

# Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai

Dr.Sridhar Sharma

Department of English,

Government College,Hod ,Sikar.

## Abstract

Feminism is women's liberation movement and a rapidly developing ideology committed to liberate woman's self-handicapped by the male dominated society since long. Feminism, in its real sense, is an advocacy of extended recognition of claims and achievements of women and their rights. Feminism or Feminist assertion in literature is not only identified with a political movement for equal wages started in nineteenth century in America but its roots can be exclusively traced back to the works of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Feminist literature in English is certainly not a recent awareness of women rights. It has been there ever since perspectives on life were recorded in the medium of literature, though it certainly has come to its own of late, of recent origin again is the feminist perception of literature. Feminist Criticism in its broadest implication has three distinct subdivisions, each distinct with its own adherents. The first two are well defined and frequently practiced without raising any ideological outrage. These are: The examination and analysis of the portrayal of women characters by themselves or in relationship with their male counterparts, and the appreciation of female authors. What is noteworthy is that in the last few years these commonly accepted critical practices have been overhanded to accommodate the possibility of exclusively feminist perceptions of human relationships. The third direction is that of the so-called "prescriptive criticism" that attempts to set standards for literature that is good from the feminist perspective.

Feminism in the Indian context is the recent renovation of early Vedic concepts of man-woman relationship and a byproduct of Western liberalism in particular and feminist thought in general. The indigenous contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes Inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, thrust on women education, and new awareness due to electronic media among women. The Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity, saddled with the burden of the past and the present to cast off her aspirations, constitutes the crux of aspirations, in fact constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms it precipitates in search for identity and a quest for the definition of the women self. In critical practice, it boils down to scrutinizing empathetically the plight of women characters and their struggle for emancipation of self.

## Introduction

Feminist English Literature is a spectrum of many colours and shades- soft, prominent and strident. The voices emanating there from vary from the traditional- but conscious- of their selves to exclusively self-seeking with a seeming vengeance. When clearly articulated well-argued and precisely defined, feminist sentiments rather than mere faint echoes thereof can be traced as already referred in early works of Mary Shelley and Jane Austen, one feels chary of dubbing feminism as merely a late twentieth century phenomenon. The feminist perspective on literature- creative or critical- whether in a third world country or elsewhere has had to confront issues of similar persuasion: male chauvinism, sexist-bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, hegemonic inclinations in

not merely the male but also the female sections of the society, the utter disregard for females psychological, cultural, familial, and spiritual quests. Predictably enough the ways out suggested subtly or propagated more avowedly have ranged from mild protest seeking accommodation through moderation, love, persuasion and in the last separation to carving out of a self-sufficient exclusivist self.

Feminist theory is by no means a single or homogeneous body of speculation and argument. If one discerns a common strand in the great diversity of the feminist scholarship it is its critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking and its political and humanistic approach to literature and literary criticism. Feminist literary theory has evolved according to the needs and demands of the international woman's movement. This women's liberation movement was initiated in 1960s by women who were politically committed- women who were active participants in the civil rights movements or in the protest actions against the war in Vietnam or those who belonged to the various progressive or Marxist groups. It was their bitter experience of the blatantly sexist attitudes that were evinced by their male associates in these politically progressive movements that finally led women to form their own groups and associations. For instance, in America Betty Friedan, the author of the 'Feminine Mystique', founded National Organization of Women popularly known as NOW, so that women could voice their grievances and fight for their. By the late 60s and 70s feminism had emerged as a political force in the western world.

As the early feminists were mainly concerned with social and political change, little attention was paid to literature and literary criticism at the initial stage of the women's movement. But soon enough their political action was extended, to the cultural field, as it is here that gender differences are created and naturalized. The feminists who worked in academic institutions became convinced that literature and literary criticism were powerful cultural weapons in the hands of male hegemony to perpetuate its sexual politics in the name of universality objectivity and neutrality. Opposed to their claims made by the humanist discourse is the central tenet of feminist criticism that no account whether creative, critical or theoretical, can be neutral. A work of literature invariably reflects the personal or cultural bias of its author. The first task of the feminists, therefore, was to lay bare the patriarchal practices in literary discourse as they had done it in other walks of life. That is why, as Elaine Showalter observes:

In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassments or women in classic and popular male literature and exclusion of women from literary history. (The New Feminist Criticism 5).

