

**REPRESENTATION OF MOTHERHOOD AND
WOMANHOOD IN THIRD WORLD WOMEN WRITING: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये
University Grants
Commission (UGC)

**MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT
1496-MRP/14-15/KAMY013/UGC-SWRO**

SUBMITTED TO

**DEPUTY SECRETARY
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
SOUTH WESTERN REGIONAL OFFICE
P.K. BLOCK, PALACE ROAD, GANDHINAGAR
BENGALURU- 560 009 (KARNATAKA)**

BY

**Dr SYED HAJIRA BEGUM
(PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR)
Assistant Professor and HOD
Department of Studies in English**



**JSS COLLEGE OF ARTS, COMMERCE AND SCIENCE
(An autonomous College of University of Mysore)
B N Road, Mysore – 570025, Karnataka
Re-accredited by NAAC with 'A' grade
Recognised by UGC as "College with potential for Excellence"**

March 2017

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March 2017

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the UGC – Minor Research Project Work entitled **Representation of Motherhood and Womanhood in Third World Women Writing: A Comparative Study** carried out is my own and has not been submitted in part or in full for any degree, diploma or other similar title.

(Dr. Syed Hajira Begum)

Principal Investigator

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project Work entitled *Representation of Motherhood and Womanhood in Third World Women Writing: A Comparative Study* is the result of the research work done by Dr. Syed Hajira Begum (Principal Investigator), Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Studies in English, JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Mysuru – 570 025, Karnataka, in fulfilment of UGC Minor Research Project for 2015-2017.

Principal

Annexure – VI

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG NEW DELHI – 110 002

Final Report of the Work Done on the Minor Research Project

- 1. Project Report No.** 2 / Final - 3/2017
- 2. UGC Reference No.**
1496-MRP/14-15/ KAMYO13/UGC-SWRO, Dated 4th Feb 2015
1496-MRP/14-15/ KAMYO13/UGC-SWRO, Dated 21st Oct 2016
- 3. Period of report:** From 11 August 2016 to 31st March 2017
- 4. Title of the Research Project:**
Representation of Motherhood and Womanhood in Third World Women Writing: A Comparative Study
- 5. a. Name of the Principal Investigator:** Dr Syed Hajira Begum
- b. Department:** Department of Studies in English
- c. College where work has progressed:** JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, B N Road, Mysuru – 570 025, Karnataka- INDIA
- 6. Effective date of starting of the project:** 2 Feb 2015
- 7. Grant approved and expenditure incurred during the period of the report:**
- a. Total amount approved:** Rs. 1,50,000-00
- b. Total expenditure:** Rs. 1,53,400-00
- c. Report of the work done:** Separate sheet attached
- i. Brief objective of the project:**
1. To explore the general conditions of African society and Indian society in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period with regard to women's status.
 2. To investigate the representation of women in different categories like 'mother', 'wife', 'sister', 'friend', 'goodtime woman', 'prostitute', 'courtesan', 'free woman', 'sexually liberated woman' etc., in the works of first generation, second generation and third generations women writers of African and Indian literatures.
 3. To analyse critically the works of men writers of these literatures viz. African and Indian to explore ideological commitments in their works. Based on these findings, this work aims to re-interpret subversive and canonical version of representation of women.
 4. To explore the evolving image of New Woman, consequently the paradigm shifts in portrayal and representation of women in these literatures.

5. It also aims to explore the feminism in these literatures based on the values of liberty, equality and humanism existing in Third World countries in general and African countries and India in particular. Thus this study focuses on the emerging trends in women writings of African and Indian, in recent fictional works.

ii. Work done so far and results achieved and publications, if any, resulting from the work (Give details of the papers and names of journals in which it has been published or accepted for publication)

Paper Presentation:

1. Presented a paper entitled “Aesthetics of Empowerment in Purple Hibiscus”, in a Two-Day UGC Sponsored National Seminar organized by Teresian College in collaboration with KSOU, Mysuru, held on 27th and 28th Feb, 2015.

