

Introduction

Foreword

In the sixteenth century, Mirabai openly inscribed her love for the Lord Krishna:

I know only Krsna

no other,

I have nothing to do with

.....

That's all that's real for me

let what will be, be.

("I know only Krsna" 1-3, 26-27)

The challenging journey of the Indian women entering into the world, dominated by men, had begun ages before the term feminism was coined. The French philosopher, Charles Fourier coined the term *féminisme* in 1837 and Hubertine Auclert first introduced the term feminism in the English language in the 1890s. She drew the term to assert women's rights and liberation against male domination. But what is feminism? Among the many definitions proposed, feminism has been discussed by Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* to be a parasol that describes all those people who feel the need to speak, write and fight against the oppression of women on the social, economic and ideological grounds (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 118-120).

In this chapter, I will trace the journey of Indian women's struggle from a point of articulating inner tumult and carving an individual identity to a point where the very notion of a permanent identity is debunked as it turns out to be in a state of flux, indefinable and having multiple dimensions. The chapter will also see the Indian women's journey for

the liberation from the clutches of patriarchy has largely been middle class and limited to the dominant classes, castes and religions till the late twentieth century.

The last section of the chapter will discuss that the taken works of the Indian women writers go beyond the dominant and homogenising features of the Indian feminist movements witnessed up till then, waves and diverse groups of Western feminism.

Indian Pictures of Unconsciously Appropriated Stands for Feminist Causes

“If I have never thought about any man but Rama, let the goddess Madhavi create a chasm for me (Valmiki 677)!” Looking for public approval, the Indian God Rama, ordained his wife, Sita, not once but twice, to prove her chastity. Sita first confronted Rama by addressing him a common man and then in an act of retaliation denies to becoming object of public desire. The embodiment of a *pativrata nari* born in *Treta Yuga*, neither proves her purity nor pleads with her husband. She, as also discussed by David Shulman in his essay “Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sita in Kampan’s *Iramavataram*”, acquires an agency in the act of self-immolation by not letting Rama become her superior and control her (92).

In *Dwapara Yuga*, when a woman’s dignity and honour was disgraced in public, her husbands sat as mute spectators, however, the woman, Draupadi herself not only reprimanded the entire Kuru clan for being the silent witness to her disgrace but also promised to wash her hair with Dushashana’s blood.

Where on the one hand, Draupadi swore vengeance on her privacy being violated, on the other hand, Satyawati, a fisherman’s daughter used her intelligence, body and sexuality to gain power. Comprehending the violent desire of Parashara, Satyawati counters his ferocious lust to satisfy him with an incredible reasoning. She first uses Parashara to purge herself from her repulsive body odour and turns musk-fragrant. Then,

Satyawati with her remarkable logic acquires a boon of getting her virgin status back even after a mutually enjoyable coitus. In this act of freedom, she not only breaks away from the authority of her father but as M. Esther Harding in *Woman's Mysteries* says, she attains “one-in-herselfness” (103). She further firmly refuses to become the mistress of the love-struck king of Hastinapura, Shantanu and agrees to marry him only on the promise of her son becoming the heir and succeeding the throne of Hastinapura instead of the crown prince Bhishma. Satyawati emerges out to be a real guru in the understanding of the politics of courtly men and their world.

In the second century B.C, outraged at the execution of her innocent husband, transformed into a fury, Kannaki in Ilanko Atikal's *Cilappatikaram* promises to appease her burning wrath by confronting the king who beheaded her husband without a proper trial. She burns his entire city and restores the order through the power of her chastity. Kannaki defies the unjust power of the king and wrenching her breasts, symbolic of sexual power, hurls them at his city, reducing it to ashes (196-199).

Many women saints of Bhakti movement, which began around the eighth century, denounced the stifling bounds of the society and religion to express and experience the mystic union with their love through *bhakti* and fearless devotion.

Antal's verses not only bravely delineate the pain of a woman's passion and despair but also reveal her audacious longing for sexual fulfilment. Lal Ded's poems blur the difference of gendered bodies by undressing. Mirabai's intense desire for her love, Krishna could not be even restrained by her royal in-laws. Not only women but even men saints like Basavanna describes love to be free of gender restraint. In the book *Speaking of Siva*, we hear him sweeping between the clothes of men and women in the hope of meeting his Lord (“The Vachanas of Basavanna” 703).

However, as discussed in Shruti Jain's dissertation, "[...] over the centuries unconscious feminism has developed into a stark and conscious one" (5).

Ancient Indian Women Writings

Indian women started to write in the sixth century B.C. *Therigatha* is one of the first Indian women writings which demands freedom from both sexual and physical bondage. For instance, Sumangalamata, in one of her poems brings out the frustrations of leading an oppressive domestic life. She expresses her desire to be free from the toil of household chores and domination of men ("A woman well set free! How free I am" 69).

Iliana Sen, in "A Space Within the Struggle" writes about the importance of understanding the various turns of the Indian women liberation movement to read new paths of their struggle (81). In this context, the picture sketched by Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing* (1993) also becomes significant. By placing the Indian women's liberation struggles in the larger context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' worldwide women movements, Kumar exposes the partial spaces in which the efforts for Indian women's liberation began. She discusses the reality of feminist consciousness that emerged throughout Europe and how women issues became the important core of the Russian reformation arguments. Against it, she has put the limited effort of few reformers of Bengal and Maharashtra to understand the evils hurled at the Indian women. These assertions make one keen to understand the difference between the Indian and Western history of women struggles and liberations (7).

Western Feminism: A Bird's-Eye View

The first modern Western voice raised for women's rights has been considered to be Mary Wollstonecraft's in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

Wollstonecraft, in the essay, champions that women's lack of education is the reason for men treating them like their slaves and thus women should try to attain the light of education. She confirms that women can fight against the institution of patriarchy by using the missile called right education. She believes that education can sculpt women's mind in the right frame of freedom (46).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the space for women was confined to the four walls of their houses and the code of conduct laid by the patriarchal family. They were considered subordinates, whose only role was to perform the household chores with unmatched artistry and be wives and mothers. Jane Austen's famous line in *Pride and Prejudice* (1796) is one apt proof of it, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3).

Liberal feminists, following Wollstonecraft, brought out the crushing effect of the patriarchal laws on women's individuality. John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) contends for both education and individuality for women. He writes about the need for women's autonomy and freedom. By using the utilitarian philosophy of greatest good for the greatest number, Mill rationalises that the liberation of women will be the liberation of half of the human race. The women's joy will bring the highest contentment to humankind.