Katharine M. Rogers claims that patriarchal feeling or the desire to keep women subject to men is the "most important cause of misogyny, because the most widely and firmly entrenched in society". (Rogers 272).

In "Sexual Politics", Kate Millett defines sexual politics as the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. In the first place, she emphasizes the need to study social and cultural contexts if a work or art is to be properly understood. Recent feminist scholarship is alert to the manner in which women's subjectivities are formed by the cultural mores and values. As Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan has remarked, "The construction of women in terms of recognizable roles, images, models and labels occurs in discourse in response to specific social imperatives even where it may be offered in terms of the universal and abstract rhetoric of "woman" or "women" (or the "Indian Woman" as the case may be)...If we acknowledge (a) that femaleness is constructed, (b) that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism) and (c) that therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire

and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves, then the task of feminist critic becomes what Jacqueline Rose describes as “the critique of male discourse” born of “a radical distrust of representation which allies itself with a semiotic critique of the sign.” what is required here is an alertness to the political process by which such representation becomes naturalized and ultimately coercive in structuring women’s self-representation. (Real and Imagined Women, 129)

One may find all varieties of feminist critics, from liberalism to de-construction. This creates disagreements and differences among the feminists. For example, there are de-constructionists like Toril Moi who charge Elaine Showalter and others for their empiricism and bourgeois humanism, while a radical critic like Josephine Donovan feels that deconstructionist theory magnifies the assertion of political identity. There are then feminists who would like to do away with gender differences as they lead to the discrimination against and repression of women, while there are others who celebrate these differences between men and women and even valorize womanhood as a part of their political strategy against male domination.

The western feminists tend to universalize patriarchy and thereby homogenize women especially the world women. Chandra Mohanty in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*, points out:

An analysis of “Sexual difference” in the Form of a cross- culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I shall call the “third world difference”- that stable, a historical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. (63)

But the problems and subjectivities of women in various third world countries may differ according to their national, historical, socio-political contexts. The ideological construction of women in India, say, is not the same as that of a woman in Argentina though both of them are supposed to belong to the so-called third world. Even within India there are differences and divergences. That would, for example, a peasant woman from Konkan has in common with her metropolitan, middle-class from Delhi?

The Indian feminists would like to empower Indian women with voice and action and the right to self-representation. The representation of Indian women as victims of the native patriarchal structures was a ruse that was often used by the British colonialists for their own material and political benefits.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita proceed to create a separate tradition of India women’s writing and to rewrite literary history from their position of postcolonial feminists. Their anthology has brought out rich haul of texts written by women in various languages, right from days of the Buddhist nuns in the sixth century BC to present day. These two critics have tried to place women writers and their works in their proper historical contexts, keeping in mind not only the issues of gender but also those of class, caste, nation, empire etc.

The greatest drawback of the feminist approach is thought to be its lack of coherent theory or its inability to offer a definition of it. But it should not be considered its minus point. Feminist criticism is a political and humanist approach to literature, which cannot be bound in certain definition, rule or scale. It will keep on changing and evolving to the changing of mores, codes, of social structure, and exigencies of time.

Representation of India women in the image of a Sita or a Savitri or an Ahilya still proliferates and will continue to proliferate in serious literature. Women who are fool hardy enough to go against the traditional role of women as dutiful daughters, devoted wives, and self-sacrificing mothers, are ridiculed for aping the western models, are humiliated and chastised.

Traditional Indian woman wants to break through this dark web and emerge as “New Indian Woman” only to fulfill her duties in more improved manner, and to assist her husband as a partner and to become a nice educated mother though her counterpart may be unduly apprehensive of losing his empire.

The Indian feminist writers had been vividly presenting and are still highlighting this traditional created imbalance. They are doing great job by depicting the conflict of the weaker as has been called from traditions, against the superior, keeping well in mind the cultural and social structure of India. The depiction of modern Indian women in the works of these feminists does not deflect Indian women from her traditional roles and chores but facilitates her easy and efficient performance and thereby vindicates her Indian identity.

