endowed with the traditional feminine qualities of sincerity, love and resignation. The autobiographical element in these novels, the transition from a concern with objective social reality to an exploration of the feminine sensibility find their echoes in the works of later women writers and such they established their position as the forerunners of the Indian literary tradition in Indian English literature. The first generation women novelists depicted woman who were traditional in outlook and resigned her to life. Under the influence of the popular British writers, these women’s writings tended to be imitative while some focused on the romantic idealization; while reformative zeal was the option for others. On the whole, these women writers wrote mainly to voice their concern for and sympathize with the suffering of Indian women rather than to censure the society. Hence, there was no room for anger, irritation, or tension in their works despite intense sociological and reformatory motivation.

The Indo-Anglican novels of the colonial period present woman as romantic, charming cultured, graceful, wise, courageous etc. The novelists of this period treated women’s lives, experiences and values as marginal. They thought literature by and about women were inferior to literature by and about men. For them woman was either a goddess or a doormat. Woman was a stereotype of the *Pativrata*. The woman of the early
Indian English novels had no identity. Their ideal was to obey the elders and follow the traditions. To quote:

This sense of obedience to the elders which the girls have to follow pervades the Indo-Anglian novel. The picture of the highly westernized girls aping the west and obsessed with the idea of physical love was ridiculed. In contrast, the traditional ideas of obedience and faithfulness were shown as the very essence of Indian girls and girlhood (Shirwadkar 31).

Woman in early Indian English fiction suffered mostly owing to the infidelity of her husband or the stigma of childlessness. Meena Shirwadkar observes that early works of Anand and Narayan are dominated by the male point of view. They have both shown girls as subordinate creatures, as pictures of pity and suffering (47). Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and Manjeri Isvaran present woman in the traditional image of the Pativrata. She is an object of pity and has no will of her own. To suffer in silence is her only life. In Anand’s Coolie, Laxmi, wife of Hari, lives in sub-human surroundings but sticks to her husband without grudge or grumbling. Markandaya in Nectar in a Sieve presents Rukmani as a dumb, docile wife who bears no malice towards her husband despite his extra-marital affair. Manjeri Isvaran presents Jagadamba as a silent sufferer in his novella, Immersion. R. K. Narayan’s The Guide presents Raju’s mother as an innocent naïve woman, a mere shadow of her husband in contrast to Rosie (heroine). Thus in early Indian English fiction there was endless variety and monotonous similarity. The ideal of womanhood was motherhood, that marvelous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother. The Indian woman had only one facet. She was nothing, less than nothing, and she had to wait for a few decades to assume an existence and a name.

It was the Gandhian non-co-operation which brought the Indian woman to the surface in family and society. The awakening of the women was one of the byproducts of the freedom struggle. K. M. Panikkar in The Foundation of New India writes:

It would be wrong historically to consider that the great part the women of India played in the non-c-operation movement and the position they have achieved for
themselves in modern Indian life was the result of sudden transformation. For over a century the process had been at work .... The Brahmo Samaj led the movement of emancipation. The ancient rules of Purdah were broken and Brahmo women moved freely in society but this was a false dawn as it was far in advance of popular opinion.... It was, however, only with Gandhiji’s non-cooperation movement that women were encouraged to come forward and participate in the life of the nation (Panikkar 235).

With the spread of education there was a gradual erosion of faith in the traditional customs and values but it took some time for the modern ideas and western culture to fill in the vacuum so created. The gulf between Indian and Western cultures crated a transitional society neither fully modern nor fully traditional. And here the women walked in. In the words of Bhabani Bhattacharya: “I think that women of India have more depth, more richness that the men. The transition from the old to the new, the crisis of value adaptation strikes deeper into the lives of our women than our menfolk” (2).

The Indian novelist, particularly since the 1930s, had begun writing novels that reflected the changing needs, realities and aspirations of Indian society. The Indian novel has largely concentrated on the problems of the individual (male and female) namely, the family, community and even the entire society. In Indian literature, the absence of the theme of love and personal relationships has been marked upon. Always extremely responsive to social, political, economic changes in Indian society, the Indian novelists (male and female) have taken up the oppression and suppression not only of women but also of untouchables, factory workers, poor farmers, landless labourers, as themes.