The first wave of Western feminism is affirmed to flourish with Mill's work. Emerging in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the first wave of feminism continued from the late nineteenth century till the early twentieth century. The aim of the movement was to attain political power for women in addition to same contract and property rights as are reserved for men. It also demanded the right to vote that led to the the Representation of People Act 1918. The act secured the right to vote for women. However, initially the right was given to women who were above thirty years of age and

had their own houses but in 1928, this right was sanctioned for all women above the age of twenty-one.

Virginia Woolf's pioneering works, *A Room of One's Own* (1928) and *Three Guineas* (1939) are also imperative segments of feminist writings. Woolf champions for women's separate space where their creative potential can be explored. She explains feminism to be a fight against the male dictatorship in the patriarchal framework that belittles women. She, in *A Room of One's Own* strongly articulates her belief that women are treated inferior by men to assert their heroism, "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size" (35). The solution to this suppression is that the value system should be revolutionised. This can be done through women's education and by carving special personal spaces for them that is, recognising and augmenting their critical and creative powers.

Women's realisation and understanding of their oppression, the act of uniting together to raise their voice against the oppression and the effort to change their status quo also mark the first wave of feminism in the United Kingdom and the United States. The second wave feminists fought for social and political transformations. They worked harder for women, to help them attain their deserved position and rights in the society. The 1960s mark the commencement of the second wave of feminism. Women began decoding the cultural conditioning of the patriarchal institutions. The major aim was to negate the identity ordained on women by the patriarchal set-ups. Many new universities were build up for women. Conscious raising campaigns, abortion rights, notions about sex and marriage were discussed in the study circles of women. They poured their experiences in feminists' magazines and newspapers like "The Pedestal" and "The Velvet Fist". They read Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchell.

“A woman is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (301), are the precious words stamped by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). They lay bare the cultural coding of women, how men have been objectifying women, constructing them as their other, devoid of individuality and subjectivity. The words also show how patriarchal ideologies have reduced women to insignificant objects. Beauvoir writes, that men and women who are fighting to amend the suppressed state of women are called feminists (Moi 91- 92) .

The publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 by Betty Friedan fired the American Society. In this book, Friedan discusses a problem that can not be named but exists in the life of every women. She discusses this problem to be existing always in the lives of American women though it is hard to be explained. She pictures it in various possible explanations like weird unexplainable throbbing or a sense of despair in some experiences or lived moments. She not only highlights women’s dissatisfaction with the various household tasks and domestic roles but also their fear to voice this despair (57). However, she eased all the women by stating the problem to be a common issue among American women.

This delineation at that time helped women realize their situation and identify their trap. It opened their eyes to the ulterior web working under the sense of accomplishment enjoyed by fulfilling the role of an untiring house-wife. Betty defines feminism for the women as a tool giving them the freedom to be what they desire and strive for, and anything and everything that is the right of a human being (Burt 37).

Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) is also a pioneering work. Millet exposes the sexual politics of and in the society. She discusses the term as “... the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extends its power over the subordinate sex” (Moi 26). Millet successfully argues that patriarchy has always been a means to dominate women; it is

a demonstration of 'sexual politics'. Her argument helps us to clearly see patriarchy being responsible for the refusal of human rights to women by laying codes of conduct which make them subservient to men.

By the 1970s, organisations like National Organisation for Women were established. Many colleges started courses which were drafted to study the images of women in literature. *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, a collection of essays discussing female stereotypes was taken out. Women also participated in the civil rights movement. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were approved. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that women had started to make space for a firm identity in the world, unjustly dominated by men.

Meanwhile, in 1977, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* suggests that the feminist criticism should be exclusively concerned about women's writing. She defines this idea as gynocriticism. She writes that women's writings should be charted out as a concrete literary movement. She in *Toward a Feminist Poetics* (1979), identifies three stages in the growth of women's writings. These stages are the feminine, the feminist and the female stage.

These stages are amazingly discussed in Margaret Atwood's poem "Spelling" (1981). The first segment is the feminine phase. It ranged from the 1840s to 1880s. During this time women had started to get frustrated by the patriarchal norms and in order to overcome this domination, some of them ventured into writing their fears, tortures, dilemmas and desires. However, unexposed to the outside world, they did not have the right strategies to carve out their identities and thus they appropriated male tools. This appropriation of male tradition engulfed them within its bounds. Atwood explains this stage to be the falling of language, where a woman silently agrees to all the rules and subjugation thrown at her. The next is the feminist stage. It extended from the 1880s to 1920s. Women

authors fought for their own tools and weapons. They demanded the space for their own culture. Atwood charts it to be the moments of uterus' hymn breaking. A woman shouts at the loudest possible pitch, this untamed shriek for Atwood, symbolises the second stage. The last stage is the female phase which began around the 1920s . Women questioned the constructs of their identity, trying to find their individual self in their own potential. They wanted to assert their worth. This phase, for Atwood is the stage of childbirth where the body takes the features of a mouth, voice, that speaks up and the child, acting symbol to a woman's identity, leaps from her depths (Jain 9, 28).

Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976) establishes that women's writing can not be treated as a mere branch rather it is an inseparable part of the history of literature (Nayar 92).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) claim that women due to the patriarchal norms fail to create their own images in the literary movements. Different women images whether angel, monster, innocent heroine or the madwoman, are, unfortunately, the products of male fantasy. Creativity is considered to be men's possession. Gilbert and Gubar through their book achieve to create unity among women (Nayar 93).

When Elaine Showalter, Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar were contributing to feminist movements in one part of the world, the writings of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray among many others were guiding the revolution in France. French Feminism has been traced, to begin with May 1968 students' revolt in Paris. Women formed groups such as *Psychanalyse et Politique*. Freudian analysis became an important component of French feminist struggle. The struggle was further marked by the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974.

Helen Cixous's works are also significant and many have been translated in English. Cixous believes that women working for social legitimization, are feminists. She shows that the underlying difference in the sets of the binary oppositions like active/passive, head/emotions, intelligible/sensitive are the differences of man and woman, where women is synonymous to all that is considered weak by the society. She writes about the term, *écriture féminine*, that is, feminine writing which gives the freedom to run away from the above binaries. She firmly believes that the labels like feminine and masculine affirm differences (Nayar 102-103).