As discussed earlier, the exigencies of socio-political and cultural structure of a country gives an impetus and momentum to the conscious writers of the age. Indian English novelists were inspired by the freedom movement and Gandhi’s political ideology. The Indian novelists took upon themselves the responsibility of giving artistic articulation of the problems that beset the common people and their small joys and immense sorrows, the crusade against the tyranny of poverty, illiteracy, suffering, disease, superstition, caste and sex. Resulting in a number of novels the protagonist is a farmer, a labourer, a factory worker, a patient or a virtuous women pitted against a zamindar, a landlord, a factory owner, or a ruthless, callous hardhearted man. It may be aptly remarked that Indian English novelists have fairly succeeded in their efforts to portray creatively in a realistic manner the problems of the age. They not only present the various problems: social, cultural, political, and economics of the contemporary society but also offer solutions in terms of fictional art.

After Independence the subject of novels took a turn due to the developments of intercultural relations between countries and fast developing electronic media and the awareness of human rights and thrust on women education. The status and predicament of women in Indian society set another motivating force for the Indian novelists with a social purpose. Despite the fact that woman can contribute to social regeneration, family welfare she continues to be a victim of social prejudices and male chauvinism. However, Gandhi’s call to the Indian women to participate activity in the freedom movement made them conscious of the much-needed liberation and equality of opportunity in personal, social and political life. Recognizing the potential of women to join their counterparts in their struggle against ignorance, superstition and backwardness, Indian English novelists in general, and women novelists in particular began to think women as legitimate, current and needful subjects for their purposeful social novels. Their Endeavour was to be relevant to their culture by presenting characters and situations rooted in Indian ethos. In this connection Nayantara Sahgal in *The Indian Writer and the English Language*, has rightly observed that:

To be relevant to his culture, a writer’s imagination has to be able to create the men and women and situations of the Indian environment and the Indian reality. If a writer can do this make people feel with him, stimulate thinking, and inspire action because of what he writes, then he is fulfilling his function. (P: v.5)

It may be relevant to dwell here on the real motivate force behind the contemporary novelists' writing with a social purpose and the urgent need: It is also rewarding to discuss the reasons which led Indian women into this predicament where they need to struggle against their superiors for identity and status which once they so graciously enjoyed.

A retrospective look into Indian History will enable us to understand that women used to enjoy self-respect, dignity and honour in ancient days and a trace of women's status can still be marked in the recitation of the hymns and mantras at the time of all wedding ceremony and husbands 'vows made to allow all the privileges of a respectable partner to their wives. Till the advent of Muslim rulers Indian woman enjoyed and availed herself of privileges but later it became the need of the time and compulsion on the part of the husband to safeguard the honour of his partner from the despotic ruling class. She was kept veiled and hidden under roof till Independence. Hundreds of years of seclusion made her morale infirm.

Gandhian philosophy and Indians struggle for freedom, and growing fast globalization and steadily growing consciousness among women are the main motivating forces behind the novelists and writers of the present age a writer who steps ahead of time in capturing the igniting spark and airs it in his work to set it in flames, always wins general approbation.

Anita Desai has been making efforts to pull out Indian woman from the quagmire of her lost identity with the same means, but with diversified idiosyncrasies and variegated aspects. The emergence of women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was the post-Independence period, which had brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by creative release of feminine sensibility and who inspired Indian women to regain their lost battle of equity, comradeship and self-identity. Women have been the central figure of many a literary works in this era. Writers apart from these three renowned novelists under study are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamla Das, Eunice d'Souza, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Imtiaz Dharker.

#### Analysis

The Problems of women, which were, till now considered to be centrifugal i.e. to break the chains of bondage and captivity and to be free; are now reversed to centripetal i.e. to regain her self-identity. Through the eyes of these women writers, one visualizes a different world till now not projected in literature. Women, who were till then treated as second class citizens are assigned their due place in the novels of these novelists. The novels of these novelists present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in the society and her assertion of individuality. The works of these three novelists discussed here can be well compared to Canadian novelists like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence and Arithavan Herk. All these writers write of life as viewed by women and contemporary life affecting women.

The present study sets out to highlight and incorporate the feminist issues raised by the noted women novelist Anita Desai. This study also attempts to place in a critical perspective the feminist assertion in the novels of their modern living Indian women novelists. While attempting to determine the shift in general literary sensibility in the novels the study directs attention on women's awakening consciousness and her confrontation against a male dominated, tradition-oriented society. Though the methods of interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problematic of individual novelists, the Indian woman being at the center emerges as a human being, essentially Indian in sensibility and likely to remain so in the near future.