R. K. Narayan presented a few independent, individualistic characters who symbolize (Daisy and Bharati in The Painter of Signs and Waiting for the Mahatma respectively) the emerging spirit of feminine freedom. Arun Joshi is another writer who deals with women realistically. “From June Blyth in The Foreigner (1968) to Anuradha in The Last Labyrinth (1981), a close study of Joshi’s women characters reveals that the novelists’ attitude towards the women as portrayed in his novels has undergone a radical
shift. While June Blyth is portrayed as a simple woman with exuberant vitality and noble ideas, through the character of Anuradha the novelist seems to project feminine power” (Parvathy 25).

Today novelists depict a large number of women characters. Women now occupy the centre stage in the novels not only by women but also by men. These women characters show courage enough to fight with social evils and male superiority. To quote:

"The women novelists have contributed to the Indo-Anglican fiction some intimate pictures of girls in isolated circles like the women in Brahmin or purdah-clad families . . . The girls are at the centre of most of the novels by women writers and some are first person narrations by the central woman character. This has given scope to the feminine point of view to enter into the sphere of Indo-Anglican fiction (Shirwadkar 48).

The Indian English novelist is concerned with much more than that. “The new woman, the feminine novelist of the twentieth century has, abandoned the old realism. She does not accept observed revelation. She is seeking with passionate determination for that Reality which is behind the material, the things that matter, spiritual things, Ultimate Truth” (Brimley iv). The Indian English fiction has come a long way from the traditional ways of presenting woman struggling with sexuality and creativity in a world where she was offered only three possible roles: virgin, wife or whore. The influence of the progressive assimilation of western standards of culture on the ethos of the urban community, especially at the higher levels of society, has given a possible thrust to the liberation of women from the shakles of tradition as reflected in the contemporary Indian English fiction.

Indian novels are, to quote Shanta Krishnaswamy, “a spectrum presentation of the ways of dealing with binary opposition of male versus female dominance of woman as subject versus woman as object” (Abstract vii). Yet these women, subject or object, are reduced to beasts of burden, the burden of traditional Hindu values. Down the ages woman’s history reads like a grim saga of suffering. In Indian English fiction by women,
the cry for women’s emancipation is a common theme. Everywhere the truncated self of
the woman clamours to be whole. It may be Ibsen’s Nora or any Indian character, the
desire is the same – to get out of the man-made cage and fly freely, as Akiko Yaseno
writes, “All sleeping women will awake now and move” (241).

To Tagore: “Man gathers round him rubbish/woman comes and constantly
cleanses it away” (199). Yet Manu the ancient lawgiver gave woman no independence at
any stage. He said that in childhood woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her
husband and in her old age when her husband/lord is dead, to her sons. Even today
women continue to be helpless non-choosers. They are deprived of selfhood, which, in
fact, forms the very basis of the woman’s story in the West. In the words of Meenakshi
Mukherjee:

Sometimes the conflict resolves itself neatly into two issues: duty to the family
and personal fulfillment. The fulfillment of oneself, however desirable a goal
according to the individualistic ideas of the western society, has always been alien
to Indian tradition, especially when it is achieved at the cost of duty to the family.
The Indo-Anglican novelist thus faces a curious predicament. He is using the
language and form of the English novelist, but he has to operate within totally
different frame of reference. Sexual love and personal happiness, those two prime
concerns of the western novelist, do not have such central importance in the
Indian context. The classic ideas of the god-like hero and the patient heroine extol
the virtues of the extinction of the ego whereas the novel in the western world
often focuses upon the achievement of the selfhood or personality. One might
argue that classical ideals no longer obtain in the Indian context. But in actual
literary practice, numerous characters are found to adhere to classic prototypes,
especially the women of fiction who persistently re-enact the suffering, sacrificing
role of Sita or Savitri (29).