In the 1970s, another feminist, Luce Irigaray, also a psychoanalyst rose to fame. She has published works like *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *This Sex Which is not One* (1987). Irigaray speaks of women being different from men, she says that the two are not equal rather are different beings and thus women instead of fighting for equality, should fight for their distinct space in the society. She has also discussed *le parler femme*, which means women specific language or womanspeak. According to her, women can only change the existing stifling order by uniting together and declaring their feelings and desires outside the patriarchy. However, if Irigaray proposes a different language for women, Julia Kristeva declares the element of sexism in language (Nayar 98,99,106).

Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* speaks of language as a tool of males. She claims the English language is not only structured by men but till date remains under their influence. She is sure that language authority is the prime way of men to gain control over their women. It is the language of men that excludes women, making them invisible and the women by not understanding this tool of subjugation, are further engulfing themselves in this chasm created by men. They are regularly using the constructed language and this will not let them write what they want to assert (Moi 156). Irigaray is thus right in expressing that language becomes a weapon for oppression.

One thing, however, that clearly stands out in all the voices, from Wollstonecraft's to Irigaray, is the reflection of particular sets of studies, proposals and group-isms working in the battles of women liberation. Different individuals and the waves generalised the experiences and requirements of every single woman from the point of view of some. These some primarily constituted white middle-class women.

Diverse Groups of Feminism

The late twentieth century and afterward marked the beginning of a new phase of feminism. It was the emergence of diverse groups of feminism. Nonetheless, these diverse groups were though different from each other in their ways to achieve freedom for women, but individually they all wrote their own codes that discarded the alternative idea of distinct identities.

A group of radical feminists, consisting of people like Shulamith Firestone, Eva Figs, Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley came forward around 1970s. They believed sexual inequality to be the root cause for the discrimination between men and women. They in "The Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto" (1969) articulate that "... women's oppression is rooted primarily in psychological, not economic factors" (Donovan 143). The essay, "The Fourth World Manifesto" (1971), says that all the women are clubbed under a frame colonised by male imperialism. However, the essay suggests that women can be free only by uniting themselves as women. Barbara Burris notes down that "We identify with all women of all races, classes, and countries all over the world. The female culture is the Fourth World" (Donovan 144).

Nonetheless, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) laid the Radical feminist theory completely. The former accuses families as the the cradles of patriarchal subjugation.

The role, tasks and nature as dictated by a family for their respective women become an inseparable part of their upbringing and remain with them forever. Men thinking themselves to be the biologically more powerful, rule women. So the biological difference becomes the hammer to seal the gender difference. One of the solutions for women is to cut themselves away from the social institutions like marriage, as these institutions perpetuate dependence of women on men, thwarting the individual growth of the former. Therefore, we can say that radical feminism is about a journey towards women becoming, where women will be absolutely free from the clutches of the dragon called patriarchy. Mary Daly explains this power of a woman to liberate herself as gynergy, women's energy which gives understanding, control and liberty to live life the way one wants to (Nayar 88, 89, 106).

A bunch of women decided to fight for women beyond the word rights. Their aim was a big cultural transformation. These women are called Cultural feminists fighting for safeguarding the virtues of women. Cultural Feminism came into being with Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1843) in which Fuller expresses her belief that women should be self-reliant and champion female bonding. They should not take permissions or opinions of men in everything, be it little or big. They should not also be influenced by men rather, should try to understand their mind. They should struggle to probe and understand themselves till the time they understand their own uniqueness and once they do so they will be born again to a new world of self-worth (*A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 161).

In the contemporary world, the Cultural feminists are working hard to counter the cultural injustices against women, whether by fighting against the issues of denying jobs and opportunities to women or punching them with terms like childish and dumb. They do not accept the differences between men and women, preached and practiced by the society as biological but consider it to be cultural. Elizabeth Cady Stanton explains that a being is a

blend of both feminine and masculine elements and hence, the way to re-unite them in society is by praying to a 'Heavenly Mother' along with the 'Heavenly Father'. The world will flourish and become heaven when all the people living in the world, that is, men and women together will aim to create the world where dominant patriarchal ideologies are not accepted (*Britannica*).

Radicalesbians, a New York group are among the first to openly talk about the contemporary Lesbian feminism. In their one of the articles, "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970) they define lesbian as the woman's rage. The rage has exploded and now this woman performs and enacts according to her will and desire which gives her space to be, what she wants to be. Lesbian feminists aim for the world without men, some of them even claim separatism and withdrawal to be the ultimate solutions possible from the bondage of men (Donovan 161).

Liberal feminism is an another group. This group champions the rights of equal opportunities and participation of women in all the fields of life and society. Women, according to them, are considered by the society to be born only to bear the burden of the household chores and duties. They are gazed as sex objects, curbed and not allowed to work as per their will and desire. Their intellectual faculties are limited by patriarchy. The motive of liberal feminists is to attain an independent status at all the fronts for women in this society so that they can be the decision- makers.

Apart from the Liberal feminists, the other group that emerged was the Socialist feminist group. They upheld the certainty that women can be free only by eradicating the class division. Women's bondage is ingrained in a society that is divided on the basis of class. They have to fight patriarchy and capitalism together. Women's household work has never been valued in the same manner as of men. Money is the ruler of the capitalist society and thus since ages men have been considered more powerful. Socialist feminists made

women comprehend this and understand their culture is rooted in their experience. They insisted women to demand their rights as carriers of the cultural values.

Something Different: Black Feminism

In the 1980s, Radical feminists were criticized to be racists by the Black feminists. They condemned the white women's movement declaring it to be a movement launched for the benefits and interests of only the white women. The Black feminists highlight their experiences and problems to be quite different from the white women and this fact can not be disregarded. In fact, they claim that the objectification and victimisation of the black women have been much more grave and violent than the white women. They are triply marginalised because of their sex, race and class. It has been discussed at various places that the black women were suppressed to such an extent that even their existence was not recognised, as black signified only the black men and the women meant solely the bodies and experiences of the white women. This misery has been brought out by Sojourner Truth in "Ain't I A Woman," (1851) at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, in the most captivating words. She highlights the clever ways of men justifying their evil deeds. In her speech, the black men talk about the struggles that they have faced to make the black women feel comfortable. They crib about how they have to be servants to women in order to help them sit in the carriages. They further, complaint of nobody offering them such a royal treatment and finally, all these accusations are answered by a black woman. She claims that men are lying as they have never helped the women. She accuses men for placing women in the patriarchal muddle. She also exposes the laborious work of ploughing and planting that women do on the hard rock fields without the assistance of men. Her arms are the witness to this cruelty. She satirically questions that if she can work equal to men then why is she beaten by him, "And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and

seen most of them sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" (Phillips 324).