Anita Desai was born in 1937. Her father was Bengali, her mother German. She was educated in Delhi and now lives in Bombay. She is in one of the most creative writers of the modern life in all its complicated aspects. Her novels are now winning her wider recognition as a writer with an original voice, a remarkable subtle voice which conveys atmosphere and character in vivid and striking terms. She presents an amalgam of the east and the west. As she upholds the cultural heritage of India, She is the most appropriate novelist to be taken up for a critical study.

Though much critical attention has been paid to the novelist and various critical papers on them have appeared in a number of various magazines and periodicals it will be worthwhile to evaluate the works in the light of feminism movement. The present attempt will certainly promote further research in this field and will give an impetus to further critical enquiry.

Apart from being living legend of Indian English novelists, Anita Desai is not simply the viewer of the pathetic conditions of Indian woman but originated and emerged through the pathos, ethos of Indian social life and was nourished by Indian culture and have shared pains and agony of Indian woman and have consoled her and have encouraged her to struggle to re-establish her self-seeking identity. The whole body of work deserves a fresh interpretation in terms of the concept of feminism. Besides, they cover almost the whole of diversified social, cultural structure of Indian life, right from Bengal to Chandigarh, Covering Uttar Pradesh, and expanding up to the southern part of India in Karnataka. A careful study peeps into the entire corpus of these phases of feminist movement in India right from Independence up to now. They also incorporate all the aspects of about social, moral, and cultural political, psychological, economical, change in the status of Indian woman. She is dedicated to the cause of Indian woman as revealed from their works. The novelist of feminist perception exhibit, by and large in built social, cultural, political, economic handicaps when it comes to denigrating the “One” despite their being “all sirens with in”.

Like Virginia Woolf, the novelist is prose rhapsodist of feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through human consciousness. She specializes in depicting the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human situations and emotional relationship. Her attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex structural stresses and strains in Indian Society having strong past moorings. The novelist concentrate and explore human relationship in the modern Indian society, particularly husband-wife relationship and her thrust lies in feminist awakening and upsurge. She includes all aspects or bringing this change by passive awakening, by being tolerant, obedient, and submissive, observant willing to seek her “own refuge” to a belated rebellion.

She challenges the rigid norms of theology, philosophy, and social conduct one after the other. She exhibits “how women can live afresh” by challenging the idealistic, beautiful but docile and weak images of women often used by men. Traditionally, India is a male-dominated culture. Indian woman covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention and ignorance’ has hardly any autonomous existence. “Our country belongs to its men” observes Aunt Lila in Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City*. The woman’s voice is an insurgent, subaltern voice. The Indian woman especially the middle class woman today is no longer Damayanti. She is a Damini or a Nora or a Jona of Arc. Social reformers championing the cause of woman like Raja Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi gave a new direction and infused a fresh spirit to the women’s lib in India. Thus, feminism has now emerged as a new way of life, free of the “dependence syndrome”. A new perspective has dawned on the Indian social horizon with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s role in the society and re-assert her self-identity.

Elaine Showalter posits three phases in the growth of feminist tradition: First “the prolonged period of limitation, second, “a phase of protest against these standards and values” and finally a phase of self-discovery, “a turning

inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". These three phases are aptly marked in the works of the novelists under review but it will be profitable to present an overview of these novelists, especially for a through appreciation of their mind and art.

The overview may also help us to understand the process of creature development of these novelists. Anita Desai for that matter is one of the three creative feminist writers taken up for study here. She was born in 1937, of a Bengali father and a German mother. Her first language as a child was German as her parents spoke German to each other. She was brought up and educated in Delhi.

As evident in her statement, she is endowed with natural gift of creation; she started writing at the age of seven in prose and fiction. The writer in her constantly without ease developed in her later age. In the college magazine, she occasionally contributed. She has been "an observant person" as she admits.

I think a writer simply has to be an observant person. If he is not, he is not going to write, not write a novel any way which entails so much acute description and also an eye for detail.(Stairs to the Attic,9)

She has been a keen observer of Indian social life, its cultural heritage and has been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Gandhi, as Anita Desai is also one of those noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility after Independence.