Shantha Krishnaswamy observes: “It is through the confines of a novel that we see what
it means to be an Indian woman today” (33). Though quiet different from her western
counterpart the Indian woman exposed to cross-cultural patterns and conflicts, is in her
own right a supreme force in the novel.
Though earlier Indian woman’s portrayal in the fiction has been of a submissive, devoted, faithful, loyal, self-sacrificing woman, later a change is presented, of a radical woman, a revolutionary, a real-full individual with a personality of her own. The rise of the new woman out of the old is an event of immense historical significance. Tagore is the first modern Indian writer who brought his women out of the kitchen and bedroom into the parlour where they argue with men and exchange ideas while still remaining very feminine. His fiction primarily deals with women as social beings, and as social agents. He shunned the stereotyped, customary depiction of women; the goddess and sex symbol images. Tagore attacked social injustice through his women characters, oppressed figures. Social consciousness is radically changed by these women who, in the course of the plots, undergo a sea-change. In his mature writings, Tagore’s heroines are catalysts, rebels against the caste system, hypocrisy in society and pretension in religion, and also are champions of higher education and have a career.

Certain Indian male novelists have pictured women and their experiences in a male dominated society, with deep understanding. Women in novels by Indian male writers have existed as protagonists and even as central voices. For example, the protagonists of Mulk Raj Anand’s Gauri, R. K. Narayan’s The Dark Room and Salman Rushdie’s Shame. Sensitively-portrayed women characters – individuals in their own right, although not protagonists stand at the core of Vikram Seth’s The Golden Gate, Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lives and Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh.

The marginalized condition of women as girl, wife, mother, widow, has been poignantly portrayed in the novels and short stories of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, K. S. Karanth, Jayawant Dalvi, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Bhabani Bhattacharya and many others. It is only fair to say that Indian male writers have been very sensitive to woman’s issues and that they have tried to centralize her rather than marginalize her (Kirpal 76). But more than men, Indian women novelists turned towards the woman’s world with greater introspective intensity and authenticity. They launched an aesthetic voyage within to explore the private consciousness of their women characters and measure the pressure of the inner weather.
There has been a spurt of new Indian women novelists from early twentieth century to early twenty-first century like Amrita Pritam, Attia Hosain, Ismat Chughtai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Santha Rama Rao, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Ruth Prawer Jabavala, Raji Narasimhan, Jai Nimbkar, Namita Gokhle, Gita Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Anita Nair, Shakuntala Shrinagesh, Rama Mehta, Manju Kapoor, Bharathi Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni Banarjee, Kavery Nambisan, Arundhati Roy, Jaishree Misra, Meena Mehrotra and Vimala Raina and many others who have also worked towards the same end. They have been preoccupied with the problem of adjustment. They have tried to explore the feelings of women who fall a victim to the conflict between the traditional and the newly acquired values. Meena Belliappa discovers in Anita Desai’s writings the “new direction that Indian fiction is taking in the hands of the third generation of urban writers . . . a deliberate growing away from debased tradition of fiction as romance and to a more meaningful wrestle with reality” (Belliappa 10). The conflict of tradition and modernity is a favourite theme of Kamala Markandaya and Jabavala.

The portrayal of women and their experiences by some Indian women writers has undergone a significant change in the 1980s. Under the influence of the gender revolution of the 1970s writing by women about women has become a political act. There has been a strong element of protest in their novels. Like, their counterparts in the west, they question the oppressor or the social order. The other or the oppressor in the Indian context is not just the husband or lover but the entire family, and sometimes the whole society. This new writing is feminist in character. It is a frontal attack on patriarchy and its tools – the processes of socialization, traditional myths, social customs, and practices – that are responsible for the zero worth of women in Indian society.

The post-independence India witnessed a spurt of fiction writing by women writers of greater quality and depth. The period between 1915 and 1950 had not produced any significant woman writer. Consequently a clear gap of 35 years existed between the post-independence writers and their forerunners. These writers were more realistic in their approach than those of the first generation and were able to project a vision of their own.
Venu Chitale, the early post-independence novelist portrayed in her novel, *In Transit* (1950), the emotional trauma of a traditional middle-class Brahmin widow weighed down by the age-old traditions and customs. Zeenuth Futehally’s *Zohra* (1955) provided realing glimpses into the Muslim life, culture and manners. Shakuntala Shringesh took up a psychological study of her characters in her *The Little Black Box* (1955).