Paper Publications:

1. Research paper entitled “Female Resistance and Self-Preservation in Kehinde”, in the journal, *Russian Studies in India: Languages, Literature and Culture in Comparison*, Combined Volume of 10-12 of 2013-2015, pp. 52-64, 2015, Publication of the University Department of Russian, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, ISSN 2349-4131.

2. Research paper entitled “Deconstruction of Gender Identities: A Study of the Novels of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie” in the journal, **Journal of English Language and Literature, JOELL** (Indexed Peer Reviewed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 86-93, Jan 2016, ISSN: 2349-9753, pp. 86-93, Impact Factor: SJIF 3.079.

3. “African Women Now and Then: Issues of Alienation and Identity” *Russian Studies in India: Languages, Literature and Culture in Comparison*, Vol. 13, pp. 88-103, Aug 2016, Publication of the University Department of Russian, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, ISSN 2349-4131.

4. Research paper entitled “Motherhood Paradigm in African Fiction: A Study” in the journal, *International Educational Scientific Research Journal (IESRJ)* (International Peer viewed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 2, Issue 12, pp. 16-20, Dec 2016, E ISSN: 2455-295X, Impact Factor: SJIF 3.606.

5. Research paper entitled “Third World Women Writing: An Overview” in the journal, *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELLH)*, (Indexed, Peer Reviewed and Refereed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp. 51-63, Jan 2017, ISSN: 2321-7065, Impact Factor: SJIF 4.287.

6. “Empowerment of Women in Purple Hibiscus”, *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELLH)*, (UGC Approved, Indexed, Peer Reviewed and Refereed online & Print Journal). Vol. 5, Issue 5, pp. 408-418, May 2017, ISSN: 2321-7065, Impact Factor: SJIF 5.27.

7. “Transcending The Margins: New Directions in Third World Women’s Writing”, *International Education Research Journal* (Communicated).

iii. Has the progress been according to original plan of work and towards achieving the objective, if not, state the reasons: Yes. The Project work was carried out according to the original plan of work and the objectives were accomplished.

iv. Please enclose a summary of the findings of the study. One bound copy of the final work done may also be sent to the Regional Office of UGC: Project completed and summary attached.

v. Any other information:

Under this project six research papers are published, one paper is presented and one research paper is communicated for publication in a journal.

Signature of the Principal investigator

Principal

(Dr. Syed Hajira Begum)

(Seal)

Annexure – VII

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG
NEW DELHI – 110 002

**PREFORMA FOR SUBMISSION OF INFORMATION
AT THE TIME OF SENDING THE FINAL REPORT OF THE WORK
DONE ON THE PROJECT**

1. Title of the Research Project:

**Representation of Motherhood and Womanhood in Third World Women
Writing: A Comparative Study**

- 2. Name of the Principal Investigator:** Dr Syed Hajira Begum, Department of
Studies in English, JSS College, B N Road
Mysuru - 570 025, Karnataka
- 3. Name and address of the Institution:** JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science,
B N Road, Mysuru – 570 025
- 4. UGC approval letter no. and date:** 1496-MRP/12th Plan/14-15/ KAMY013/UGC-
SWRO Dated 10th December 2014
- 5. Date of implementation:** 16-02- 2015
- 6. Tenure of the Project:** 21 Months (18 months + 3 months)
- 7. Total grant allocated:** Rs. 1,50,000-00
- 8. Total grant received:** Rs. 1,37,266-00
- 9. Final Expenditure:** Rs. 1,53,400-00 (Excess of expenditure Rs.
3,400/- met out of interest earned)
- 10. Title of the Project:** **Representation of Motherhood and
Womanhood in Third World Women
Writing: A Comparative Study**

- 11. Objectives of the Project:**
1. To explore the general conditions of African society and Indian society in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period with regard to women's status.
 2. To investigate the representation of women in different categories like 'mother', 'wife', 'sister', 'friend', 'goodtime woman', 'prostitute', 'courtesan', 'free woman', 'sexually liberated woman' etc., in the works of first generation, second generation and third generations women writers of African and Indian literatures.
 3. To analyse critically the works of men writers of these literatures viz. African and Indian to explore ideological commitments in their works. Based on these findings, this work aims to re-interpret subversive and canonical version of representation of women.
 4. To explore the evolving image of New Woman, consequently the paradigm shifts in portrayal and representation of women in these literatures.
 5. It also aims to explore the feminism in these literatures based on the values of liberty, equality and humanism existing in Third World countries in general and African countries and India in particular. Thus this study focuses on the emerging trends in women writings of African and Indian, in recent fictional works.

12. Whether the objectives were achieved: Yes, the objectives have been achieved using analytical method of comparison.

13. Achievements from the Project: The study taken up has given deep insights and new perspectives in understanding the women's status and struggles in life depicted in literary studies. A total of six research papers are published, one is presented and one more paper is communicated for publication.

14. Summary of the findings: Summary of the findings attached

15. Contribution to the society: Emphatically the study brings to the fore the sufferings of women in patriarchal societies in Third World nations and it urges for social justice and egalitarian approach in men's writings which may bring a change in society because literature is the reflection of society and it has educative value for everyone.

16. Whether any PhD enrolled/ produced out of the project: No

17. No. of publications out of the Project:

Paper Presentation:

1. Presented a paper entitled "Aesthetics of Empowerment in Purple Hibiscus", in a Two-Day UGC Sponsored National Seminar organized by Teresian College in collaboration with KSOU, Mysuru, held on 27th and 28th Feb, 2015.

Paper Publications:

1. Research paper entitled “Female Resistance and Self-Preservation in Kehinde”, in the journal, *Russian Studies in India: Languages, Literature and Culture in Comparison*, Combined Volume of 10-12 of 2013-2015, pp. 52-64, 2015, Publication of the University Department of Russian, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, ISSN 2349-4131.
2. Research paper entitled “Deconstruction of Gender Identities: A Study of the Novels of Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie” in the journal, **Journal of English Language and Literature, JOELL** (Indexed Peer Reviewed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 86-93, Jan 2016, ISSN: 2349-9753, pp. No. 86-93, Impact Factor: SJIF 3.079.
3. “African Women Now and Then: Issues of Alienation and Identity” *Russian Studies in India: Languages, Literature and Culture in Comparison*, Vol. 13, pp. 88-103, Aug 2016, Publication of the University Department of Russian, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, ISSN 2349-4131.
4. Research paper entitled “Motherhood Paradigm in African Fiction: A Study” in the journal, *International Educational Scientific Research Journal (IESRJ)* (International Peer viewed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 2, Issue 12, pp. 16-20, Dec 2016, E ISSN: 2455-295X, Impact Factor: SJIF 3.606.
5. Research paper entitled “Third World Women Writing: An Overview” in the journal, *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELLH)*, (Indexed, Peer Reviewed and Refereed Online & Print Journal). Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp. 51-63, Jan 2017, ISSN: 2321-7065, Impact Factor: SJIF 4.287.
6. “Empowerment of Women in Purple Hibiscus”, *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELLH)*, (UGC Approved, Indexed, Peer Reviewed and Refereed online & Print Journal). Vol. 5, Issue 5, pp. 408-418, May 2017, ISSN: 2321-7065, Impact Factor: SJIF 5.27.
7. “Transcending The Margins: New Directions in Third World Women’s Writing”, *International Education Research Journal* (Communicated).

SIGNATURE OF THE PRINCIPAL

INVESTIGATOR

PRINCIPAL

REPORT OF WORK DONE ON ANNUAL BASIS

Minor Research Project

(1496-MRP/12th Plan/14-15/ KAMY013/UGC-SWRO)

Title of the Project: Representation of Motherhood and Womanhood in Third World Women Writing: A Comparative Study

Year I (02.02.2015 – 28.03.2016)

Purchase of Equipment and Reference Books

Purchase of Laptop and Printer was completed in six months' time. The titles of the books were chosen keeping in view the theme of the topic and order was placed for reference books. The research work gained momentum with the purchase of Laptop and reference books.

Review of Literature

Extensive review of Literature was done visiting various University libraries to understand the facts about the topic. Literature collection and survey of the work was taken up and it was followed by preparing research papers on various themes that were chosen under the study.

Research Papers publication and Paper Presentations

Proposed research problems were taken up for analysis in preparing the research papers and were sent for publication in National and International journals. Meanwhile research paper for oral presentation was taken up showing the deep insights into the topic of project work. This exercise of research has resulted in publication of two research papers and one research paper accepted for publication.

Year II (11.08.2016 – 31.03.2017)

Purchase of Reference Books

Some more titles were chosen for in depth analysis of the topic.

Review of Literature

Further literature collection was taken up, followed by preparing research papers and sent for publication.

Report Writing

The information gathered from various sources was analysed and interpreted using the theories of Feminism and Post colonialism following deconstruction and subversion as the techniques to explore the representation of women in Third World Literature focusing especially on African and Indian women writings. The result of the analysis was discussed and report writing was done. One paper presentation and seven research papers are published based on the data gathered through this study. Of the seven papers prepared six are published and one is communicated to a journal, the result is awaited.

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1. Introduction: Society and Space for Woman

Today's women
Born yesterday
Dealing with tomorrow
Not yet where we're going
But not still where we were

Adrienne Rich

The women studies have been receiving increasingly academic and disciplinary recognition throughout the globe. It has emerged as a distinct genre. The writers are determined to narrate, and thus put on record their response and reaction to the place of a woman in the social system, giving way to an image of new woman. The advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience; in other words, a new element.

Women in Indian Society

Indian woman in pre-Independence era had a different status in society. She was considered a burden, and mostly being illiterate, she was considered to be a non-entity whose only obligation was to attend to the needs of her family. In Indian English writings and in most of the writings of the regional writers, she maintained the image of *Sati-Savitri*, self-sacrificial, denying her personal needs. In some of the writings by the Indian authors, her image oscillated between two extremes – the Westernised image and the image of an ideal mythical figure. But gradually, the impact of the social reformist's activities, the Gandhian ideology and the spread

of education brought a change in the set pattern which had been prevailing in India for the last so many centuries, advocating the belief that man is to rule and woman is to obey. Viola Klein opines that, “The attitudes of scholars towards women reflected the status of women in a given society, the prevailing ideologies concerning women in a certain historical period and the author’s personal attitude towards women” (3-4). Feminism in Indian English Fiction has been a series of counters and ordeals on the part of woman to strike roots, to belong and assert her identity in a transitional society. Woman, like man, is born free, but she has become the ‘subordinate sex’ ‘the other’. This is changing as women now do not conform but rebel. They are the ‘Kali’ and ‘Durga’ symbols of destruction as well as creation.

In Indian Fiction in English, women are assigned two types of roles: traditional or the conventional and the radical or unconventional. The traditional image of a battered condemned silent and weak woman figures out in the novels. The unorthodox suffer for their flouting of accepted social norms, for their rebelliousness. The conventional suffer too, but their suffering is sanctified by the norms of a patriarchal male-oriented culture. Both the types are shown to have the same experience for they suffer in one way or another. The radical ones suffer for their violation of the accepted norms of society or for even questioning them and due warning is given that if they do not mend their ways by smothering their desires, they have no salvation except in death. The conventional ones also suffer, though they are canonized by the norms of a patriarchal culture, and sacrifice themselves for the comfort of others and uphold traditions and conventions without knowing that these are engines of oppression of women. The conventional female protagonists are tolerant and submissive but do not seem to be ready to compromise their identity and individuality. They suffer from intense isolation because they cannot reconcile the demands of their psyche with those the world around them. They view this world as a hostile place often take a negative stance, which generates psychic states of fear, guilt, anger, bitterness, anxiety, helplessness and depression. The years of societal and cultural

conditioning teaches the Indian women to be self-effacing, submissive and subordinate to men, suffering of a patriarchal society in silence.

