

Chapter- I

Introduction

Since the literature took its shape, the role and image of women have repeatedly been scrutinized in various ways and the accumulated knowledge regarding women has been stored in literature, the works of art, religious texts, mythology and codes of social behaviors.

The present research is an attempt to analyze the delineation of the Indian women characters particularly based in Himalayan region in *The Selector of Souls* and *The Himalayan Love Story*. The former is penned down by Indo-Canadian novelist Shauna Singh Baldwin and the latter is written by Indian writer Namita Gokhale. The most striking feature of these two novels is that both these novels are set in Himalayan region and in both these novels females are the protagonists. Both these novelists are females and they have raised the issue of feminism in a more vehement way. Indian women writers composing their thoughts in English range from an array of people like Toru Dutt to Kamala Das and from Sarojini Naidu to Suniti Namjoshi and Arundhati Roy to Shashi Deshpande. These feminist writers tried to bring equality in the society because it is a dire need of the time. As Jasbir Jain writes:

Equality, in meaningful terms, in terms of greater freedom and more space for women is global need. Degrees of oppression may differ, kinds may also differ subject to the difference in the other factors: but gender discrimination persists almost in all societies. The dreams of women may differ, their struggles even more so but their need for air to breathe is the same. When one moves across cultures, similar problems can be seen surfacing everywhere (Jain15).

Since the time immemorial women have been given different tags. Sometimes she is defined as goddess other times she is delineated as an evil spirits but what is most unfortunate is that she is rarely considered as a common human being. She is always deemed as a dependent and the “other” as Simon de Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex* “History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy’s earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other (Beauvoir163).

Almost half of the cosmos is filled with women but even then she has to prove herself in this phallogentric world that she also has her identity. Simon de Beauvoir says:

Women is losing herself, woman is lost’. It is hard to know any longer if women still exist, if they will always exist, if there should be women at all, what place they hold in this world, what place they should hold.... Everyone agrees there are females in the human species; today as in the past, they make up about half of the humanity; and yet we are told that femininity is in jeopardy (Beauvoir3).

The main focus of feminist movement isto strive the aim that the traumas of women should be ameliorated; they should be given the equal status in society; they should be rendered equal opportunities in this male dominated patriarchal society. The word feminism is not a new one. Alison M. Jaggar defines feminism:

“Feminism” was originally a French word. It referred to what in the 19th century United States was called “the woman movement”: a diverse collection of groups all aimed, in one way or another, at “advancing” the position of women. When the word “feminism” was introduced into the United States in

the early 20th century, however, it was used to refer only to one particular group of women's rights advocates, namely that group which asserted the uniqueness of women, the mystical experience of motherhood and women's special purity (Jagger5).

The concept of feminism has always formed part of women's liberation movement, although its endeavours have been changing in form and content with gender equality being one of the most aspired facets. Women are deemed "second sex" (title of Simone de Beauvoir's book). She is relegated to secondary position and the first place is assumed by men. She is given the secondary position because she is supposed to be a weaker sex in all fields of life whether it is field or office. Feminism is not a new term which is used by these writers but it is being employed in literature from the time when subordination of women began as Alison M. Jagger says:

In a sense, feminism has always existed. Certainly, as long as women have been subordinated, they have resisted that subordination. Sometimes the resistance has been collective and conscious; at other times it has been solitary and only half-conscious, as when women have sought escape from their socially prescribed roles through illness, drug and alcohol addiction, and even madness. Despite the continuity of women's resistance, however, only within the last two of three hundred years has a visible and widespread feminist movement emerged that has attempted to struggle in an organized way against women's special oppression (Jagger3).

The recent form of feminism that came into existence after 1960 has become a progressive socio-political movement in the whole world. The main purpose of this feminism movement is to have a better understanding of social set up, male

domination, social practice, and institution. The role of all these is to assign a marginalized status to women. And man is always assigned the bigger roles and thus he is deemed as the master and protector. As Jasbir Jain defines:

Man has not only been viewed as the 'master' but also as the protector and the bread earner, a belief, which in large measure, is a myth. Epics and folk tales alike throw up examples of how women have been abandoned or left unprotected either because of the turn of events or because of the male rejection, persecution or authority. There are also sufficient examples in real life, almost in every society, of women struggling to support their families- orphaned women, single and widowed women, abandoned wives, persecuted or rejected women, and those who support sick husbands and many who earn the bread while the men spend their hard earned money in drink or self-indulgence (Jain 18-19)

Women always suffer a lot. They are discriminated and differentiated on the basis of customs, rituals and sometimes on the basis of social prescription. Different-different types of tags are labeled to women on the basis of custom. Women are assigned certain roles and certain roles are denied to her. Almost every time our society prescribes that what a woman supposed to do and what not to do. Although such kinds of social prescriptions have nothing to do with the so called progressive society in matter of women yet they remain intact in this phallocentric society. All the religion whether it is Hindu or Christian or Muslim, they deny women equal status in society. In Muslim religion purdah system dominates, women are not given share in property. Only one word thrice is sufficient to separate the spouses. In Hindu religion we worship *Maa* Goddess Saraswati, Laxmi, Kali but it is just limited to religious

activities. When it comes the term of reality they are never given equal rights let alone the matter of worship. A woman is assigned low status when the story of creation is described in Christianity. It is shown fall of man is because of woman. Even the Bible says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husband . . . as unto the lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church . . . " (Ephesians 5: 22-23). Overall the main concept that is accentuated in all these religions is that woman is subordinate to man and man is always superior having been created in the image of god. This is why Church considers woman as second class citizen.

The role of governance, production, and ecclesiastics are always linked to men and because of her biological capacity to reproduce the human is assigned to her and it is the only factor because of which she is tied down upto the four walls of the house and her aspirations, hopes die down there. Regarding the position of women in India it is pointed out that in this male dominated society sex differentiation gradually but inevitable developed in a manner such that societal roles which were linked with production, governance and religious activities, became the sole domains of phallogocentric world. On the other hand the biological capacity of the female to reproduce the human species and ensure its survival, led to her being given roles tied her down upto the four walls of a home and withdrew her from the wider economic, political and religious arenas of social participation. Paralleling these two processes, there took place the progressive elaboration of an ideology which rationalized this shift from differentiation to discrimination by means of custom, rituals and religious or social prescription.

Thus man had been pushed into the outside world whereas women were confined to the household chores. There were many factors why the women were

confined to the four walls of the house. Prominent factors among these were socialization, the influence of religion and mythology and representation of women in literature.

Through socialization women imbibe the femininity. Women or girl learn what is desirable attitude such as having braid and long hair, accept the lower status in life, learn the values of obedience, patience and humility. Let alone the matter of society even parents teach the girls to be shy , gentle and graceful as a person, pure, true and faithful as a spouse, loving, caring and selfless as a mother. Thus the lower status to women is assigned at birth and rest of the work is fulfilled by so called societal obligation. When we go through the books which are generally taught to in schools then we find that most of the women are revealed in household settings while men are portrayed in public settings. Even when we come to the conclusion of getting jobs then we find that women are restricted upto the limited jobs and moreover comparatively they are paid less than men and even their occupational positions of women are inferior to male world. Regarding the social life Simone de Beauvoir points this out:

The family is not a closed community: notwithstanding its separateness, it establishes relations with other social units; the home is not only an 'interior' in which the couple is confined; it is also the expression of its living standard; its wealth; its tastes; it must be exhibited for others to see. It is essentially the woman who will organize this social life. The man is connected to the community as producer and citizen, by ties of an organic solidarity based on the division of labor; the couple is a social person, defined by the family, class, milieu and race to which it belongs, attached by ties of mechanical

solidarity to groups socially similar to themselves; the woman is the one who most likely to embody this most purely : the husband's professional relations often do not reflect his social level, while the wife, who does not have the obligations brought about by work , can limit herself to the company of her peers; besides, she has the leisure, through her 'visits' and 'reception' , to promote these relations, useless in practice , and that, of course, matter only in categories of people wanting to hold their rank in the social hierarchy , that is, who consider themselves superior to certain others. She delights in showing off her home and even herself... (Beauvoir585).

On the basis of biological differences women are discriminated and differentiated. Women are deemed delicate by birth which is why she is denied the roles and works which demand hard work because it may damage her health. When we observe that most of the higher posts are assumed by phallogentric world and that is why females are relegated to lower status. Because of the biological differences there is sexual division of labor. There is difference in the size of the brain and physique of male and female. Because of this difference women are always considered delicate and tender which is why they are considered at bay as far as hard work and too much mind are considered. Therefore education, vocation, and ratiocination are concerned these are considered de-feminizing factors. Therefore, the woman, says Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, "gives up criticizing, investigating, judging for herself and leaves all this to the superior caste"(Beauvoir 611). On the basis of biological data she is separated, maltreated and subjugated. To man word 'female' sounds like an insult and on the other hand male feels proud when he hears 'he is male'. Defining the Biological Data Simon de Beauvoir says:

Woman? Very simple, says those who like simple answers: she is womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her. From a man's mouth, the epithet 'female' sounds like an insult; but he, not ashamed of his animality, is proud to hear: 'He is male!' The term 'female' is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature, but because it confines her in her sex, even in an innocent animal, seems despicable and an enemy to man, it is obvious because of the disquieting hostility woman triggers in him (Beauvoir 615).

Opinions regarding different types of roles of two sexes vary greatly from each other. These roles lack any scientific basis but they are based on social myths. Most of the philosophies of the world have taken sexual differentiation for granted without attempting to explain it. These philosophies and myths try to subjugate the position of women in every facet of life. There are also different types of opinions which are based only on social myths. As Simon de Beauvoir says:

Opinions about the respective roles of the two sexes have varied greatly; they were initially devoid of any scientific basis and only reflected social myths. It was thought for a long time, and is still thought in some primitive societies based on matrilineal filiation, that the father has no part in the child's conception: ancestral larvae were supposed to infiltrate the womb in the form of living germs. With the advent of patriarchy, the male resolutely claimed his posterity; the mother had to be granted a role in procreation even though she merely carried and fattened the living seed: the father alone was the creator (Beauvoir 25).

On the basis of religion so many social restrictions are imposed on women. Indubitably, it can be conveyed that religion overtly or covertly subjugates women.

The Hindu religion texts often refer to women as “*ardhangini*” the half body of man. But the power of women is observed as creative, fertile only when she harmoniously conjoins with male. The concept of femaleness in Hindu religion presents duality. On the one hand she is seen as divine, fertile, creative, nurturing, and on the other hand she is deemed to be the abstract of what is pernicious, carnal, fleshly and evil and, therefore, in constant need of control by man. The woman who quiescently accepts the control of man is considered an ideal Hindu woman. There are female goddesses in Hindu religion who represent knowledge (Saraswati), wealth (Laxmi), and power (Shakti). But in real life women are bereft of knowledge, wealth, and power and what is given to women is subordination and subservient roles. Thus we see female is considered like a nurturant and destructive. But in this male dominated society custom and tradition have focused on those models which are supportive of the social order and underplayed the emulative potential of woman.

So far as creation of man is concerned in Christianity, it is because of low status of women. Because of the low status of woman man is doomed to suffer here on this land. The religious book of Christianity the Bible describes woman’s husband as a god.

Woman is always considered subordinate to man and even the pious church deems women as second class citizens. The domination of male over female is greater in Islam religion in comparison to other religions. In Islam women suffer at the hand of phallogocentric society. Women are ordered to veil the face. Without veiling the face they cannot come out the home. The right to property is equal to nil. Divorce is so easy in Islam that people cannot imagine. Altogether it can be declared that women are far-far inferior to man in Islam.

Husband is considered everything (god) to a woman. Savitri follows Yama even underworld to get the life of her husband back. Sati, when she cannot tolerate the words spoken by her father about her husband, immolates herself. These examples prove that man is the first god of woman. Women, of course, appear in literature defined by phallogocentric world. It is man who calls her virgin, and whore and good mother and wicked step-mother. Now these roles have become deep rooted and only because of man these images of women appear well established. Sometimes it happens she appears in literature to be a good woman but generally her fate is to wait. Her life is considered static. Generally women are cast in literature in sexually defined roles. Women are mothers, women are wives, and women are sisters. These are the only facets in which women are cast in literature. When feminist movement started, India was under the British rule and still deep rooted in age old tradition. Actually this feminist movement in India was started not by any female writer but by male writer i.e. Rabindranath Tagore. Generally in Indian novels women were not given due roles. They were generally shown in poor lights. But the wind of change started blowing in the middle of the twentieth century. People started thinking about women in a different way in India only when they came to know that women started participating in freedom struggle, influence of feminist movements in foreign countries and movements of liberation of women in India.

This feminism movement first emerged in Western world. These feminist movements depict women in two aspects. First it tries to find out the inequalities and injustice meted out to women. The second facet of feminism is that it recognizes and stresses the value of women, their human dignity and how they contributed to society and still contributing to society.

In broad definition it can be concluded that feminist movements strive to ameliorate the oppression of women in this phallogentric society and endeavors of male and female to change the deplorable condition of women. This can be considered a humanistic concern. The main purpose of feminist movement is to restore the rightful place to women which they deserve but they are kept afar from that rightful place.

The works of Marry Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) set the movement of feminism rolling. Their books *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and *The Subjugation of Women* (1869) foresaw the observations and demands of the women's movements. Marry attacks in her book over the system of education that inculcates false notions of femininity in men and women and impedes the development of reason and understanding in women. Mill declares the inferiority between male and female is not natural but it has been made by the phallogentric world and thus artificial. He is of the opinion that enlightenment of womanhood can be established by education, moral reforms and legal measures. He also says that men and women are not superior and inferior but they are reciprocal to each other.