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly the most outstanding among the second-generation women novelists. Her women protagonists are the repertoire of transitional Indian Society. She presents a cross section of the Indian society wherein her women characters go in quest for autonomy. The irregularities in the social system confine her women to time honoured and taboo-ridden path. The economic travails inherited in Indian Society further complicate their position adding to their inexperience, sickness, blind faith in their destiny, which they accept as their ‘Karma’. Thus her women, by and large, are conservative and traditional in outlook. But most of her women manage to be independent in thinking while performing their traditional roles.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala finds life in India to be an overwhelming burden to European women. Well aware of the changing values of the evolving Indian society, she portrays the predicament of the modern urban women who face the challenges of the contrasting cultures between the traditional Indian way of life and the western modernism. They are more concerned with their relationships with their partners than with women’s rights or changing traditions. Though a majority of her women begin their married lives as non-conformists, very soon they learn to conform to traditions.

Santha Rama Rao appears to believe in the innate strength of the traditional Indian culture even when it comes in contact with the western culture. The characters are portrayed mostly with international background. She sketches her women characters as the ones who go in search of fulfillment and an attempt is also made to probe into the feminine psychology. Her women are mostly depicted as victims of political incidents
and they are at times declared as war criminals. They aspire to have the experience of “living”, and so they go in pursuit of artistic careers. The writer is adept in characterizing her protagonists with care and diligence. Like Jane Austen, she is quite at home in portraying women characters. As an Indian educated in the West, she brings to her task a wonderful balance.

Nayantara Sahgal delineates with keen perception and sensitivity the problems and sufferings of women in marriage, who feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, and show her own reaction in her novels. Most of her women are aware of the injustice done to them in marriage. As they go out of their homes, they go in quest of their freedom. While some accept their fate unhesitatingly, most of them crave for freedom. Nayantara Sahgal seeks to “interpret the rigid concept of virtue and chastity through her women characters who have a kind of untouched innocence and integrity” (Jain 67). Her women shield themselves with their virtuousness and courage to take risks of the unknown. In a way, Sahgal shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man’s equal. In each of her novels, “she pleads for mutual trust, love, understanding, consideration, generosity, and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness in marital relationships” (Shyam 66). Thus she is a champion of individual freedom with a penchant for the feminist cause.

The newly evolved and liberated women in the contemporary society really bloom and blossom in Raji Narasimhan’s novels. In her three novels, The Heart of Standing is You Cannot Fly (1973), Forever Free (1979), The Sky Changes (1991), liberated women characters are portrayed. Educated and able to live individually, they are not dependent on men. They live in working women’s hostels where they are free from domestic responsibilities. Women who are away from parental restrictions are exposed to societal pressures and other exploitations. The heroine in her novel, The Sky Changes returns home after being separated from her husband and goes to fulfil her desire of blossoming as a writer. Krishna, the protagonist asserts herself “My body is not my jail. It is my boat. I will row to freedom in my boat” (Raji 30).
Anita Desai differs from other women novelists through her method of the psychological exploration of her women protagonists who are essentially lonely and sensitive. The isolation and insecurity that her characters suffer is human, and the growth of women is from self alienation to self identification. The psychic travails of the estranged self indicate a measured and specified movement from self-desertion to self-assertion. When her women characters are carefully scrutinized, they reveal that though they remain distegrated and fragmented in the beginning, finally they attain integration and harmony. It is the inner urge that springs from their self-identification that strikes a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self-alienation. While she seeks social realities from the psychological perspective, she does not look at them as a social reformer or a moralist. It is Anita Desai who has added to Indian-English fiction an existentialistic dimension, a lyrical splendor and technical richness that were hitherto lacking. She has curved a special niche for herself in the world of Indo-English fiction. She is in the vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness.

Shashi Deshpande takes up for study the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. From her novel *The Dark Holds no Terror* to *A Matter of Time*, she portrays the pathetic and heart-rending condition of women in a male-dominated society. She is one with Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal in not merely describing the pathetic life styles of Indian women but trying to understand and suggest measure for amelioration.

Gita Hariharan the distinguished recipient of the prestigious commonwealth award for her maiden novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, for the year 1993, portrays women who battle in their relationship with men and society. Her protagonist passes through a lacerating process of identity crisis. There is effective communication between the characters that keep her works flowing. Gita relates the relevance of Indian epic stories in the context of contemporary India scenario. Her women protagonists are the representatives of the present-day intellectual women, and she does not confront them with problems like loneliness and alienation. At the end, they feel that they have but an
ephemeral existence. Her characters are not only interesting to read, but are thought provoking.

Uma Vasudev’s women can be called truly liberated. They are not bothered by traditional middle class attitudes, views, opinions, and taboos, which render them destitute and condemn them to live within the four walls of their homes. In her novels, *The Song of Anasuya* (1978) and *Shreya of Sonargrh* (1993), her characters are depicted as liberated women.

Jai Nimbkar’s novels, *Temporary Answers* (1974) and *A Joint Venture* (1988) deal with the middle class married woman’s identity crisis in the contemporary male-dominated Indian society. The protagonist in her first novel gives us a sense of lived reality, making the novel most autobiographical, authentic not only in terms of details of a ‘lived life’ but in terms of a psychological reality as well. Her protagonists in general suffer due to the existing inequality between the sexes.

Thus a brief account of Indian women novelists in English clearly shows not only their fictional writings but also the image of Indian woman. In most of their writings women novelists have tried their best to free the female mentality from age old control of male dominion and heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking.

Viola Klein opines that, “The attitudes of scholars towards women reflected the status of women in a given society, the prevailing ideologies concerning women in a certain historical period and the author’s personal attitude towards women” (3-4). Feminism in Indian English Fiction has been a series of counters and ordeals on the part of woman to strike roots, to belong and assert her identity in a transitional society. Woman, like man, is born free, but she has become the ‘subordinate sex’ ‘the other’. This is changing as women now do not conform but rebel. They are the ‘Kali’ and ‘Durga’ symbols of destruction as well as creation.
In Indian Fiction in English, women are assigned two types of roles: traditional or the conventional and the radical or unconventional. The traditional image of a battered condemned silent and weak woman figures out in the novels. The unorthodox suffer for their flouting of accepted social norms, for their rebelliousness. The conventional suffer too, but their suffering is sanctified by the norms of a patriarchal male-oriented culture. Both the types are shown to have the same experience for they suffer in one way or another. The radical ones suffer for their violation of the accepted norms of society or for even questioning them and due warning is given that if they do not mend their ways by smothering their desires, they have no salvation except in death. The conventional ones also suffer, though they are canonized by the norms of a patriarchal culture, and sacrifice themselves for the comfort of others and uphold traditions and conventions without knowing that these are engines of oppression of women.

The conventional female protagonists are tolerant and submissive but do not seem to be ready to compromise their identity and individuality. They suffer from intense isolation because they cannot reconcile the demands of their psyche with those the world around them. They view this world as a hostile place often take a negative stance, which generates psychic states of fear, guilt, anger, bitterness, anxiety, helplessness and depression. The years of societal and cultural conditioning teaches the Indian women to be self-effacing, submissive and subordinate to men, suffering of a patriarchal society in silence.

Indian novelists in English have either glorified and idealized their women or exposed their pathetic and pitiable plight. In the novels dealing with East-West encounter, they project the best of their cultural heritage, the quintessence of their country’s transcendental, traditional values embodied in Sita or Savitri. In the novels thematically set against the Gandhian backdrop, they are Daminis armed with indomitable courage and unflinching determination. But novels like Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice* and Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers* which deal with hunger, famine, joint-family and industrialization, women are victims of injustice, cruelty and exploitation. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal look at them differently through their emotional break-
downs and psychic turmoils. Woman is often found trapped in a myth of the wife and mother or the animal: “May be she had been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told. And in return she had been fed and sheltered” (Sahgal 57). But the new woman protests. In the novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, woman is not a mere goddess or a lifeless engine of propaganda. She passes through a process of transformation which signifies for her a change from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion, and from weakness to strength. Shashi Deshpande in her novels presents the Indian middle-class educated woman, who is engaged in an unconscious struggle to release herself from the strange hold of a tradition-bound society. Deshpande’s women try to transcend it but fail. They raise a protest against social taboos and norms but end up in a stifled whisper. They are neither old, orthodox type nor the modern, westernized variety. They are the familiar Indian women of the middle-class society. Her novels usually begin with an unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alienation, accommodation and adjustment. The conflict in her protagonists is resolved through their desperate unconscious submission to traditional roles. Thus despite the impact of western culture and alien mores and values on them, they remain intrinsically Indian in sensibility.