Black feminists have also launched organisations like Combahee River Collective which ensure the inclusion of the issues of race, ethnicity and other differences to combat the women oppression. They unlike the black men and the white women are not battling against a single aim rather they have pledged to achieve and establish equality at all the three fronts of class, race and gender. Matriarchal Myth has also been ruptured to expose the suppressing reality. Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* discloses that one should not believe that the Black woman are central to their families. She deconstructs the myth of matriarchal dominated black families. She says that neither the men nor the women in black families rule rather it is the slave position that stands as the starkest reality of their life (52).

Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* considers a need for the black women to trace and appreciate their heritage and culture, lived by their mothers. The lost identity of the black women can be regained by searching and asserting their ethnic roots. They have to know and affirm their self-worth. The "Black Women's Manifesto" (1970) reads the same: "Racism and capitalism have trampled the potential of black people in this country and thwarted their self-determination ... The black woman is demanding a new set of female definitions and recognition of herself of a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker" (42).

Feminism: Can't be a Binding Concept in India

Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* discusses feminism to be an umbrella term for all the beings who feel the need to fight for women liberation from the social, economic and ideological prejudices. Like everywhere, even in

India, feminism emerged with the need to stress equality between the genders. Then, the theory expounded that equality should be accepted with the realisation of the difference between men and women. None is inferior to the other and the implementation of this truth in and by all the facets of society became the prime aim of the Indian feminist struggles. The men should respect the individuality and difference of the women, rather seeing them slaves carved to serve them.

Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* (1989) justly analyse that the Indian women movement is much older than the two Western Waves. They talk about the *Shakti* cult, that is, the believed inherent power of Indian women to be older than ten centuries (5).

However, today, in India, the raging journey of women against the male dominance is taking even bigger lunges. *Zenana*-meetings and the *aangan*-gossips are travelling beyond the household threshold, transforming themselves into difficult battles as women are realising their potential and power. Nevertheless, the Indian women's movement in order to cater varied marginalities has to tour beyond the social, political and economic confinements joining hands with women of other castes, classes and religions.

Mary E. John, while pointing to the history of the ill-treatment meted out to the women because they are born 'as' women or as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, they are men's other, the negative-other, in "Feminisms and Internationalisms" (1998) suggests that if there can not be one solution for all the women to gain liberty then their individual experiences and situation should become the opening point of their rebellion (23).

The women's movement in India has shifting issues and plans resulting from the plural perspectives, that survive within the circumference of the movement, and if the scholars like Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid also confirm different patriarchal actions, in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (2003) then, one can not negate the

requirement of the different routes and strategies to fight them. The two scholars, write that the aim of the women struggle in India has always been the same, that is, to safeguard the position of women or change it for the betterment of women. Nonetheless, now the movement probes into the the different ideological shades of patriarchy(1).

I will now trace the journey of the Indian women's struggle from being the reflection of the homogenising Indian feminism to the acceptance of the varied positionality of Indian women.

Indian Women's Struggles for Freedom

The fact, asserted by many writers that much of our India ancient history has been documented by the male writers and their words, is true. The stories like the abduction and exile of Sita's dignity, disrobing of Draupadi's integrity and honour, dismissing the desires and emotions of the courtesans like Matavi and Vasantasena and relegating Kannaki's rage to the power of a devoted wife, have never been revealed and recorded in the own voices of women. Thus it will not be wrong to state that the Indian written literature and texts which are witnesses to our history, do not read the minds of half of the Indian population.

It was in 1876, with Rassundari Devi's autobiographical work *Amar Jiban*, that the conscious and independent voice of an Indian woman was heard. Not allowed any formal education, she taught herself in the confines of her kitchen.

In her book, Devi discusses her plight at length. She writes about the never-ending time spent in the kitchen and doing all kinds of household tasks. Amidst all this work, Devi expresses her desire to study. She says that initially, the desire made her angry. She was upset with herself for wanting such space, "But somehow I could not accept" (Tharu 199) the shackles. Devi, in this book, not only states the her miseries but also

requests other women to analyse their own lives within the biased practices of the patriarchal society. She believed education to be a strong weapon for women's struggle.

Haimabati Sen, born in 1886, in her autobiography, *The Memoirs of Haimabati Sen*, wrote about the denial of education to the Indian women and the orthodox women's belief of inviting the terror of widowhood through education. However, the truth of being born in *zamindar* families, away from the socio-economic marginalities, can not be erased off the lives of Devi and Sen.

At the same time, the importance of education, as mentioned by Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing*, had already been championed by the Atmiya Sabha. It was formed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal during 1815. The first school for girls by the English missionaries and the first text on women's education in an Indian language, that is, Bengali were constructed in Bengal during the period of 1810-19. These schools were attended by the poor, lower class and Muslim girls. The threat of Christian influences forced the upper caste Hindus to open the gates of education to their women. In the context of the same, Sumanta Banerjee in his essay "Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal" (1989) reveals that the Bengali *bhadralok* patriarchal society, in the wish to ascend the social ladder, and prove themselves to be cultured like English men, unchained the territories of education for their women. Nevertheless, they altered the education system to suit the requirements of the Hindu patriarchal regime (167). It is lucid that till now the liberation movement of the Indian women primarily concerned the upper or middle class women, and rested on the grounds of education.

The desire of the Indian males to showcase themselves to be civilised, by redressing the traditional patriarchal lacks, barred the upper class Bengali women in the courtyards and *zenana* of their homes. It also thwarted their contact with their sisters from the lower social places of the society. They lost touch with their togetherness, with other

women and with nature. The occasions for women to come together near the village temple, a pond, some garden or at the bank of a river to share their emotions and feelings withered away. The exclusive women festivals, rituals like getting together in big number, giving flowers to each other, exchanging gifts and singing songs were suppressed. These little get-togethers actually served a larger purpose of allowing their psychic and emotional energy to let out through singing and sharing. This sharing was completely erased. The old rituals were ruptured but the new were not created and the *bhadralok* women ended up secluded, in a completely different social set-up. The life which was about the joy of sharing with the sisters of different classes, the wonders of existence that unfolded around them through nature, were now replaced by a completely alien education system. Nature has always been shaping women's environment with love and care. The tradition where women from all castes and classes helped each other to steal moments of happiness, in the male-dominated society, through the folklores narrating the nature-cycles including the phases of moon, cycles of seasons and other circadian rhythms, was barred. The suddenness of the new education system ripped the harmony, leading to the loss of touch of these new women information, with their deeper selves, "Her voice has ceased to rend the air like cuckoo, and has become instead the mew of pussy" (Banerjee 220). It is hard to say if it was the new agenda of the patriarchy or indeed a new patriarchy was in the formation. Nonetheless, the plight and deprivation of the lower-class women is not even highlighted in this new situation.