She established herself as a pioneer of Indian fiction writer in English from her novel *Fire on the Mountain* when she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978. To date she has enriched English fiction with eleven great novels and for three decades she has been engaged in shaping literary scenario of Indian fiction in English.

To Anita Desai the purpose of her writing is to discover- for her self- and then describe and convey the truth. She opines that truth is synonymous with Art, not with Reality. There is no discrepancy between the Truth and Art. Reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean- Art the remaining nine tenths of it that lie below the surface. This is undoubtedly an irrefutable fact.

Commenting upon her writing she says that:

My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon the incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible word.(Indian Fiction in English,152)

In her works this literary philosophy is manifest and she has succeeded in projecting the truth of this social panorama. She chose fiction as a métier of writing, realizing the fact that a novel can convey the truth far more vividly, forcefully and memorably than any number of factually correct documents, exhaustively detailed histories or excellently documented biographies.

Gifted with this perception, she preoccupied herself with the feminine sensibility which is unique in the annals of the Indo-Anglian novel. In the following pages an attempt is made to give an introductory glimpse into her major work.

*Cry, the Peacock*: First published in 1963, the novel explores the inner world where fantasy and experience alternate with psychedelic effect. The novel begins with the death of the dog and ends with the death of the heroine. The novel projects a deep concern over the female loneliness of female protagonist and inhumane violence of non-communication by the male protagonist against his counterpart and in their relationship, the predicament as a torture inflicted by passive insidious miasma of indifference and unconcern. The resentment of the female protagonist reminds one of Nora of *A Doll's House*:

.....Our home's been nothing but a playpen.  
I've been your doll- wife here, just as at  
home I was Papa's doll child.....(110)

Maya, Gautama, Rai Shahib, Arjuna, are the major characters of the novel but central theme revolve round Maya and Gautama. Gautama is pragmatic, unromantic, and unsentimental and believes in "detachment" on every count. Maya on the other hand, is a highly sensitive creature gifted with poetic imagination and a neurotic sensibility. Communication gap between the husband and wife is felt throughout the novel. Maya remains throughout an utterly lonely creature in this helpless and indifferent world.

*Voices in the City*: First published in 1965 the novel is the second novel of Anita Desai. This novel presents the plight and trauma of two women doomed and circumscribed in the claustrophobic space of Calcutta, which is described as a "City of death". The story is based exclusively on the life middle class intellectuals, caught in the vortex of changing social values.

Monisha, Amla Nirode, Jiban, Anita, Arun, David, Amla, Auntlila, Jit Dharma and Prof, Bose, are the main characters woven to exhibit the compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearnings of women for freedom and self-dignity. Both the sisters Monisha and Amla seek solace, love, and dignity in a rigid, codified society and both are disillusioned in the end. As a result Monisha commits suicide as she finally accepts the fact that the parameters of the choice for a woman are almost always predetermined while Amla realises the stark truth that the world outside and the transient love of Dharma is like a mirage and no escape into permanent happiness.

*Bye-Bye Blackboard*: First published in 1971 the novel is based on the cultural alienation of the female protagonist. It portrays the problems faced by female protagonist due to cultural difference between her and her husband. The title refers to England's bidding farewell to an Indian-a "blackbird". One is reminded of Kipling's view that the East is East and the West is West and that the twain shall never meet. What is significant is that East or West, woman is the underdog and the novel underscores this aspect as well.

The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* centers on three major characters viz. Adit, Dev and Sarah. Among them Sarah plays a vital role in the novel. Sarah is an English lady married to Adit Sen, an Indian immigrant. By marrying an Indian immigrant Sarah faces cultural crisis. Even after a lot of sacrifices, she is treated by Adit like the "other". Sarah is a passive victim, "The other" in the hands of male-chauvinistic Adit. The end of novel suggests submission by a woman before her counterpart only to bring peace and harmony in man-woman relationship.



Where shall we go this Summer published in 1975 is yet another remarkable novel of Anita Desai. The novel dwells on the theme of incertitude, alienation, and non-communication in married life. It is the alienation of a woman, a wife and a mother, an alienation conditioned by society and family.

