CHAPTER I
Introduction

"Those who are able to read their world and then have voice within it are positioned to have a certain modicum of power within that world and over their destinies," say Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham in the introduction to their work Race, Rhetoric and the Post-colonial. In fact, beyond the categories of the title of their work, it is common knowledge that man and groups of men have controlled the destinies of others -- women and other marginalized groups -- over centuries in constructing and controlling the domain of discourses in its discursive formations. However, some of these practices have been contested and challenged by those who had lost their freedom, identity, history and self-possession. The alternative and contestatory discourses have made it possible for the voiceless to speak and to gain agency. Feminism is one such discourse of dissent and resistance and has attempted to enfranchise the marginalized, or to put it in other words, to rescue women from the misprison of a male truth and restore agency to them. Infact the feminist struggle has been to interrogate male hegemony and deconstruct notions of law, rationality and universalism. A woman, therefore, has to reinvent herself in a language that is fundamentally controlled by men in order to assert the autonomy of her selfhood and identity.

Traditionally, man has controlled the domain of the discourse and
trapped woman inside a 'male truth.' Such a position in its formation not only has constituted patriarchy as the dominant discourse but considered it as axiomatic. Feminism exposes the patriarchal premises and prejudices in order to map the space available to women in literature. For centuries women have been culturally and socially denied their autonomy of selfhood and identity. Further, they have to suffer a kind of linguistic violence for language is used as a weapon to further marginalise women, forcing them into silence. Women's voices either in literary / creative articulations or in social sphere have been silenced as they are considered as objects of men's desire.

Feminism and feminist literary criticism are often defined as a matter of what is absent rather than what is present. In mapping absences, redefining the lack, feminism has developed through a series of creative oppositions, critiques and counter-critiques, while challenging and interrogating male positions, expanding its own agenda. Hence there is no one 'grand narrative' that homogenise feminism as such but many narratives that are grounded in specific cultural-political conditions. The diversity within feminism is now well-established so much so that it would be appropriate not to speak of 'Feminism' but to speak of 'Feminisms.'

Notwithstanding the current debates on feminism, while considering the institution of woman's discourse one is propelled towards theoretical
feminism, which provides the framework for any critical analysis from a feminist perspective. Theoretical feminism, one cannot deny, is mostly Western. However one cannot ignore its relevance while yet admitting its exclusivity. Valuing the theoretical does not deny other discourses, instead it underlines the fact that feminist theory might best be viewed as one legitimate move in a wider feminist endeavour. Therefore, even while considering the institution of an Indian woman’s discourse, which is situated in an entirely different socio-cultural matrix, the Western feminist theory can be safely applied. No doubt, we might find ourselves in an uneasy relation but the basic tenets of feminism are as much relevant to us in India as those in the West. It is not ‘theory’ itself we should be wary of but particular forms of theorizing which operate to reinforce the status quo rather than challenge its operation. Over the years, Western feminist criticism is becoming more aware than ever that a critic and the text both need to be understood in relation to their locations within a cultural formation. The imperatives of an Indian woman’s discourse thus need to be carefully placed in relation to the Western feminist theory so as to maintain its authenticity in the context of its own socio-cultural space.

To begin with, it is conventional to distinguish the two waves of feminism, the first wave spanning the period 1830-1920 and the second wave from 1960 to the present. First wave feminism, from the beginnings of
liberalism in the West in the 18th century until the advent of the contemporary Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960's, was predominantly liberal in character. Since its inception, liberal feminism has been concerned with the rights of the individual to political and religious freedom. Until the advent of second wave feminism, liberal discourse consistently spoke of 'man'. In liberal thinking, rationality is placed in binary opposition to the body. In other words, the mind is conceived as distinct from the body and superior to it. Until well into the twentieth century all women and most men of colour in the West were forced to fight against their exclusion from the rights and duties of liberalism. The feminist battle for inclusion within liberalism was waged for 300 yrs. From Mary Astell's appeal in the 1700's for women's education and emancipation from the patriarchal family to the present, liberal feminists have fought to extend the benefits of liberalism to women and to achieve for them suffrage, education, access to the professions and property rights. In this struggle they have argued for women's equality with men. They argue that women are equally rational and equally capable of holding public office and administering property. To make these arguments, liberal feminists have inevitably played down women's differences from men. They have argued that sexual difference should not determine how one is regarded as a human being. Liberal feminism thus tended to focus equality of opportunity within existing social relations.
The failure of much of liberal feminism up to 1968 problematizes, categories such as the individual, freedom and choice while challenging the deeprooted structures of contemporary capitalist societies – particularly the sexual division of labour. Indeed, the tendency within liberal feminism to perpetuate the definition of the private sphere as an area of individual choice led to a failure to politicize specific areas of women’s oppression within the family. The perceived limitations of liberal feminism provided an important impetus for the development of more radical forms of feminism over the last thirty years.

Second-wave feminism,9 which developed in the late 1960’s, fundamentally transformed the domain of the political. Its most famous principle, 'the personal is political', was symptomatic of an opening up to public and political scrutiny of areas previously seen as personal. Second wave feminism challenged the public/ private divide and in the process reinstated the importance of the body in sexual politics. Women’s exploitation and oppression were seen as all-pervasive and intrinsic to all aspects of contemporary society. Much of the early theoretical and political impetus in second-wave feminism came from radical feminism. Radical feminism turned its attention to the body as the site of women’s difference and oppression. It reinstated the centrality of the body in politics, attempting to both expose and counteract the exploitation of women’s bodies and to give new, positive meanings to female difference. In opposition to Marxism,
radical feminism regards women's oppression as the primary and fundamental form of oppression. Gender is seen as an elaborate system of male domination of women's minds and bodies which is at the basis of all social organisation. 'Patriarchy' is the term used to signify this universal system of oppression:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men -- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour -- determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.¹⁰

Patriarchy thus is a system of domination which pervades all aspects of culture and social life and is to be found in all cultures and at all moments of history.

Since the publication of the influential radical feminist texts of the late 1960s and 1970s, there has been a fundamental shift in much feminist theory and criticism. One of the objectives was to unmask the patriarchal colonization of women's minds and bodies from what the theorists termed as patriarchal discourse. For a proper and systematic study of feminist criticism it is worthwhile to follow it within the frame work of two schools: the Anglo-American feminist criticism and the Anglo-French feminist criticism. While the Anglo-American feminists focussed more on questions of representation and genealogy the Anglo-French feminists have been occupied with the ‘theory’ of the role of gender in writing. Kate Millet's
Sexual Politics (1969) focusses on the images of women in mainstream literature. Millet's analysis openly posits another perspective from the author's, and shows how precisely such conflict between reader and author/text can expose the underlying premise of a work. Millet's importance as a literary critic lies in her relentless defence of the reader's right to posit her own viewpoint, rejecting the received hierarchy of text and reader.11 The main thesis of Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women (1968) is that Western Culture at all levels is permeated by a thought of 'sexual analogy'. Ellmann points out that men have traditionally chosen to write in an assertive, authoritarian mode while all the time confining women to the language of sensibility. While exposing the 'phallic criticism', she writes how "Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women."12 In a particular section in her book, Ellmann sums up the eleven major stereotypes of femininity as presented by male writers and critics: formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and finally 'the two incorrigible figures' of the Witch and the Shrew'. Ellmann suggests that male reviewers just cannot attach the same degree of authority to a voice they know to be female.

Ellen Moer's Literary Women (1976), Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) marks the coming-of-age of Anglo-American feminist criticism. All the three books strive to define a distinctively female tradition in
literature on the grounds that as Elaine Showalter puts it, "the female literary tradition comes from the still evolving relationships between women writers and their society." For these critics, it is in other words society, not biology that shapes women's different literary perception of the world. Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* was the first attempt at describing the history of women's writing as a 'rapid and powerful undercurrent' running under or along side the main male tradition. As it mapped a relatively unknown territory for the first time, it received wide acclaim. Women's writing, she demonstrated, drew upon women's experiences and also on a literary subculture of women writers that the mainstream was hardly aware of. Moer's book in fact touched on almost every theme that was to be elaborated and refined in the subsequent women's writing: the exclusion of women writers, the need to find new strategies to open up canonical texts for feminist readings, the idea that a knowledge of feminist history was crucial for an understanding of women's writing, and the suggestion that women writers had shared a subculture that they often secretly kept alive. In a *Literature of their own*, Elaine Showalter sets out to describe the female literary tradition in the English novel from the generation of the Brontes to her time and to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture. In efforts to fill in the terrain between the 'literary landmarks', she uncovers three major phases of historical development claimed to be common to all literary subcultures. She elaborates three phases: the phase
of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles; the phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy; finally a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. These three phases have also been termed as 'Feminine', 'Feminist' and 'Female' respectively. Showalter's major contribution to feminist criticism is the emphasis she places on the rediscovery of forgotten or neglected women writers.

In their influential work *The Madwoman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar set out to explore anew a "distinctively female literary tradition" and develop a theory of "female literary response to male literary assertion and coercion." Gilbert and Gubar's enquiry shows that in the nineteenth century the patriarchal ideology presents artistic creativity as a fundamentally male quality. They opine that since creativity is defined as male it follows that the dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies too. Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness; instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. Gilbert and Gubar clearly demonstrate how in the 19th century the 'eternal feminine' was assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness.
The Anglo-American feminists fronted by the 'gynocriticism' of Showalter thus stressed the study of women's writings in order to learn 'what women have felt and experienced', and also that this experience is directly available in the texts written by women. They reject theory as a male invention that can only be applied in men's texts. They encourage the study of women's writing: in order to find a female tradition in literature. The feminist struggle, they foresee, must both try to undo the patriarchal strategy that makes 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness, and at the same time defend women precisely as women.

Whereas the Anglo-American feminists were concerned with study of women's writing, the Anglo-French feminists were more concerned with 'writing' in general. In this they were influenced by French theories. Major theorists of the Anglo-French school of feminism are Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. French theory has contributed powerfully to the feminist debate about the nature of women's oppression, the construction of sexual difference and the specificity of women's relations to language and writing.

The single most distinguishing feature of feminist scholarship has been its overtly political nature and feminism's commitment to material and social change has played a significant role in undermining traditional academic boundaries between the personal and the political. Feminist
theory is traditionally characterized by its interdisciplinarity — its transgression of the usual subject divisions (literary, historical, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, and sociological). As has been already mentioned, in the 1960's the general concern among feminists was finding a female tradition in literature and exposing the stereotypical ways in which women were represented in mainstream literature. In the 1970's the concentration was more towards finding a woman's language. Notable shifts have taken place since the early years of second-wave feminism. Since the early 1980's the pace of debate and range of research have been intense. What is distinctive in recent feminist work is not only the presence of the theoretical, but also the nature of the theories. Feminist theoretical endeavour has increasingly challenged the dominance of materialist theoretical perspectives, focusing in their place on processes of symbolization and representation. The search for depictions of women that escape the straitjacketing of already-existing symbolic forms has led to analyses of the relation between images and social representation, identity and the upholding of social order. Questions of vision, power and knowledge are also evident in redefinitions of women's relation to 'the gaze'.

This theoretical restlessness apart, one cannot but overlook the contradictions within feminism. There has always been a contradiction between feminism's theoretical refusal to countenance master narratives and the
political ascendency of certain canonical texts. Feminist theory in the 1960's, 70's and early 80's was predominantly Western and motivated by white / heterosexual interests. More recent feminist writing has tended to be overtly critical of this exclusivity of focus. Mobility of theory between disciplines should not blind feminists to the relative immobility of theory across more geographical boundaries. Voices from elsewhere is still far from reality. Grappling with this issue, in the 1990's feminists have widened this debate. At the present time feminists are concerned with both representation and method : who speaks, in the name of whom and in what voice. Bell Hooks expresses concern to avoid assimilation of particular forms of dominant feminism. Gayatri Spivak articulates this exclusivity of focus of Western Feminism: “in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman”. 17

However, epistemological, ontological and questions of representation still serve as key loci of feminist concerns and at the same time also form the significant grounds for dispute between feminists. The disputes or fragmentation within feminism is largely viewed as symptomatic of rather than problematic for feminist endeavours. It only tells of the dynamic nature of feminism and its openness to address issues relevant to our times.
The need of the hour is to re-negotiate questions of gender relations, patriarchy, self, identity, which have always been central to feminism. As feminism has generally been Eurocentric, it has became necessary to negotiate the issues from other locations. Situation of women cannot be said to be the same everywhere. Women’s experiences differ. Patriarchies differ and cannot be said to be universal. Other factors affecting the lives of women, like caste, colonialism, racism, have been rendered invisible in Western feminism. Therefore, keeping in mind the location of diverse women, feminists are re-opening the questions concerning a woman’s ‘self’, ‘identity’ or in other words, subjectivities. A move in this direction has implied a need to look at texts that take shape at the margins.

Since the study undertaken relates to texts situated in Indian social reality from a feminist perspective, it is worthwhile to examine the beginnings of feminism in India. In India, too, feminism could be traced back to the 19th century which expressed itself in the form of reform movements. Feminist consciousness in India was a direct result of India’s confrontation with the West. In her essay “The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness”, Bharati Ray states that “the crucial juncture or the historical point from which feminist consciousness began to be fashioned arrived with the freedom struggle.” Prior to the freedom struggle, at the beginning of the 19th century a whole lot of reform activities were taking place to alleviate the condition of women.
Sati was abolished, widow remarriage permitted and women's education introduced. These reforms nevertheless were initiated under British influence, who wanted to exploit the low status of women to expand their own interests. The main purpose behind the reforms was in no way to attack the prevalent patriarchal system, but rather to improve the position of women within the patriarchal framework and make them more capable of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers within the family.

The 'woman' question provided a convenient tool to establish and assert the moral superiority of the colonial rulers over the colonized. The colonized elite sought to defend their culture by projecting a 'glorious' past when the position of woman was high. There followed a strategic reconstruction of the 'glorious' woman of the ancient period. Placed within the two opposite models - the Western model and the Indian ideal - Indian women were expected to combine in themselves the womanly qualities prized both in the 'modern' West and in the 'ancient' East. The models of both the women of the 'glorious past' as well as the Victorian England was of course, idealized.

While 19th century contradictions were not resolved in the 20th century, new forces and influences were released to shape the contours of women's consciousness. Spread of women's education no doubt generated new ideas. But the crucial difference in the shift in women's images, ideas
as well as life-situations was made during the freedom movement. Even
as the designs of the Britishers was exposed to their disillusioned al­
lies, in the fight for freedom the co-operation of women was sought. The
nationalist appeal was to the indigineous Indian concept of woman as the
embodiment and transmitter of tradition. The worship of the motherland was
made synonymous to worship of mother-goddess and by invoking the reli­
gious sentiments women were won into the movement. 20

It has often been argued that women’s political participation was
merely an extension of their domestic role. Nevertheless, tremendous chan­
ges did occur in women’s perceptions during this period. They did step out
from the cloisters of their homes into the male world of politics and power.
The age-old notion of women’s total inferiority to men began to be slowly
eroded. Women had proved that they were capable of fighting alongside
man. The protest that was made against British imperialism was also di­
rected at least partially against the unfair patriarchal structure which benefitted
half the people at the expense of the other half.

As men were pre-occupied in their struggle against colonialism
women were questioning their own role within patriarchy. Susmita Debi
articulates aptly the rise of feminist consciousness during the national move­
ment:

I do not suggest that the term femininity connotes some
particular characteristics of women. Most women in our country live in an unnatural ambience. They have a separate existence isolated from men. This is what I call femininity. This is what has kept women as women and not allowed them to develop as human beings... All the energies of women, their intellect, their strength, their skill, are devoted to catering to the comforts of men... In their desires or aspirations, in fact, in everything that women wish to do or accomplish, they meet with resistance at every step.21

One of the debilitating effects of colonialism in India was colonisation of the minds. The British rulers were convinced that Indian literatures contained neither the literary nor the scientific information required for the moral or mental cultivation so essential if good government was to be desired and appreciated.22 Imperial interests clearly underlay the fashioning of the literary curriculum. Gradually as the new powers staked their claims over the land and over the minds of the people, not only individual works but whole literary traditions were delegitimated and marginalized. Colonial restructurings of gender and curricular institutionalization of literature worked to undermine the authority of Indian literatures and undercut the societies that gave rise to them. In opposition to this, Oriental scholarship reaffirmed the significance of an Indian tradition, but it was a highly restructured version of the past. Historians have pointed out that the Indian past, reconstructed and reempowered by such scholarship, was not only an idealized paradise untouched by the disturbing changes taking place in European society that the Romantics longed for, but also a brahmanic one in which the Indian
society and its history was reduced to what could be found in the ancient sacred texts. As a consequence more recent literatures that emerged from historically changing and secular contexts were marginalised.  

Whereas Colonialism idealised the Victorian woman, Orientalism idealised the subservient woman of the scriptures. Women were to find their ideals in either of the two. As Tharu and Lalitha opine, most of women's writings were lost to these two waves. 'Woman' as such was caught between myth and reality. In Indian Literatures in English, we might not find representations of different sections of women. But literatures in translation do offer us a stupendous body of work, in which to see how women articulate and respond to ideologies from complex and decentered positions. Writers are clearly imbricated in the ideologies of their times. Patriarchies take shape and are transformed in specific historical circumstances. Not all literatures written by women are feminist or even about woman. As not all literatures written by men can be said to be unfeminine. However, by a reading of the literatures in translation we do get a picture of Indian social reality, simply because most of these literatures take shape besides the canon. Therefore, a study of women's representation in such texts is a telling of Indian woman's reality.

The present study therefore attempts to trace women voices in
literature in translation in order to locate women’s ‘self’ and ‘identity’. The question of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ has always been in a state of flux, constituted and reconstituted. But a woman’s identity is sought to be generally universally fixed and it is patriarchy in different forms that defines the roles a woman has to play. Woman is defined as an ‘essence’ and biology determines her situation. Feminists reject this notion of woman as an essence or a product of biology. This is well articulated by Simone de Beauvoir when she says “Woman is not born, but becomes a woman.” Thus women have questioned the male definition of woman. The questions that feminists ask are -- What is it that constitutes the ‘self’ of a woman? How can she determine her ‘self’ located within the framework of patriarchal power? Questions such as these are relevant even today and so the study explores such questions with reference to Anantha Murthy’s \textit{Samskara} (1965), Gopi11ath Mohanty’s \textit{Paraja} (1945) and Mahesweta Devi’s \textit{Rudali} (1980).

\textit{Samskara}, \textit{Paraja} and \textit{Rudali}, are English translations of regional texts. All the three writers are Jnanpith award winners and have been widely read in India in the regional languages as well as in translation. Undoubtedly, there are still reservations in the academia whether to nomenclature such translated texts as Indian English Literature. Debates still continue over this issue. But not going into the intricacies of this debate, it needs to be pointed out that \textit{Samskara} has found its way in the curriculum and is widely discussed. Mahasweta Devi’s \textit{Rudali} too is subject to many feminist readings. I
 steer clear out of this debate although questions may arise as to the validity in selecting such texts for study. The purpose behind taking translated texts for analysis is that texts written in Indian languages convey a reality which is more telling than texts written by Indo-Anglian writers, who are more informed and self-conscious about Western Feminism. The reality they represent is mimetic. Vernacular voices on the other hand, are more grounded in the social reality and the discursive social practices. Two of the writers selected are male writers against one female writer. An author speaking through the voice of the other gender opens up the problematic of 'sounding differently.'

A comparative study of men's and women's writing is essential opines Myra Jehlen in order to locate "the difference between women's writing and men's study that no study of only women's writing can depict."27 The feminine voice that is represented in the texts by male authors speaks because it purportedly emerges from a female body that gives it life and currency. Examined within the cultural discourse of the period, woman's voice is seen to be imbricated in female sexuality, just as silence is 'bound up' with sexual continence. Some of the questions that obtain in the context of locating the 'self ' and tracing women's voice are - How much space is given to a woman in a narrative? How is she portrayed? Are the woman voices if any, interrogative or affirmative? How is resistance articulated in silence? How does the 'self' locate and signify itself? In the context of these questions, the present study explores what happens to women char-
acters in both male and female texts, taking into account representations of high-caste, low-caste, dalit and tribal women. Caste and class are equally important categories of differentiation like gender. Either through speech or silence the women characters do register some form of communication. While reading the silences or voices of women characters in the texts already mentioned, the objective is to re-orient the critical assumptions about these texts from feminist perspective.

The introductory chapter looks into theoretical aspects of feminism and defines the scope of the study. It also focuses on the need of taking translated texts for the purpose of analysis.

The second chapter, "Locating the 'Self' in culture" traces the philosophical tradition of the 'self'. It is understood that the concept of 'self' has been a contentious issue in the philosophical domain. However, for self's location in culture, the self is seen in a process of negotiation that constitutes itself. An attempt is made in this chapter to resituate the question of identity in the sphere of contemporary culture and examine the shifting terrains of critical theory in placing and displacing identities.

The third chapter, "Tracing the 'Voices' of women in Samskara, Paraja and Rudali" begins with the development of novel in India and goes on to analyse the three texts in order to locate the 'Voices' of women.

The fourth chapter, "Reading Silences: Marginality and Resistances", 
tries to read the nature of woman's voice. Women are silenced and even when semiotically they are voiced, the muted voices of women turn into a 'cry'- a cry of resistance or may be a discourse of loss rather than restoration. Voices are suppressed and silenced and when voiced become fragmented and meaningless.

The study is concluded with the insights that are gained from the previous chapters.
Endnotes


3. Ibid., p.5.

4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p.15.


15. Ibid.
Bell Hooks, in her essay “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit., pp.22-27.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay “French Feminism in an International Frame” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, eds. op.cit., p.53


Ibid., p.180.

Ibid., pp.181-182.

Susmita Debi, quoted in Bharati Ray, op.cit., p.214.


U.R. Anantha Murthy (b. 1932) is one of India’s major modern creative writers. As an outstanding creative writer, critic, editor and teacher, U. R. Anantha Murthy has had a seminal impact on Kannada literature and culture. In the course of a very distinguished academic career he has received numerous fellowships and has lectured at institutions all over the world. He has been the president of Sahitya Akademi and was awarded the Jnanpith Award in 1995. A radical of the Lohiaite School, his works are primarily an enquiry into the nature of the self in a situation that dramatizes the contradictions and paradoxes of a society at a crucial phase of transformation. His first collection of short stories Endendu Mugiyada Kathe was published in 1955. Bavali his first book of poems was published in 1963 and Samskara his first novel, published in 1965.

Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1992) is a major Indian novelist who wrote in Oriya. He wrote more than twenty novels and dozens of short stories. He was also a prolific translator of literature into Oriya. His novels are based on the life-style of the primitive tribes, the Kondhs
and Paraja’s of Orissa, as also the middle class society of Oriya villages and small towns. *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana* are his major novels on the tribal theme and *Mati Mata* is a classic of the eternal Indian village. He was given the Jnanpith Award in 1974, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955 and Padmabhushan in 1981.

Mahasweta Devi (b.1926) is one of the boldest of Bengali female fiction writers. In a long and chequered career, in her own words, she has been a school teacher, a dealer in soap dyes, a failed exporter of monkeys and a roving reporter for rural Bengal for the daily *jugantar*. In 1956, she became a professional writer. She has to her name 41 novels, 15 short story collections besides a number of plays and children’s stories and innumerable newspaper articles. In her works she focuses on “class exploitation” in which “the underclass is exploited—both men and women.” A ‘committed’ writer, for her, familiarity with the documents and fidelity to her experiences is important. Her first book *Jhansir Rani* was published in 1956. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Aranyor Adhikar* (1970). Some of her other works are *Hajar Churasir Ma*, *Amrita Sanchay*, *Andhar Manik* and *Rudali*.

Myra Jehlen, quoted in Toril Moi, op.cit., pp.80-81.