Though women's education has been placed as the major concern in the history of the Indian women's fight yet the depressing truth is that the 'National Policy on Education 1986' still reports that, "... 57 percent of the illiterate population, and 70 percent of the non-enrolled children of school stage are girls" (*Women Studies in India* 322). Smriti Irani, the former Union Human Resource Development minister, on twenty 9 March 2016

in *India Today* not only announced an extension of two years for women students to submit their research work but also proposed maternity break during the research to ensure that women do not have to abandon their dreams and wishes, post marriage. Gender even today plays the role of licence on the road of education and this license still holds cancel for many Indian women.

In 1815, Raja Ram Mohan Roy marshalled against *sati pratha*. Radha Kumar exposes the orthodox beliefs of the Hindu culture which sees *sati pratha* to be a way of achieving that holy knowledge which is otherwise barred to women and ironically, as the dying women can not keep the knowledge with them in this birth, they leave it for the family to possess it. Roy objected to this blind faith arguing, "... that women clearly possessed virtuous knowledge, for their lives showed that they were 'infinitely more self-sacrificing than men'" (*History of Doing* 14).

In 1829, Sati Abolition Act was passed. Needless to say, the abolition act itself was not an easy win yet the laborious victory could have been enjoyed if brutality like 'Roop Kanwar's immolation' was not performed and glorified in Rajasthan, 1987. Even the marches, campaigns, street plays, demonstrations, and newspapers articles have not been able to guarantee the abolition of this savagery. This further, puts into question the claim that first wave of Indian feminism spanned only between 1880-1940, as asserted by Geraldine Forbes in 1982. Can the tragedies like *Sati*, widow remarriage, child marriage, women's education among many other social issues can be put under the headings of the first wave or pre-independent India? Thus it can be said that there is no chronology or easy demarcation within the women's movement in India. The waves can not even sketch these vast struggles and hence freedom is a farfetched thing.

The violence of *Sati* makes it indispensable to discuss the cruelty and violence of rape. However, even after using the adjective, cruelty, I am not surprised, that neither

Radha Kumar in *The History of Doing* nor Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar in their essay “Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women’s Movement in India, 1970s-1990s” use any stark words to discuss rape. Kumar’s writing on rape begins with a casual tone, “Rape is one of the most common and heinous crimes against women in India ...” (128) and so does Agnihotri starts writing about it under a sub head like any other crime, “It was the widespread, national level campaign, in the course of 1979-80 ... two policemen involved in the rape of a minor tribal girl ...” (55). Be it Britain, United States of America, Latin America, Africa, and India, rape is the easiest crime committed against women. It does not need the setting of a pyre, wedding, clinic or medical apparatus to be violent against women. In fact, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has begun to record rapes in the table of “Incidence of Cognizable Crimes (IPC) Under Different Crime Heads” only from 1971, even when the tabulation of many other crimes had begun from 1953. The hike in the percentage of the crime of rape in last forty-three years is almost fifteen times, as there was a report of two thousand four hundred and eighty seven rape cases in 1971 and thirty six thousand seven hundred and thirty five rape cases have been reported in 2014 by NCRB. Nevertheless, the chances of many cases not being visible, reported or registered can always be discussed.

In the article entitled, “Are Women Safer in India or the U.S.?” published in *The Wall Street Journal*, New York City on 1 January 2013, Sudha Sundararaman, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women’s Association estimates that: “... from her field experience only about one in 10 rapes get recorded in India”. The article also claims that, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime “... shows 1.8 incidents of reported rape in India per 100,000 people in 2010 compared to 27.3 in the U.S”. Hence, it can not be denied that cultural matrix plays an important role in the reportage of such violent acts, alarming the misleading consequences of a generalised rape culture. In 2012, from many rape cases

reported, one stormed the State and its legal and judicial systems. A girl had been gang raped on the evening of 16 December, 2012 in the wakeful hustle and bustle of Delhi, the capital of India. Things had fallen apart and the entire Delhi was on the streets. It seemed that the violent night will not only alter the face of the Indian legal and judicial systems forever, but will even change the way, the State perceives this violence. However, though nothing has changed, the following questions stand loud:

- i) Did rape crimes stop?
- ii) Had the girl being a sex worker or a woman living separate from her husband, the State would have handled the situation with the same immediate concern?
- iii) Had the State shown any immediate concern if the case would not have been a saturation point for the public?
- iv) Had the State taken such a prompt action if it would have been any non-metropolitan city?
- v) Had the State acted at all if the case would not have been a rape case?

After reading the case of “Cycle Mechanic Held for Daughter’s Rape” reported in *The Times of India*, Hyderabad on 13 June 2016, the answer for the first posed question is crystal clear. The answer is that the crime of rape has not stopped.

The second question can be answered through 1978, Rameeza Bee’s rape case. Rameeza Bee was gang raped by some policemen and her husband was killed protecting her. The agitation of the thousands of *Hyderabadis* made it necessary for the politicians, police and army to step in. Even after curfews, killings and injuries, the case lies pending because one of the many fabricated facts sees Rameeza Bee to be a whore who offers herself willingly for sexual favours and so, she can not be raped. The December 2012 gang

rape, had definitely seen an extraordinary stir among the masses, it was a sight of unity working as strength, but even it was soon set aside by the State that analyses the tempo of the situation to plan strategies.

“Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat”, the December 2003 report by the International Initiative for Justice (IIJ) reads that Muslim women in the riots of 1990s were encouraged to be raped by the Hindu women of the right wings. Sadhvi Ritambhara claimed that this can re-masculinise the Hindu men.

Gujrat, in 1990 also saw an unprecedented churning like Delhi 2012, both were carried by the masses, yet the chasm is truly deep. One was ignited by the authority, and the other was addressed by it. This answers the question of the difference based on geographical places. However, what can be seen from all the above cases is the reality that it is not the act of rape which leads to the subordination of women but the false values attached to it.

In Manipur during the year 2004, a woman Thangjam Manorama was abducted by the Indian paramilitary unit, 17th Assam Rifles on an unsure allegation of being associated with People’s Liberation Army. She was found dead in a field and the post-mortem reports confirmed that she was being raped before being shot. Ironically, in December 2014 her family was decided to be paid a compensation of rupees ten lakhs. Finally, comes the question of why only the crime of rape becomes big, why is it always considered to be the most heinous form of controlling the women’s sexuality? Manorama has been at least identified as a victim but the Iron Lady of Manipur still goes unheard. She has been repeatedly remanded in judicial custody for trying to bring peace from massacre like Malom. Domestic violence, marital rape, wife beating, child abuse, female foeticide are still majorly subjected to the case studies. The violence of rape and its consequences, whether, the public protests, elaborative judicial discourse, compensations, State building

alliances with the dominant castes or defiling of the sacred female body being equated with the violation of religion; can be then understood to be framed through patriarchal lenses.

The menace of dowry, the exchange of money during a wedding, are equally alarming. Rajni was burnt alive after living a hell of constant harassment and a verdict was passed by Justice Markandey Katju in June 2009. He confessed that there are many cases where the bride burning have been defended as the cases of suicide. He questioned that in the country where women are regarded to be goddesses, how can they be brutally murdered? Laying bare the harsh truth of India, he not only explicitly mentioned the barbarity of the act but also refused to accept the unacceptable claims of suicide. He strongly refused to grant any mercy to the murderers in his court (*Pressreader*).

The grim reality is that even after numerous stringent outburst from the protectors of our country, the demand of dowry remains rampant. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 (amended in 1984 and 1986) banned dowry yet every decade, new organisations like Stri Shakti, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, Nari Raksha Samiti and laws and sections of Criminal Law Act 1983 and Section 498-A in the Indian Penal Court have to be formulated. The 1970s and 1980s are considered to be the bombing decades of the struggle against dowry yet this peril has always been rooted in the Indian soil and unfortunately, the grip is becoming stronger.

The roots which were sown by the Indian social structure and patriarchy are honestly nourishing their producers. Hypergamy is becoming a means to improve the social status of a family in exchange for cash and jewellery. Sanskritization is flourishing on the lower caste' desire for the abolition of caste division and the upper caste' patriarchal lust for material goods. But the common site on which the exchange gets materialised is the female body. The Muslim culture does not have the devil of dowry written in their books but they

have the custom of *mehr*, the sum to be given to the bride as a symbol of maintenance or respect.

The section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code reads, “A Common Civil Code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies” (“Uniform Civil Code” *Legal Service India*). This section was invoked during the historical case of a Muslim woman Shah Bano, fought in 1986. Shah Bano, an uneducated Muslim woman, after more than forty years of marriage was thrown out of her home by her husband. As per the Muslim customs, she was just given rupees two hundred per month by her husband, but soon it was stopped. The helpless Bano approached the Bhopal High Court. It was decided by the Court that she will be given rupees one hundred and seventy nine and twenty paise per month. But the crude husband did not accept the decision and divorced Bano. Shah Bano then knocked the doors of the Supreme Court under the Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code which gives shelter to all the Indian women. The Supreme Court passed the same verdict as the Bhopal High Court but the husband escaped giving money on the claims of the already paid maintenance.

The Supreme Court judgement met resistance from a bill seeking exclusion of the Muslim women, considering it to be a communal onslaught, as the case was linked to the Babri Masjid issue. Finally, in 1986, against the anticipation of a united future through the concept of the ‘Uniform Civil Code’, the Muslim Women’s Bill was passed which allowed the exploitation of Muslim women under the decision to lodge communalism. It pops up the fact of even law being handcuffed by caste and religion. These two define their status, both social and religious, through women’s place and possession in their framed structure. The women in India are merely treated as the sites on which these branches of Indian system rustle.

In 1887, M.G. Ranade had started the National Social Conference, which had women's betterment and liberation on its plan. However, it was not one of its own kind as there were Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Theosophical Society in the eastern, western, northern and southern parts of India, respectively. Liddle and Joshi in *Daughters of Independence* state that, the British people wrote nine big laws to ease out the legal position of the Indian women, "... including those forbidding female infanticide, Sati and child marriage, and those raising the age of consent, allowing widow remarriage and improving women's inheritance rights" (26). However, Liddle and Joshi also highlight the British cunningness of making and implementing these reforms only after being sure about their stability. The argument proves that the garb of guarding the women of India against the barbaric Indian patriarchal customs was adorned by the British rulers, to justify their civilized rule.

The 1880s and 90s were the dawn decades of women stepping outside their four bounded walls, "... one of the first attempts at public campaigning by women was ... in 1890s ... against *pardah* in Calcutta, groups of Brahma women walked through the city's streets singing, and when crowds collected, addressed them on the evils of *pardah*" (*Source Material* 95). Then in 1889 Congress session, there were "... no less than ten lady delegates graced the assembly ..." (*Source Material* 95). The hope was that the women of India are now all geared up to draw their vision of future rather than men deciding the changes for them. Their participation in the Indian freedom struggle is also seen in the same mirror, but the reality is not exactly the same, as reflected.

Pandita Ramabai was among the first of those women, who could sense the impending danger of the Hindu laws. In *Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai*, Ramabai criticizes the thoughtful amendments done by the British government in the Hindu Laws. British colonisers were quite clear about the repercussions of interfering with some

personal laws of the Indian communities. However, in the interest to practice complete control, which could not be possible without penetrating into the hard walls of domestic space, where women were enslaved by the Indian men, the colonisers subtly manipulated the personal laws (257). Liddle and Joshi explain this process in the *Daughter of Independence*. The first step was to regulate the Indian Hindu system of marriage. The consequences were that the male control was made even more severe and in the process of universalising the customs and rituals of marriage, they even constrained the enjoyed rights of lower caste women (30-2).