Sita, Raman Rekha, Jeevan, Menaka, Karan are the major characters in the novel. The novel highlights the fact that the female character Sita has always been loner and the novelist establishes the existential predicament of a woman in this wicked world. Sita, the protagonist a married woman in her forties, a mother of four children, pregnant for the fifth time living in Bombay flat with her husband Raman an upper middle class factory owner leads an “empty” and “meaningless” married life which provides no satisfaction to her. Her escape to the island of Manori in quest of happiness provides her no comfort. The novel presents sensibility of a modern housewife who is under constant stress and mental agony to establish her identity as an individual.

Fire on the Mountain: First published in 1977 it presents reclusion, isolation and desertion resulting out of pathetic sufferings of married life of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Her alienation with her husband is the most unpleasant fact of her life which deliberately suppresses in the subconscious mind. Mr. Kaul was madly in love with a Christian lady whom he could not marry, and out of despair he treated his wife as a non-entity.

The anger and pain with which the novelist narrates Miss Ila Das’s rape and murder and the ill-treatment given to Raka’s mother by her father is suggestive of the highest insult to woman’s pride and dignity.

Major characters who spot out the social, economic, political, emotional, and psychological disintegration woman suffers in a male-dominated society are Nanda Kaul, Raka and Miss Ila Das.

Clearlight of the Day: Published in 1980 the novel dwells on existentialist theme of time in relation to eternity. It is a domestic novel set in old Delhi. The novel exhibits the aspirations and despair of four children alienated by their parents. At the end of the novel they adopt a middle course by making a compromise between the ancient and the modern social values. It is the novel which reflects the despair, and isolation of female protagonist Bim and also at the same time reflects her endeavour to accept those responsibilities which are designated to only Man in this world.

The Main characters of the novel are Bim and Tara while other characters are Mira Masi, Bakul , Raja, Baba, Moyna and Benazir.

The novel depicts the struggle of the two female protagonists to re-establish their lost identity-Bim achieves her “feminine self” by association, by fusion and by harmony. She represents the modern New women of India who is constantly struggling for identity, and emancipation.

The novel revolves round two brothers Raja and Baba, and two sisters Tara and Bim, who grew up in a house in old Delhi. The mental agony of a delicate young woman Bim in the pattern of movement and stillness has been very optimistically printed by the novelist.

A Village by the Sea: An Indian family Story was published in 1982. The novel sets out into a village ‘Thul’, portrays economic class, and is quite different in nature from her earlier novels. The novel has in it an exotic touch. The novel opens with exotic dimension and disintegration of family and ends with “mythic acceptance”.

It is the story of a family disintegrating under the pressures-not of alienation but due to poverty, illness, and drunkenness disintegration stops only when disruptive forces are over powered. The family relationship has been explored and defined in terms of the self in the novel.

In Custody is the eighth novel published in 1984. The novel reflects the male protagonist Deven's failure to form congenial and harmonious conjugal ties. It also reveals the couple's marital isolation and conjugal chaos leading to insanity.

The major characters in the novel are Deven, Sarla, Murad, Nur, Siddiqui and minor characters are Jayadev, Mr Jain, Mr Trivedi and Intiyaz Begam wife of the poet Nur.

The novel prefigures how the central character Deven, instead of bringing a little respect, happiness, permanence, daintiness and order in his life and family, courts turmoil.

He is trapped in the world of illusion, materialism, serving as a lecture in a college is caught with high aspirations travels to Delhi to meet the derelict poet Nur and returns to his village Merpore with transformed vision of awareness and reality of life. He finds locked into a "barred trap" and her wife is as much victimized by his state of mental agony.

Baumgartner's Bombay: The novel was published is 1988. A notable novel for its departure from her obsessive pre-occupation with representation of complexities of an aspiring woman, as it appears on the surface, portrays and asserts the need for self-identification and self-reliance of a woman.

The novel explores the psyche of a male protagonist Hugo Baumgartner, a Garman Jew. He is dispatched to India as India is considered as a safe place during the Nazi persecution. Hugo arriving in Bombay travels to Calcutta and is later shifted to internment camp. When he is freed, he confines himself to one room apartment with cats as pets, substitute for his family until finally; he is murdered by an Aryan German boy whom he has been helping across the barrier of racial hatred.