A plethora of women writers have constantly endeavored to capture the essence of the feminine consciousness through their works and provide glimpses of the “New Woman” who breaks through revered archetypes. Empowerment is only possible when it is coupled with an awareness of the present situation. Indian women novelists present a new woman not an archetypal one in their works. Their vision reminds women that they too are capable of moving mountains and bringing about change, they being the change themselves. The New Woman’s image of the woman is that of an emancipated one who can live life on her own terms. The New Woman portrayed in some novels depicts the woman’s journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self. This awareness is the assertion of her individuality, her willingness to confront reality and not to run away from it. The new emancipated women are non-conformists who are discontented with the rhetoric of equality between man and women. They want to liberate themselves from the shackles of tradition and exercise their rights for the manifestation of their individual
capabilities and the realization of their feminine selves through identity assertion and self-affirmation.

The Indian woman who is new in her outlook also realizes that breaking away is also very painful. The modern educated female mind asks many questions. Modern Indian woman is no longer a child, a baby, a pet, under the control of man the protector, the master, the guardian. For long, man has treated a woman as a child, but the realization of her new identity/self liberates a woman from the chains of oppression. The new woman is struggling to come out of the shackles of her sanskara/s. The modern woman is striving to be free and self-reliant, but then the timidity and difference, the product of the years’ slavish and protected life pattern admits impediments. The New woman suffers from many weaknesses and impediments. New awareness or identity alienates a woman from her man. Shirwadkar observes:

An aspect of new woman - women protagonists project an image of Indian woman - like a frustrated woman, angry wife, in the process of asserting her individuality, - may leave the family or turn to another man other than husband, thus shattering the prime rule of chastity in the individual code (77).

Ibsen’s Nora in A Doll’s House realized ‘my duty to myself’ and opened the door to the life of freedom and prepared the way for women all over the world to think about their place in family and society as also about their own identity. The Indian woman who used to bring up children, look after her man, nurture familial and social relationship, maintain social values; suddenly awoke to intense introspection and discovered her status of non-being in her family and society.

The degradation of women is a pressing reality and remains today in many, sections of society. Generally, Indian women are described as the neurotic victims of their supposed sexuality that leads them to an unnatural or confused behaviour approaching the perverse. Though sexuality is regarded as an innate human drive, its expression differs according to cultures. Patters of sexual behaviour in a society are results of the fundamental spirit of a culture. Consequently, the same sexual behaviours have different
meaning and outgrowths in different societies. Traditional societies have tried to control sexuality by setting it securely within matrimony and kinship structure.

The breakdown of patriarchal family has contributed to the atomization of society and to the disintegration of kinship and related human relationships. The idea of sexual liberation, as it is understood by and practiced in the western countries does not fascinate Indian women. The majority of Indian women (and men) think that individual rights must be strengthened either by neither attacking nor isolating oneself from family and community. The interests of the family are fundamental and take precedence over individual interests and needs. In India, the idea of the place of sex in life differs greatly from that of western women due to different cultural values and philosophies.

One of the contributions made by Indian feminism has been to increase one’s awareness of the part words play in perpetuating particular types of social power relationships, for instance, bringing to mind and deconstructing stereotypes. Today Indian feminist literature seeks to understand socio-religious oppression and promote ideas about the related ways in which gender, race, caste, sexuality work together to influence Indian women’s lives. Consequently, to as great an extent as possible, Indian feminist writers have come to recognize that different forms of social oppression associate in a way that makes it difficult to separate one from the other. Therefore the Indian feminist writers have a very acute part to play promoting sensitivity to women’s problems and unveiling the weight of overwhelming traditions whose negative aspects have been doomed accepted because they have been endured. The Indian women writer’s fiction is, thus, a form of raising awareness, identifying problems and suggesting forms of resistance and negotiation.

In thinking beyond femininity in its past and present representations, Indian women novelists have created narratives in which they alleviate the restrictions of gender, celebrate a changing femininity in which a woman becomes more like a man, psychologically and socially. In this context, they are challenging the very ground on
which ethics are based through the deformations of gender. The new femininities invented and narrated by Indian women writers symbolize the pursuit of dreamed but true-to-life female identity including inappropriate unfeminine features such as intelligence, ambition, coldness and violence. The troupe of femininity gives Indian women writers a flexible weapon with which to attack cultural misogyny. The male evocation of femininity as negative associations of inferiority and evil has probably been a fundamental feminist raison d’e^tre. Though feminism carries on exploring about what is biologically/naturally given and culturally built, feminist analysis of femininity has highlighted the supposed female virtues social sympathy, revealing femininity a great aptitude for supportive relationships with care and love. Despite, all the various ways in which women are defined by others and themselves, stereotypes of the fictive feminine offer contradictory evocation of femininity beyond culture, as at once inferior, weak, dependent on the one hand, and threatening, transgressive and sexual on the other hand. There are no fixed or stable identities, but perceived social models of femininity and masculinity.

Post-colonial Indian women writers’ writings reveal the patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive trends towards feminist growth and also shaped ways of eradicating those attitudes. The fiction of Anita Desai and others reveals new code of values, notably freedom and love, growing out of the bonds of feminism, and the power and vitality of women. Women characters are portrayed with great intuition and insight. Desai’s women characters find freedom not by living in their own confined selves or by clinging to others but by connecting with others and asserting their intellectual and economic independence. They strive for a balance established within the harmonious individualistic existence in the community of men and women. Mannu Bhandari’s women reflect the dilemma of Indian women who are portrayed as standing at the crossroads of community and freedom. Her writings depict the helplessness and confusion of women in their attempts to overcome these particular conflicts. But, education and economic independence help them to get rid of humiliation issuing from relationships with men.
In post-colonial Indian society freedom has given women a chance to fulfill specific desires; but due to various conscripting attitudes of the society, this newly won freedom causes awful grief on their lives, and remains greatly dominated by men and the society in general. Her society compels a woman to see her roles and duties as a mother and a wife as her fundamental priorities. Most Indian women seem to depend much more on their children for emotional subsistence than on their husbands. Motherhood brings both personal fulfillment and consideration which probably could not be provided as a mere woman. In her part as a mother, she remains culturally much more praised. The traditionally martyred Indian women can more easily cope with emotional incompatibility and other types of stress in their conjugal lives for they invest their emotions across an away of relationships within the joint-family, parents, and sisters-in-law, brothers and children. Yet, women writers such as Arundati Roy or Bharati Mukarjee offer matriarchal criticism of patriarchal institutions, notably sexuality which remains a complex and contested domain within the Indian culture where male is the unique empowered sexual agent. Each woman writer describes different kinds of self-chosen exiled existences of women that become a way of breaking patriarchal hold over their lives. Each portrays the patriarchal community from the woman’s point of view as obscure, cloistered, oppressive and destructive.

Thus fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment in Indian English literature. The struggle to establish one’s identity and to asset one’s individuality has led the women to wage a desperate fight against the existing social order of the day. It is therefore, imperative for women to determine their new role and to redefine its parameters. The portrayal of women in literature helps them to do so as it provides them with role models drawn from the sufferings of the women characters, harassed under the chauvinistic male domination. Their thematic concerns and ideological preoccupations paved way to establish the synchronic and diachronic developments and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of women. The similarities and dissimilarities in the writer’s perceptions of the selfhood of women, given their different socio-cultural milieu, suggest a continuum of different possible responses.
Shashi Despande in a keynote address at a seminar in Sri Padmavati Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Tirupati, expounded at length on ‘woman in women’s writing.’ She made three significant points, first is the nature of the self. The female self is not wholly constructed by the roles which are thrust upon it, “even before I became a wife and mother there already was a self, a clearly developed self that was me, a self that was distinct from the different roles that I play.” When men create women, they are unable to capture this elusive self which underlies the adult roles. This leads one to the second point which is the women created by women writers and those by men writers. The former category bears no relation to their counterparts in men’s writings who construct them out of their own needs. They shy away from portraying intellectual women and are most comfortable with women as emotional beings. Commenting upon the genre of women’s writing, she expresses concern at the future possibilities, and this is her third point (Jain 46). She says she writes about women. Most of her writing comes out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in Indian society. It comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoined on her by society when she knows that she is something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. “My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly ‘women’s writing’” (Jain 209).

Literature in general and fiction in particular reflects the contemporary culture and social interactions of any country. As such it gives insight into the set-up of society, traditions, norms and the social position or status of women and men which regulate human relationships. Literature depicts the human drama in the backdrop of society where the lives, values and altitudes of men and women are undergoing major social changes. Therefore study of fiction, especially by women, is worth attempting as it presents the women’s perspective which is vital today to understand (the whole of humanity) the ignored and neglected class of human race.
Works Cited