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century saw women's engagement in "... revivalist and extremists activities in addition to their earlier involvement in social reform and moderate nationalism" (Kumar 38). Women associations like Mahila Samitis were formed to train and refine social skills so that women can get jobs. National associations of women like the Women's Indian Association (1917), which first lifted up the issue of women's suffrage, the National Council of Indian Women (1925) and the All-India Women's Conference (1927) were also constituted. The Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement from 1905-58, saw the biggest number of women standing together on a common platform. This mass scale participation is described by Geraldine Forbes in *Women in Modern India* (1996) as rejuvenated Indian womanhood. She describes that how women in this movement did not perform roles as dictated by men, rather they used their own skills and intelligence to act politically. They employed their traditional roles cleverly to achieve larger political aims of the movement and what they intended. They did not blur the definite categories of private and public, as marked by patriarchy, yet, redefined the characteristics and roles attached to these two spheres of their life, to inscribe new meanings (124) .

The Congress also supported this mass participation of women. Radha Kumar reports that in 1931, Congress promised sexual equality in the Constitution of India. These ideas of women's freedom and equality were also advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. He, like many other male leaders, encouraged the Indian women to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the *Discovery of India* (1946) also appreciates the role of women in the freedom struggle.

However, this participation of women has also been studied from a different perspective. This picture made women's struggle insignificant by stressing an underlying politics. It could be clearly read that the women were given the license to step out of their households only on the condition of strict adherence to the stereotypical gendered conventions and rules.

Yet, by placing the two perspectives of women's mass participation together, we can not steal away from the truth that if on the one hand, the women's mass participation was the structural trap whereby producing an ideal image, the Indian men improvised women as useful resources thereafter again reducing them to the same silent position through a fresh tool of modernity or new woman, on the other hand, it also became a platform that enabled some women to deduce the meaning of the patriarchal call on their own. They decided to respond and participate against a threat, choosing to become the direct agents of liberty.

Padma Anagol also provides an excellent documentation of women like Pandita Ramabia and many who converted from Hinduism to Christianity, emerging as conscious agents of change in her essay "Indian Christian Women and Indigenous Feminism, c.1850-c.1920".

The All-India Women's Conference demanded some changes in the Hindu Codes. It wanted to amend some personal laws of marriage and inheritance. So, as

discussed by Jana Matson Everett in *Women and Social Change in India* that when these issues under the heading of the Hindu Code Bill were taken up, the Indian nationalist men to an extent agreed for equality on the matter of voting rights and employment as their enlarged political and economic independence was a threat to colonial power but the so-called private issues like marriage, divorce, polygamy, inter-caste marriages, inheritance faced strong oppositions (102-106). The State could not take any substantial measure to amend the personal laws and even decided not to include the following statement in the final draft of the Constitution, “The State shall endeavour to secure that marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and shall be maintained through mutual cooperation, with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis” (Kannabiran 369).

So, it can be reasoned that the issue of Indian women’s freedom was one of the strongest pillars of the colonial rule and Indian Nationalism, “In her exoticism and her misery, the Indian Woman has embodied the subcontinent itself: attracting and repelling at the same time, she is absent in the construction of her image as India has been...” (Liddle and Rai 497). However, I will add to the quoted statement that the Indian woman was showcased to be absent, as during the freedom struggle, she not only emerged as powerful but also constructed India to be an indestructible mother-land.

The miseries, exoticism and misconceived powerlessness of Indian women are also exploited by colonial feminists. Kumari Jayawardena discusses in *The White Woman’s Other Burden* (1995), that how the maternal feminists considered the Indian women to be their responsibilities (95-100). In the context to this point, I can not miss to mention Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s analysis in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, which reads that Western feminism does not pay attention to the diversities of the Third World countries based on different social, political, economical and religious grounds (335).

But unfortunately, the process of homogenization and systemization has not only been regulated by the Western feminist discourse. The practice of homogenising different women of India has been rampant in India also. The issues of women's rights, restriction, liberation, position and needs have not only existed but also registered. However, they are recorded under a common sub-head of Indian women, represented by a small group of women. This group basically constitutes of the Hindu middle class women. The recorded histories do not read much about the women other than this group. For instance, KumKum Roy in "Re-presenting the Courtesanal Tradition: An Exploration of Early Historical Texts" discusses the existence of courtesans in ancient India as different from the category of women (111-13). Therefore, ironically, the process of grouping all the women of India under a single label has limited the significance of many historical events in the Indian women's struggle during colonialism and partial fulfilment of the promises made to women during the national struggle by the Congress in the Constitution of India, and the "Towards Equality Report" (1974).

The Towards Equality Report Committee has been the first important move to study and comment on the statistics of the various facets of women's status in India. The review of the committee was published as the "Towards Equality Report" (1974) which covered the important captions of political, social, cultural, educational, employment, legal, health, welfare and development programmes existing for women. It proposed for an urgent abolition of many socio-cultural evils and stressed the required intervention of the State and community for establishing equality between the genders. Yet, even after the detailed submission, the 2002 report of the National Commission for Women, "Towards Equality: The Unfinished Agenda, the Status of Women in India" 2001 bemoans the delayed implementation of the proposed agendas of the 1974 report.

In India, the social and cultural structures dominate and frame the concept of a woman which is expected to be followed by all the women. It first produces an ideal woman image and then enacts it in a particular manner to make it the perfect possible, in every Indian eye. In this post-modern-structural world, we breathe in the constructed reality of languages, so, even when the world exists outside the domain of language, the reality can be endowed with meaning only through languages and its representations. This construction, articulation, understanding and the acceptance of the meanings carried in the language or representations, helps the patriarchal culture practice its hegemony.

However, the ideologies that work in the construction of the woman image, not only varies in the different class, caste, communities and religion but also their bond with the material reality lived and experienced by women is not quite straight.

In Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916), we see how the *bhadralok* aggression against the colonial master, ironically emerges out to be the conservative ideology making Bengali middle-class woman its targets. The novel depicts the Bengali *bhadralok* patriarchal decision to fight the colonial rulers by creating a fearful and ferocious image of the motherland in the cast of the Hindu Goddesses battling the evil forces. The onus of representing and enacting this image of the ruthless goddess who is also the symbol of purity and renunciation is put on the ideal Bengali *bhadralok* woman, Bimala. Bimala is married to the rich aristocratic man, Nikhil who wants to liberate her in his own manner. On experiencing the cracks in her age-old internalisation of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, she first laments her mother's time when the boundaries and divisions between the outer and inner realm were clearly defined to women and then in turn, falls an easy prey to the glazing image of *shakti* perpetuated by a *swadeshi* enthusiast, Sandip. Bimala is completely overcome by the feeling of modernity and new education. Thinking that, she is going to be the herald of the new-woman, she wants to act but unaware

of the fantasy enveloping it and forgetting that her new role has no basis in reality, ends up enacting the patriarchal script. The long-awaited desire for freedom is easily cut down by the emotional popularisation of a new image, this time, the cult of the mother-goddess. Bimala in the end knows that she would be punished.

