ABSTRACT

The consequential awareness in women at the advent of emerging feminist consciousness has heightened their questioning openly regarding their status in their family and society and especially doubts regarding their roles assigned to them by the patriarchal society such as a dependent daughter, wife and mother and as a member of the society. Marxist feminists see class as the ultimate determinant of women’s current economic status, whereas socialist feminists view gender and class as equally powerful oppressive mechanisms in addition to focusing upon areas of sexuality and reproduction. The sharp distinction, made in the psychoanalytical feminist perspective, between woman’s ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ has had its impact on the polarization of the old feminine mystique, the angel in the house now split into feminine and feminist, but the adaptability of the remedies they all offer for the existing evils is still an unsolved mystery.

Contemporary women thinkers are trying to achieve attitudinal changes by developing critiques of established assumptions about female familial roles. Yet it has been perceived by liberal feminists that, though feminists have highlighted the oppressive aspects of role-playing, the societal values have not changed as fast as women are changing. It is apt to probe whether the contemporary women writers react to the changing female attitudes towards domestic familial role-playing in such a society. The extent and the strategies of their reactions and the matters related to it also need to be analysed and hence a select study of two women novelists from varied cultural backgrounds—British : Doris Lessing and an Indian Regional Writer in Tamizh : Rajam Krishnan, is undertaken in this dissertation.
CHAPTER - I: INTRODUCTION: THE DIVIDED WOMAN makes a survey of the changing attitudes towards feminine mystique in the context of the feminist movement, highlighting issues such as the creation of the mystique through institutions of patriarchy. ‘Origin of Property’ is identified as the historical reasons as to why women are subjugated and hold a secondary position. Patriarchy imposes varied roles on women. Conforming to such roles is unconditionally compulsory. This chapter enhances the universal dilemma between conformity and non-conformity that women undergo relating it to a comparative study of two novelists belonging to various socio-cultural and literary backgrounds and describes briefly the nature of the analysis undertaken. It further provides a social and literary backdrop to the authors / texts taken up for study : Doris Lessing’s *Martha Quest* (1954); *A Proper Marriage* (1954); *The Grass is Singing* (1970) and *The Golden Notebook* (1984) and Regional writer Rajam Krishnan’s Novels— *The House* (1975); *The Chains* (1975); *After the Sound of Fury* (1982) and *Mailampattu Valli* (1985).

CHAPTER - II: DAUGHTER: NOT BORN BUT BECOMES evaluates the female protagonist’s sensitivity as a girl child until her teens, until she reaches the next stage, namely the wifehood and in her capacity as the daughter of a family in her later years. The analysis is undertaken in three dimensions– the female protagonist’s feminist consciousness as a child, as a teenage girl and as an adult. The extent to which she realizes her subjugation, her consciousness towards the breeding methodologies in families, the social and psychological conditioning which are the tools of saddling femininity on girl children, the protagonists acute awareness of such discriminations and their questioning attitude regarding the differential breeding between boys and girls are elaborated. This chapter makes a close survey on Lessing’s daughter characters
and Rajam Krishnan’s daughter characters— the extent of their cherishing or rejecting the daughter’s role.

CHAPTER - III: WIFE: MARRIAGE MARS HEAVEN traces the process of woman’s conformity and non-conformity in her capacity as a wife to the familial and social established norms of the patriarchy. Though mostly marriage is their career, the intricacies of fitting into such role are deeply analyzed. This chapter begins with the investigation into the protagonists’ very choice of marriage, which throws light on their state and status and then undertakes to scan the extent of the selected heroines’ assimilation or rejection of the role of wives entrusted to them and whether the role is entrusted forcefully or is it their own choice? This chapter also illuminates the unique crisis that all married women face, which has far fetched implications in feminine and feminist parlances. This chapter ends upon enhancing the brilliance of the novelists as feminist critique especially for capturing the intricacies of marriage, the major institution of patriarchy, which is vile mostly.

CHAPTER - IV: MOTHER: BEARING AND REARING discusses how the women’s capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced by being built into the feminine psychic structure. The male ownership anxieties and the overthrow of ‘mother right’ are identified as the historical reason behind the mother’s burden of bearing and the stressful rearing responsibilities. The ensuing contradictions and conflicts arising in women gave birth to the feminist phase of women who realized their discontent. It is interesting to note how the modern mothers who protest and contradict with their traditional mothers cope with their roles molded by the necessity and practical situations of her modern life. The chapter proceeds to analyze whether these modern mothers suffer or rather assimilate their roles easily.
CHAPTER - V: WOMAN AS A SOCIAL ENTITY: ROCKING AND RULING estimates the social consciousness of the novelists, their perspective regarding the society in relation to the status it accords to women, the way the novelists portray women as a social entity. In this connection, it becomes necessary to undertake an analysis as to the nature of the role that the society assigns to women and responsibilities and capacities it expects from them. This chapter further proceeds into an inspection of women’s willingness in accepting socially invested roles or their ability to fit into the slots and hence the rejection and revolt ensuing thereafter. It also surveys women’s expectations from the society, the scope and the possibilities of fulfilling women’s societal expectations and the scope of women achieving the required societal transformations if any, as befitting the female dimensions.

CHAPTER - VI: CONCLUSION: The concluding chapter reinstates the endeavor and success of the novelists in intricately establishing through the selected novels the universal dilemma between conforming to roles foisted on women—socially, psychologically and patriarchally. The women’s craving for shedding off the femininity foisted on them and their inherent quest for establishing their self-identity and their strategies are summed up in this chapter. The constant internal vying between conforming to established notions and standards, her inability and unwillingness to conform has always been problematic to women and hence the need to relieve women from it is stressed. All the protagonists execute a socio familial protest from their capacity as a daughter, as a wife or as a beloved or as a single woman, as a mother and as an employed woman in the society, which salient feature renders all the familial novels of Lessing and Rajam Krishnan and especially the selected novels the esteem of vibrant feminist critique.
A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

Quotations from the Secondary Sources are parenthetically documented as recommended in the *Seventh Edition of MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and for those from the primary sources, the following abbreviations are used:


