

The similarities in the early literary works of European, American, and Indian feminist writers

Asha Kaushik

Assistant Professor (SS), Centre for Professional Communication, College of Engineering Studies, University of Petroleum & Energy Studies, Bidholi, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

Abstract

Throughout history women have been locked in a struggle to free themselves from the boundary that separates them from men. In many circles it is agreed that the battleground for this struggle exists in literature. In a field which has typically been dominated by men, women have seldom been represented positively through literary characters. American, European and Indian societies has been traditionally dominated by the race of men. Till the beginning of the twentieth century, women lived in domesticity and were denied basic human rights. Twentieth century has witnessed a growing awareness among women regarding their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence and destiny. In early stages of the revolution the feminists and suffragists were condemned by the patriarchal society for adulterating the minds of women with the idea of liberation to the established traditional dogmas. However, it soon blossomed into a comprehensive ideology and provided the conceptual basis to a women's struggle to overcome all types of explanation and attain autonomous selfhood. The creative writings of the feminist writers of those times have significantly encouraged and shaped the feminist struggle to empower women and help them transcend their deprived status. This research paper highlights the similarities among the literary works of the early feminist writers from America, Europe, and India.

KEYWORDS: Feminism, feminist writers, second wave feminism, women empowerment, feministic ethos, feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Frieden, Shobha De.

“Enough ink has been spilled in the quarrelling over feminism, now practically over, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women really? (1989: 19)” These are the words from *The Second Sex*, one of the best known works of the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, written in 1949 and still we are no way through. We all agree to the fact that the women exist in human species and that they make about one half humanity and still this species is in danger. From a long time feminists are of the opinion that man and women should be regarded as human being but antifeminists have had no trouble in showing that women simply are not men. In this manuscript, some light has been thrown on works of some writers who tried to advocate feminism.

Feminist writing and criticism began from the day when women tried to express their deprived state in writing. It is difficult to trace the first feminist writer because many writings went unnoticed and unpublished. But we can count Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Frieden's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) as revolutionary feminist text which brought

about a fundamental change in the perspective of women towards their lives in Europe and America. Mary Wollstonecraft, born in 1759 in London, was the second of the six children and the radical author of in the sense that she desired to bridge the gap between mankind's present circumstances and ultimate perfection. She was a child of the French revolution and saw a new age of reason and benevolence close at hand. Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) has been treated almost exclusively as a feminist manifesto, an unequivocal defence of women's rights. She raised her voice against sexual discrimination prevalent in the society and expounded that women should have equality of status. In her discussions she has included many claims integral to modern feminism-coeducation, economic independence and legal equality – which expresses her concern for the inferior state of women in contemporary Europe. Her narration presents a grim picture of an oppressive reality. Women were not allowed to participate in public and political meetings. They were also denied the right of franchise. They were routinely provided with the basic education, whereas higher education was strictly reserved for men. Mary Wollstonecraft's letter to M. Taileyrand-period, a French diplomat, which is illustrated in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, shows her deepest concern for women education. She requests him to respect the women's rights whenever the amendments in the constitution are discussed. She writes, "But, if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of the mankind, prove first, to ward injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason-else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality (1996: 3)". Though Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about the deprived state of women in Europe, yet the book strangely had practical impact on contemporary mainstream literary criticism. Still, it is a definite precursor of revolt against the economic, intellectual and social restrictions on women and is a major statement of female potentiality.

Another feminist writer Virginia Woolf not only advocates intellectual emancipation of women, but also encourages them to fulfil their responsibilities as women. Considered one of the best of the modernists of the writers Virginia Woolf's personal life is almost as intriguing as her fiction. Disturbed by mental instability for most of her life, Virginia composed her great works in burst of manic energy. Despite her personal difficulties, Virginia Woolf's fiction represented a shift in both structure and style. She was at times, incisive literary and social critic. She was at her best when she took society to task for limiting the opportunity of gifted female writers. *A Room of One's Own* was the compilation of lectures Virginia gave at Cambridge on the topic of woman and fiction, and in this slender volume she argues that talented female writers face the two impediments to fully realizing their potentials, social inferiority and lack of economic independence. Virginia proposed five hundred pounds and a private room for female writers with talent. This book elucidates her feminine principles. She feels that men and women are interrelated and therefore, conquering of one by the other destroy the harmony and happiness of life. She also points out that patriarchy has deprived women of self-expression and self improvement. The book vocalizes that only when women are considered as human beings and are provided with education, they will be able to contribute to the overall development of the society. She believes that women possess potential, talent and strength with which they can dissolve their secondary status in the society, but their energy requires to be utilized in a proper direction. Virginia Woolf mentions in *A Room of One's Own* that "Shakespeare had a sister" who "died young" (1996: 105)

and thus “never wrote a word” (1996: 105). She believes that this poet who never wrote a word was buried at the cross roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives, for great poets do not die, they are continuing presence, they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh (1996: 105-106). Virginia Woolf has drawn some very remarkable and outstanding women characters in her novels. In the *Voyage Out* Rachel embarks on what seems to be a very typical liminality-initiation into maturity. Naive and untried, she leaves England. She learns to discriminate, and eventually, she leaves the vacation community of Santa Marina and travels deep into the primitive wildness of the non human jungle. Psychologically she remains in liminality, she remains among the symbols of chaos and of freedom, she remains on the border of the initiation passage and does not return. For her as for other women in Woolf’s novels- liminality or the green world is not a temporary festive escape. It is a revolutionary country. It is a place from which to evaluate civilization, the male civilization and its traditions which, as Woolf noted differ considerably from those of women. In Virginia Woolf’s first novel *Voyage out*, her second, *Night and Day* (1919), is a voyage back at least in form, Katharine Hilbery, member of a tradition- respecting family that maintains a ceremonious attitude toward its famous Victorian forbears, at first accepts dutifully an engagement to the qualified and stuffy William Rodney; when she subsequently decides on the honesty and comfortable freedom of a life with Ralph Denham, she and her mother successfully oppose the pride and will of Mr. Hilbery, the dominating father figure. Katharine and Ralph apparently bring the sight from the liminal and dark side of life back into the structure of an ordered community’s bright side. *To the Lighthouse* delineates her concept of complete woman through the character of Mrs. Ramsay. With her emotional poetical frame of mind Mrs. Ramsay represents the female principle, while Mr. Ramsay, a self centred philosopher, expresses the male principle in his rational point of view. *To the light house* was a radical departure from the norm in the period in which it was written. At that time women were expected to conform to tradition, to remain subservient to men. Virginia Woolf in creating Lily Briscoe defied convention by allowing her to assert her independence. Thus Virginia Woolf can be summarised as a successful feminist writer who has given a new image to women of her time.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was published in 1949 and translated into English in 1953. The book reveals the true picture of subservient female, trained deeply to suit the masculine needs. She has exposed the patriarchal society which celebrates the ideal woman – devoted to domestic duties, religious, modest in dress, silent unless spoken to and deferential to men. Beauvoir has talked about the subordination of women which they are subjected to at every stage of their lives, obliterating their individuality and restricting them to lead a passive life from childhood to motherhood. She has categorically analysed every stage of a woman’s life and reveals to us with transparency the feminine world, its perspective towards life and its way of perceiving men and their world. She holds the society responsible for developing the feminine qualities in women and restricting their talents to a limited frame of family life. She writes in *The Second Sex*, “Thus the passivity that is the essential characteristics of the ‘feminine’ women is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society (1989: 280)”. *The Second Sex* has to be accepted as a serious treatise on feministic ethos and issues which not only exposes the hidden facets of a woman’s life, but also criticizes the society for setting different codes of behaviour, action and manner for women. She

has critically analysed the forbidden state of women and termed them as the second sex due to their secondary status in the society. Simone de Beauvoir appears to be realistic in her approach towards women's suppressed and subjugated life.

Betty Friedan is considered as a well known feminist writer in American literary scene. As an icon in the women's right movement, Betty Friedan did more than write about confining gender stereotypes- she became force for change. She cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, serving as its first president, Friedan also fought for abortion rights by establishing the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969. She wanted women to have a greater role in the political process. Thus with the help of the other leading feminists as Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem, Friedan helped create the national women's political caucus in 1971. It was Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which created an awareness among women about their deprived state in the post-war society. The book is a harsh statement of male superiority and female subjection. It criticizes the evident sexual discrimination against women which is condoned by the society and hence pushes women to recesses of domestic life. She has elaborately discussed the problems of middle-class American women who become lethargic by leading a monotonous family life. The book exhibits the gradual change in the image of subservient American housewives and the open opposition it received from the patriarchal society. It traces the process of the American women's evolution from their dormant and passive state to the acknowledgement of their strength and power, simultaneously analysing the stifling norms associated with their femininity. It can be stated that Betty Friedan's book had a major role in initiating the feminist revolution in the United States of America. She comments in the epilogue of *The Feminine Mystique* "It is twenty years now since *The Feminine Mystique* was published. I am still awed by the revolution that book helped spark. It is a mystery to me that I was able to put it together, at the time it was needed, and that women, and men, even now stopped me on the street, and remember where they were when they read it – "in the maternity ward, with my third kid, and then I decided to go to the law school (1984: 9)".

In America black women also gradually became aware of their suppression due to racial as well as sexual discrimination. Black women were maltreated and discarded by white as well as black men. They were doubly enslaved in white patriarchal, racist society. Slavery, which was once an inseparable part of the American society, never permitted black men to create a family as they had no strength, power or independence to provide security to it. Even those black men, who consciously or unconsciously made one, left their families to be looked after by their women. Thus the Afro-American women were vulnerable and open to racial, sexual and political exploitation. Anna Julia Cooper is among the early feminists who discussed the plight of black women and their status in America. She advocated the granting of the right to higher education to them in her book *A Voice from the South* (1892). The two issues- the participation of women in American society and American race problem frames the base of this book. As an African American woman these two issues are very close to Cooper. She claims to speak for all African American women on these points. She compares a healthy family structure to a democratic society. She argues that for America to be a truly democratic country that has freedom for all people, it must have participation by women and black. The black feminist writer like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gayl Jones communicated their black feminist impulse through their literature in 1970's. Toni Morrison in her essay *What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib* lays bare the difference in the

status and treatment of black and white American women. She vociferously raises the issue of feminine emancipation in her literature. She is the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. In her novel *Sula* (1973), she talks about the lost identity of women in a chauvinistic society. Her female protagonist Sula is an enfant terrible who resists the established dogmas of the society related with women and strives hard to achieve self-identity. In her novel *Beloved*, which won for her the Pulitzer Prize in 1987, she describes the slavery system and the pathetic condition of black women within it. *Beloved* is a saga of grit and courage, the combination of the strength and constraints of a woman who is the mother, and happens to be a black slave in a society, which is bifurcated by dominant racial hatred into two sections – the ruler and the ruled, the master and the slave. Sethe, the female protagonist's decision to liberate her children from the evils of slavery leads her to attempt their murder. Thus Toni Morrison has touched the core issues of slavery and black suppression in her novels and has given a realistic picture of black women as victims.

Another major black feminist author, Alice Walker critically interrogates and deciphers the physical and sexual exploitation of black women by black men in her first novels. Walker's first novel *The Third life of Grange Copeland* (1970), describes the economic oppressions. African – Americans suffered under the share – cropping system and its tragic effects on black families and the black community. Walker asks to what degree black themselves have been accomplishes in their victimization by the white power structure which destroys their dignity and dreams. She also explores the intersection of racism and sexism in the oppression of African American families, depicting black men who vent their anger and frustration, not on the whites who exploit them, but on their wives and children. Another novel *Meridian* (1976) illustrates the refusal of its eponymous protagonist to accept the idealized image of black motherhood. She revolts against the racist and sexual oppression of black women and participates in civil rights demonstrations. She has realistically described the change desired by black women in their subjugated status.

Gayl Jones, another significant black feminist author, has evaluated the effect of stereotypes on the psychology of black women. Ursa Corregidora, the female protagonist of her novel *Corregidora* (1975), finds it difficult to free her from the deified stereotypical image of ancestral women who meekly surrender to suppression and subjugation in their lives. It creates friction and disharmony in her relationship with her husband Mutt. Thus we can conclude that these writers advocated a feminist emancipation of black women by representing their pathetic state. They have communicated the traditional modes of oppression of black women in their own community and also by the dominating whites. Their language and imagery also successfully project the reality of black women's lives and are also an assertion of the validation of their feminine identity. Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Bevuvoir, Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan created a general awareness among women about their marginalized status and the futility of their existence. Many other writers must have raised the issue of women emancipation earlier too, but their writings did not receive desired attention, appreciation and consideration. Gradually many successive writers came and advocated the concept of feminism through their work.

After the collapse of the colonial system in Africa and Asia in the mid twentieth century, the newly independent countries, including India adopted a secular democratic system of governance and tried to remove various inequalities. A distinction needs to be made between pre-independence and post-independence women's movements. The former were essentially about the social reform and

initiated by men who, under the influence of western liberal ideas, worked against repressive social norms like child marriage, widow remarriage, sati and seclusion whereas the post-independence movement demanded gender equality, question gender based division of labour and highlighted the oppressive nature of patriarchal structure. Literary works present avant-grade constructs which often becomes the basis of revolutionary social transformations. They not only embrace in themselves the social, cultural or mythical background of their native land, but also expose the fragments of alienation present in different segments of human life and its predicament. Literature therefore, has always been an effective vehicle of fundamental changes. To a large extent, the popularity of feminist ethics in India has also been generated by the 'new' image of women presented by literary writers in their works. The abolition of certain evil practices against women in the preceding centuries had also created a much needed awareness in the society for imparting a better status to women. It was during the British rule in India that many relevant changes were made in order to ameliorate the pathetic condition of women. The Viceroy Lord William Bentinck banned Sati tradition in 1829. Social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy had also supported this move. Similarly, remarriage of widows was sanctioned in 1856 and in 1929 a law was passed prohibiting child marriage. The most difficult task in India at that time was to educate women, because only a few women belonging to the families of zamindars were able to receive basic education. Many teachers, as well as social workers, considered it a necessity and started many educational institutions for women. In 1850s Ishwarchand Vidyasagar started many primary schools in the villages of Bengal. Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand, also propagated women's education. John Drinwater Bethune established the first women's college in India in Calcutta in 1849. In 1851 Jyotiba Phule came forward to educate the scheduled caste girls in Poona. Since then, there has been no looking back, as women also started clamouring for education for which they had been indifferent for ages. These attempts provided the much needed impetus and Indian woman took a hesitant step towards social emancipation. Many great Indian women writers appeared on the scene who represented the educated group of Indian women. Toru Dutt, Cornelia Sorabji, Shevantibai Nikambe, Krupabai Santhianathan and Smt. Swarnkumar Ghosal are some of the prominent women writers of this time. The literature produced by these women writers may not possess many literary merits, but it highlights the pathetic condition of women belonging to different sections of society. The dilution of rigid social norms eventually propagated a liberated modern outlook among women.

The change in the social milieu and its effect on the status and psychology of women encouraged the Indian writers to take cognizance of women's issues. Many outstanding regional writers – Homen Borgchain, Narayan Sanyal, Bimal Mitra, N. Mitra, Prem Chand, Yashpal, Nagar, Upendra Nath Ashk, to quote a few – also wrote about this under-privileged class, critically reflecting the prevailing inhumane practices and atrocities in their work. Though the English prose writing in India was started by Raja Rammohan Roy, the novels of Bankim Chandra and Lal Behari Day are accepted as the first authentic examples of fictional writing in English. Mantagini, the female protagonist of Bankim Chandra's *Rajamohan's wife* (1864), is a woman who values her feeling and affirms her individuality. She represents those Indian women who protest against conventional mores and break the barriers of self-abnegation and denial. Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta* (1874) is a realistic novel, which describes the socio-economic changes occurring in contemporary society. Women character of the novel- *Aduri* (1969), a widow who kowtows to evil practices

related with women and Malini, a rebellious woman who is not ready to succumb to the atrocities of her mother-in-law – form only a part of the plot which adroitly demonstrates the leap from traditional to modern womanhood. The next generation of writers which appeared just before the Second World War, i.e. in the 1930's when the big trio –R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao appeared on the scene. Their work created awareness about the emerging Indo-English literature. R. K. Narayan and Bhabhani Bhattacharya portrayed modern women protagonists like 'Rosie' in *Guide* (1958) and 'Kajoli' in *So Many Hungers* (1964) respectively. Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao also delineated sensitive women characters in their novels. R. K. Narayan has depicted two kinds of women characters – one group possesses a traditional mind – set, while the other seeks freedom from constricting social norms. The conventional group contains women who are devoted mothers, aunts, grandmothers and wives – like the wives of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* (1952), Srinivas and Sampath in *Mr. Sampath* (1949) and Natraj in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961). Though R. K. Narayan has portrayed some strong women protagonists, yet in most of his novels women are not treated with equality. In comparison to him, Bhabhani Bhattacharya's novels possess round women characters who are integral to the development of the plot. His women characters, though somewhat dominated by their male counterparts and patriarchal customs, are still full of the life and hope to have a better future. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers*, Meera in *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), Sumita in *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) are optimistic women. To Bhattacharya, women are a source of strength and thus their contribution is significant not only to their familiars, but also to their country. Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand have not taken up the theme of women's emancipation independently. Their novels concentrate on the socio-economic issues of their times, exposing the harsh facts and realities of life. Feminist issues are only a part of their overriding concerns. However Anand's protagonist Gauri in *The Old Man and the Cow* (1960) is a fine example of his idea of emancipated woman.

With the attainment of independence various reforms were made by the government to ensure development in the country. Soon, a new sphere of literature appeared where the writers wrote on themes projecting the miseries and complexities of human lives and concentrating on individual predicament. The mid 1950's and 1960's make the second important stage of Indian English Writing, when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shobha De, and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their works that changed the face of Indian English novel. They have opened up a new vista of human nature and man-woman relationship. The problems discussed in their novels are individual, rather than universal. These writers have projected the inner psychological turmoil of human being surviving in different sections of the society.

Anita Desai has portrayed the tyrannies, torture and violence faced by women in Indian society. She has stressed the disturbed psyche of women which makes them appear neurotic. Shattered by their stifling atmosphere her women character become depressed and helplessly suffer. Most of her women characters lack the spirit of viewing life with optimism and fail to overcome their existing traumas and apprehensions. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) is unable to understand her husband who has a practical approach towards life. Raka in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is a product of a broken marriage who has witnessed the violent attitude of her father towards her mother. The brutality of her father destroys the humanity in Raka. She sets mountain on fire and rejoice in her act. Sita in *Where Shall we go this Summer* (1975) lives a life of comfort and ease with her husband, who is flexible and

understanding. At the time of her fifth pregnancy she develops a psychological imbalance during the gestating period. To escape the reality of her life she takes refuge at the island of Manori with the thought of getting blessings of his dead father who was known for performing miracles among the local people. It not only disturbs the smooth course of her marital life, but also pushes her children to the darkness of the island. Monisha in *Voices in the City* (1965) commits suicide as she finds no way out the monotony of her life. Anita Desai has also projected the pathetic condition of Indian widows through her character Mira Mavishi in the novel *Clear Light of the Day* (1980). She is one of those contemporary writers whose themes revolve around the female world. Her women characters though lack strength, vitality, valour and hope, and are normally unable to develop a positive approach towards life, these characters are feeble and engrossed in their pain, which inculcates in them a devious state of mind restricting them from initiating relevant and authentic changes in their lives. Most of them lack the power to analyse their pathetic condition and cannot overcome their nerrotic state. Her novels mostly exhibit the disturbed psychology of bereaved women and their lassitude due to the stifing atmosphere in which they have to survive. Her fiction does not talk about the emancipation of women either intellectually or morally. Her themes are not universal; rather they talk about individual women and their emotional and psychological turmoil.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is another contemporary Indo-English novelist who has portrayed strong women characters in her novels. Her novels project the post-independence Indian society which consisted of Indians as well as Britishers. They portray beautiful and vivid pictures of the British culture and its style of living. However, her novels lack the warmth and touch of Indianness. Though she has touched upon the theme of human relationships, it is presented within a latticed framework consisting of sophisticated Britishers and learned Indians. She has also delineated women's alienation resulting from the adaptation of British culture by Indians and Indian culture by Britishers. Jhabvala has penned the growing influence of Britishers on Indians which was making them materialistic. While writing about Indians and their families she has displayed the typical Indian housewives as well as modern, educated women. She talks about the attitude and temperament of Indian women in *Esmond in India* (1958) when she writes, "So like animals like cows..." he said with sudden revulsion. 'Beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves, saying do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God' (1958: 78)". Jhabvala has given us a glimpse of Indian society in which men hold the place of master and women of slave. The feminine traits inculcated in women force them to unquestioningly submit to their male counterparts. Cultural difference also baffles them. Judy in *A Backward Place* (1965), who has a British upbringing is unable to cope up with an Indian husband, similarly Gulab in *Esmond in India* reticently endures her British husband's callousness. Jhabvala has written about a particular section of Indian society, which thrived soon after India received her independence and has limited herself to a particular time-frame. Her themes do not possess a universal appeal. Her writings too do not become a part of feminist literature as they relate about women and their plight with no aim of ameliorating their pathetic state.

Kamala Markandaya is one of those contemporary writers who have tried to define the pathetic condition of Indian women by raising some feminist issues. She talks about women by raising some feminist issues. She talks about women trapped in their poverty like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) and Nalini in *A Handful of*

Rice (1966), whereas in *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) she has written about women belonging to rich families. Unlike Anita Desai and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, she points out that the crux of all prevailing problems of women is their financial dependence. Her women characters like Premal, Sarojini, Vasantha and Meera project the idea that the economic independence of women shall solve most of their problems. These characteristics of Kamala Markandaya's female protagonists distinguish them from women characters of other Indian English writers. Her women characters refuse to treat men as oracles. Her novels take up some feminist issues and provide a new, strengthened and independent image of women. Unlike other writers, she not only criticizes the deplorable status of women, but also wants to guide and encourage them to transcend it. Though she has suggested financial independence as a remedy to the doomed feminine world, yet many other problems concerned with women, such as social conditioning, sexual discrimination, forced sex remain unanswered. Still, Kamala Markandaya has successfully propounded some feminist ideas in her novels.

Shobha De's fiction deals with the lives of urban aristocratic women. Marriage to them is a convenience for money, social status and physical gratification, rather than having an emotional and psychological attachment. Shobha De portrays women who, while in quest of self-identity, lose their morality. Her female characters are modern, educated, glamorous, ambitious, money-minded and have thirst for physical gratification. They are relentlessly in search of a new life partner instead of analysing their marital problems, and are doomed by their spirit of romanticism. Her characters do not possess any moral or ethical values the Indian psyche normally associated with marriage. Infidelity is not a sin but a routine activity for them for which they have no remorse. Her novels portray the metropolitan cities, who have bartered values and ideal for superficial lusts – lust for money, physical gratification, success and ambition. Shobha De's feministic ideas lack Indianness. Her themes propagate the dilution of family ties by women in order to accommodate themselves in better social positions. Though she takes up some problems related with the lives of women, she fails to suggest any substantial or relevant solutions to them. Her novels present a very small section of contemporary society. The enthusiasm to ameliorate the condition of women in an underprivileged society often overlooks the difference in the plight of Indian and western women. According to the western feminists, women should attain their individuality within or without the family, whereas Indian women want to seek their individuality while remaining within the institution of marriage. They value their family, as well as their individuality. They normally do not favour fragmentation and dilution of familial / marital bonds. This difference in the temperament of Indian and western women nullifies the adaptation of western feministic ideology in India. Writers like Shobha De represent a small section of Indian women who get misguided and carried away by their emotional undulations and end their marital knots with in regrets.

In this whole scenario the fiction of Shashi Deshpande comes as a fresh air, which not only propagates feminist ideas but also advises women to understand their naked selves. Deshpande's novels suggest that women should take cognizance of their weaknesses, overcome them and implement their potentials in order to assert their individuality. As a novelist she mirrors the new socio-cultural context of the process of change. Her novels reflect the social realities of Indian life – they also reevaluate and reinterpret women's status, helping them to reinvent their identity and community positions, norms and values. The themes dealt by Deshpande in her novels possess universality. They do not refer to a particular woman or a particular section of women in the society but are representative of Indian womanhood. As compared to the novels

of Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, kamala Markandaya and other early writers, we find her fiction giving a more transparent picture of the status of Indian women. She is neither prejudiced against men nor has any partiality towards her female protagonists. She presents the true facet of the modern Indian society in her novels. Supporting the autonomous self-hood for women she suggests that substantial and reasonable methods should be employed to improve their condition. Like Virginia Woolf, she feels that women should be allowed to utilize their talents and simultaneously they should fulfil their duties towards their families. Like Betty Friedan, she too advocates that women should be equivalent to men and their existence should be noticed as human being. Like Simone de Beauvoir she traces and exposes the limitations associated with a woman's life from her childhood to womanhood. Deshpande's novels define the concept of feminism within the context of Indian social milieu. Her feministic concerns are different from those of the other contemporary writers. She presents the new image of the Indian woman-who wants to be a wife, mother and daughter, and simultaneously desires to achieve her individuality.

Thus we see that the conservative social norms and myths of feminine behaviour were challenged by feminist writers in Europe, America, as well as in India. The new climate recognized the vital contribution of women to the progress of humanity and sought a change in the social parameters. Women stepped forward to transcend the image of stereotypes in order to attain individuality. Although the acceptance and popularity of these feminist credo was initially propagated by socio-political factors, yet the important and vital role played by literature in popularizing the idea of female emancipation, equality and empowerment can never be undermined.

References:

1. Beauvoir, Simone De *The second Sex*, 1960, Trans. and Ed. H. M. Parshley, London, Vintage Books, 1989.
2. Friedan, Betty *The Feminine Mystique* New York A Laurel Bood, 1984.
3. Jhabvala, Ruth Praver *Esmond in India* Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1958.
4. Wollstonecraft, Mary *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, New York, Dover Publications, 1996.
5. Woolf, Virginia *A Room of One's Own*, 1984, London, Vintage 1996.
6. Ruth Praver Jhabvala : *Esmond and Julia*