The novel is contrived with major characters as Hugo, Lotte, ChamanLal, Farrokh, Hugo's mother and minor characters as Kanti Sethia, Gisella and Julius.

Journey to Ithaca: (Published in 1996) The novelist's prime concern in the novel is to expose the difference of two cultures and civilizations. Journey to Ithaca is a spiritual quest for self-definition, for contentment, and for faith and love. It is a story of transformation of a biological mother into the spiritual Mother, brought about by Indian spiritualism. The East sustains one's belief in human values, helps in comprehending the meaning of life while the west abstains for values and is the message revealed through the major characters Sophie and Matteo other characters of the novel are Laila, Fabian, Krishna, Madame Beaunier, Montu-da, Nonna and Dr Bishop. The novel is an attempt to explore woman's psyche, and its habitation with the familial and the outer world.

Fasting, Feasting: Published in 1999, the novel can be viewed as cultural contrast or as "Feminist discourse which prioritizes the body and reverses the male view of the female body as an object of desire".

The major characters of the novel are Mira Masi, Uma, Arun, Aunt Lila, Anamika, Bakul, Ramu Aruna, SisterAgnes, Mrs O'Henry and Mrs Dutt Mrs. Patton and Melanie.

Uma, a forty-three year old divorced woman the central character of the novel and Mira Masi a widow, reveal neurosis, hysteria, depression, anorexia and bulimia of Indian woman in family relationship.

Feminism holds that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. It attempts to analyze the reasons for and dimensions of women's oppression, and to achieve women's liberation. To some, liberation is defined as social equality with men, while others feel that this narrow definition reflects the class bias of what is described

variously as bourgeois feminism, career feminism, main stream feminism or liberal feminism. There are several views of feminists differing on the ideologist grounds.

The conservatives believe in the inherent unequal abilities of men and women and they emphasize that the main task of the state is to ensure that an individual performs his or her proper social function. They argue that social differentiation between the sexes is not unjust, since justice not only allows but also requires us to treat unequal unequally. Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Fichte (The science of Rights) , Nietzsche ( Thus Spake Zarathustra ), Freud and Steven Goldberg are writers with conservative view points.

Liberal feminists believe in libertarian for women as the freedom to determine their own social role and to compete with men on terms that are as equal as possible.

Marxist feminists view the oppression of woman as historically and currently a direct result of the institution of private property. Frederick Engels writes, “Within the family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat”(39). They see the oppression of women as a function of the larger socio-economic system.

Radical feminist writers like Ti Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone deny the liberal claim that the basis of women’s oppression consists in their lack of political or civil rights. Similarly they reject the classical Marxist view that basically women are oppressed because they live in a class society. They hold that the roots of women’s oppression are biological. The origin of women’s subjection lies in the fact that as result of the weakness caused by child bearing, women become dependent on men for physical survival. They believe in biological revival for women’s liberation.

## Conclusion

Thus looking at these various feminist viewpoints it may be remarked that the feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization and unjust treatment of women though the hostile power of oppression may differ in accordance to the ideologies or the vision adopted. What is significant is the need to profound changes in traditional social structures, family structures, and power of women, fundamental attitudes and personal relationships, leading to a just social order. Indian feminist writers present three images of woman: assertive i.e. progressive, submissive and compromising. Assertive i.e. progressive image is the advanced image of woman who is conscious of her identity, submissive image of woman is the traditional image of woman and the compromising image is the image of woman who seeks to change the status remaining within some parameters without breaking from tradition.

## Works cited

Engels, Frederik.1942 (1884), Trans. Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Newtown, Resistance Books.

Ibsen, Henrik. (1970), Four Major Plays vol. I, New York: Signet Classics.

Jain, Jasbir.(1994), *Nayantara Sahgal Stairs to the Attic* II edition. Jaipur, Printwell Publishers.

Mohanty, Chandra. (1988) "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30 (autumn)

Rajan, Rajeshwari Sunder. (1993), *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post Colonialism*. London / New York: Routledge.

Rao, Malikarjuna.,P. Rajeshwar, M. (eds.) (1999) *Indian Fiction In English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

Rogers, Katherine M.(1966), *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*. Seatle: University of Washington.

Showalter, Elaine. ed. (1985), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books.