In the later part exponent of feminism such as Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Kate Miller, Betty Friedan, Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray continued this fight to establish the equality of men and women. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*(1949) Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*(1963) and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*(1969) these are some of the books which advocates that the pernicious effect of socialization make women suppress and hinder them from leading independent and fulfilled lives.

In India this Indian women's movement began in the early years of twentieth century and Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu were two of the first leaders who initiated this movement for the liberation of women. They opine that these social practices should be rooted out and women should be educated. They were of the opinion that the restoration of Indian women status that was in the past is necessary. In this arena Indian social reformists such as Rajaram Mohan Roy, Justice Ranade, and Dayananda Saraswati played a crucial role in liberating the women in India. Indian freedom struggle gave them a golden opportunity to prove their strength. They took part in protests, burnt foreign clothes etc.

The selected novels of the research i.e. *The Selector of the Souls* and *The Himalayan Love Story* strive to demystify the "feminine mystique". The "feminine mystique" is a false thinking that a woman's role in a society is just to perform the role of a wife, and to perform the role of a mother, and none else. Namita Gokhale is a Lucknow born and Dehli based novelist and short story writer. She is married to a Maharastrian boy, a son of law minister of India. But unfortunately her spouse dies after some time because of cancer and after that she is living with her girls in Delhi. She is diagnosed with cancer at the age of just thirty five and her husband died after two years when she is diagnosed with cancer. Therefore in her works a sense of emptiness and isolation reflect. She has penned down six novels and a collection of short stories and numerous works of non-fiction. In her novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, she satirizes on the upper caste people. Her *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* tells about the street life of Delhi. Most of her novels raise the issue of failure of male- female relation and it happens because of the deceitful attitude of the male characters resulting a theme of loneliness. Death plays an important role in her works. Over all she throws light on the hard realities of the current society. Her

Himalayan Love Story is a novel which reveals the romantic loss of girl namely Parvati.

Shauna Singh Baldwin, a Montreal born Indo- Canadian novelist, is an award winning novelist who won the Commonwealth Prize of Canadian region for her work *What the Body Remembers* and her another novel *The Tiger Claw* was also nominated for Giller's Prize. In most of her novels she raises the issue of feminism and with the projection of female character in the leading roles; she would like to ameliorate the traumas of squirming women. Her important works consist of *English Lesson and other Stories*, *What the Body Remembers*, *The Tiger Claw*, *We are not in Pakistan*, *Six Sixty*, *We are so Different Now*, and *Das GeteitteHous*, and *A Foreign Visitors Survival*. Currently Shauna Singh Baldwin is living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The selected two novels can be linked on the basis that both these novels were penned down by female writers: NamitaGokhale and Shauna Singh Baldwin. Another link is that the setting of both these novels is of Himalayan region. NamitaGokhale observes each and every thing from a very closed range and resides in India and her Himalayan description is her first hand description. But Shauna Singh Baldwin is an Indo-Canadian writer who lives in Canada and she also writes about Himalayan region and particularly about the problems of women of Himalayan region like NamitaGokhale does. These novels are characterized by multiple interior reflections of women's lives and perceptions. These two novels reveal the facets of Indian women. The women characters in these two novels are pivotal character. It appears without the projection of these women the novels cannot be imagined.

The current study of these two novels is an attempt to analyze the delineation of the Indian women characters in the selected novels of selected novelists of present

India. In keeping with the traditional notions of women character in India prevalent in the society then, these selected novels reflected the “feminine mystique” which glorified the sacrificing, giving, submissive and suffering woman.

The time has now come to understand the reality. The voice of the woman cannot be suppressed for a long time. It comes fore when it gets an opportunity. Jasbir Jain rightly says:

Patriarchal structures will sooner or later have to understand this anger and respond constructively to it. The present confrontation between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations has also been brought into existence by two equally aggressive systems. The third (woman) which represents a ‘sane’ voice is struggling hard to survive, but it does prove that polarities are no longer valuable. The time has come to move outside polarities and oppositional positions (Jain 20).

It shows that this male dominated world will have to recognize the true power of women and will have to respond positively only then they can uplift themselves in the phallogentric world. Women are still struggling extreme fights with this male world to survive. But now time has come to understand the power of women and will have to fill the chasm of male and female.

To prove the above mentioned points the present research has been designed into four chapters. In the first chapter there is an introductory discussion on the topic Demystifying the “Feminie Mystique” .After the discussion the second chapter tell about the squirmingWomen in the *Himalayan Love Story* and in the third chapter there is a discussion about the women who have been suffering in *The Selector of Souls*. Finally a conclusion is made on the basis of the chapters in the research.

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