Post-Independent India witnessed a new consciousness. It was the consciousness of educated and economically independent women who, unlike Bimala, were in full knowledge of their marginalities.

Some autonomous organisations were also set up, which were neither patterned on the traditional structures nor were following the conventional concept of leadership. Yet, women were not accepted as the agents of desire and even the attempt to challenge the dominant patriarchal construction of meaning ended in a conventional stance. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah while discussing an autonomous group in “The Question of Autonomy” write about one of the women of that group. This woman did the maximum of the work of the organisation and as the rest professional women did not have time and experience like her, she became the supreme leader rejecting the points of views different from her (74).

Post Independence Feminist and Women Writings

The post-independence Indian writings, chiefly marked the awakened awareness of the middle class educated woman longing to fulfil her wants and desires.

These are the works of women writers like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander’s which brought out women’s loneliness and longing for their husbands, the excitement in their liaisons with other lovers and also the ensuing guilt and self-disgust because of them. Das in her relationships with other men seems to be an assertive, dominant figure, whereas, in her

relationship with her husband, she is almost pleading for his affection and love. The excess of emotion in Das' poetry is replaced by economy and control in the novel of Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence* (1989), through Jaya, pours out a confessional work. It is full of contradictory emotions and thus multilayered and complex. She delineates the feelings within the self, tussling with one another, and do not delve into other aspects of love or sex. Jaya sees her father and husband as the symbols of patriarchy.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) is a middle class raging rebellion against the middle class respectability and its thoughts. Dimple like many other girls is brought in a fairy land that is replete with the stories of the princesses and the handsome knights. She marries with the hopes and expectations of these stories coming true. However, her dreams and desires are soon broken and she is faced with a monotonous life. She is neither able to build harmony with her husband nor is able to bridge the fissure between her wishes and married life and family. She finally protests by murdering her husband.

Eunice De Souza's writing mainly deals with the middle class, Goan Christian community, although she does raise questions on the issues of wider relevance. Her childhood, contrary to Das' childhood, seems to have been a hell, and her poetry is often a satire against church, marriage, Catholic motherhood, sexual prudery and hypocrisy. She also writes in the confessional strain, following the tradition set by Kamala Das. Both de Souza and Melanie Silgado are preoccupied with the relationship with their fathers, as they delve into their own fears, insecurities, self hate and depression which have been caused as a result of their inability to fit within patriarchal norms. Like her teacher, Eunice de Souza, Silgado too writes about her own Goan childhood and family, and the conflict they caused within her.

These works continued the trend of expressing the reality of a single woman's life, depicting the frustrations, demands and tensions of middle class women living with unconcerned families or the ones who live alone in cities.

Anita Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) explores the anxieties of a single woman's life. Tara Patel and Mukta Sambrani look at the complications of living without the securities of husband and family.

Anjum Hasan, Arundhati Subramaniam and Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) explore, and usually celebrate, the experience of living alone.

My Work/s

The works that I have selected to study, show that the issues being addressed by the Indian women, have now gone beyond the domestic violence, confinement of middle class women and their rage against patriarchy, as was the trend earlier.

Through Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), Bama Faustina Soosairaj's *Karukku* (1992), Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* (1974), Nabina Das's *Footprints at the Bajra* (2010), Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1984) and Thrity Umrigar's *The Space between Us* (2006), I will study that Indian feminisms have become more democratic and inclusive as they attempt to narrate the lives of marginalised women such as Dalit women, maid-servants, Naxalite women in wartime and women who are considered to be ferocious by religion.

The subversion of the historical records and myths in these works and their retelling of the stories, from the perspectives of the Indian women, whose voices are often silenced in the official versions of written records, serve to establish these work within a traditional framework while simultaneously puncturing and questioning it. This is one of the techniques they employ to address subaltern issues.

The feminist movement in India has largely been limited to the upper caste and upper class Hindus. Gail Omvedt in “Socialist-feminist Organization and the Women’s Movement” writes that in the recent times, a need is being felt for taking the women’s movement beyond these confines to the women of other castes, classes and religions. The women’s movement must now be seen as a socialist-feminist one (62-67). Sharmila Rege in “Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Dalit Women’s Testimonies” highlights that women’s studies in the academia have also ignored the questions of marginalised women, so far preferring to focus on the canonical (452-57).

These works also trace relationships as journeys of discoveries between two equals where neither dominates but the power play continually shifts from one to the other. The works engage with the sexuality of subaltern women, depicting them as active agents and desiring subjects. This treatment of love is startling in a country where the mainstream culture, as Shohini Ghosh in “The Troubled Existence of Sex and Sexuality: Feminists Engage with Censorship” shows in the context of Bollywood films, continues to equate the display of women’s sexuality as a form of women objectification. Women here are still not accepted as the agents of desire, and a film such as Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* which explores same sex relationships between women ultimately takes a conventional stance (566-73).

The works also attempt to break the humanist idea of a stable, unified speaking subject. Deconstructing the notion of identity, they show multiplicity of identities, constantly in the process of changing, becoming, and discovering. The older idea of women’s writing voicing a reality specific to women is now undercut as the idea of a stable identity is itself challenged.

Following the theorists like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, one can question whether educated, upper class women can ever, adequately represent the marginalised, and can writing in an elite language such as English actually give voice to the more democratic

feminisms. Meena Kandasamy however, argues that she deliberately and consciously writes in English as she believes that wider, international support is necessary for addressing the issues of Dalits (*Poetry International Web*).

We can also question the extent that this writing remains a part of the diasporic literature, at what point it ceases to be so and becomes American or British and so on, when we study writers like Thrity Umrigar. A voice different from all is that of Thrity Umrigar's in its conscious social commitment. Although she is a diasporic writer, Umrigar's novel *The Space Between Us* has been placed in the social reality of India. It has gone beyond expressing the doubts within her mind.

Feminism can not be read as a binding concept with particular characteristics or features that one has to follow. The picked Indian women writings are creating a space of freedom where voices choose to observe, construe and practise feminisms in their own ways, enabling an interaction between the various perspectives of feminist issues.

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