A.S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (1956) which was followed by Ananda Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva* (1957) presented a historical and sociological survey respectively of the status of women in India. The freedom movement, independence and spread of education contributed a lot in uplifting the condition of women in India. All these multifaceted activities and movements left their indelible imprint on the pages of literature of Post-Independence era. Many men and women writers created such female figures who symbolised the ideal of Indian womanhood. The early Indian novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan Raja Rao reflected sociological realism in their works and created the archetyped female protagonists to whom their husbands were gods and it was their duty to serve that god. After the Second World War, the women writers like Kamala Markandaya held mirror to the Indian villages where the husbands were worshipped like gods.

In the wake of feminist movement in India, themes like woman's search for identity, quest for selfhood, relocating the self, and awareness to seek a balance between tradition and modernity became popular in the works of male as well as female writers of Post-Colonial Indian English Fiction. The Indian Fiction resounded with the women's assertion of her individuality, social and economic freedom, freedom of mental make-up and also emotional independence.

The female writers like Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Mahasweta Devi, Bharathi Mukherjee, Rama Mehta, Manju Kapur, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy portray myriad faces of this new woman who gradually learnt to fight for her rights and lived not only as a wife, mother or daughter but also as an individual. These women give a tough fight against the established order and often come upon new concepts of

morality, sometimes they fall rebellion and go too far against the accepted code of morality that they enter into extra marital relationship and become lesbians. No doubt, the female protagonists of these Indian writers have to face many vicissitudes of family life but they keep abreast of all hurdles which come in their way in their marathon struggle for seeking their identities in this patriarchal society. They fight for their emancipation and empowerment. Education that has been their eye-opener has made these oppressed and suppressed women aware not only of their duties but also of their rights. The writers have been dealing meticulously with this emancipated 'new woman' and her efforts to face challenges and also how she, while living within the bounds and bonds of marriage, frees herself from the inhibitions of society, culture and her own conflicting emotions.

Sometimes this new woman succumbs to the present unfavourable circumstances and turns out neurotic. Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* (1963) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975), Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* (1960), Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) portray such women who in their fight for their existence lose their equilibrium. In their struggle for existence the new women muster courage to cross all the boundaries of docility and like Ibsen's Nora desert their husbands and children. One such illustrious character is Savitri in R K Narayan's *The Dark House* (1956). The gusto of being a liberated self as prompted by this New Woman's shattered conjugal life manifests itself in a socially and ethically unapproved solution, i.e. her being a lesbian. Thus contemporary or postcolonial Indian women writings provide thought provoking insights of contemporary life depicting women redefining themselves.

Women in African Society

In Africa there are traditionally many types of families. A family may consist of parents and children only, or it may include grandparents and / uncles and aunts. One point of difference between the Western family and the traditional African family is that the latter formalises the interpersonal relationships between its members into a tight miniature social system in which the so-called kinship terminology defines not so much kinship as social relationship. Thus “mother” does not mean as it usually does in the West, the woman who gave birth to the child. Rather a mother is a person, not necessarily even a female to whom the child behaves, and who behaves towards the child in the manner appropriate to that term. If the individual biological mother dies there are many others to take her place and fill the same roles in relation to the child.

In general, Africans get their familial identification from some kin based unit larger than the nuclear family. The effective family unit is ideally polygynous, and often comprises three generations, with married adult sons commonly remaining in their fathers’ compound. These two characteristics lead to relatively large family units. In African society the female principle dominates the social life. ‘Ani’ the goddess of Earth is supreme, worshipped by the entire community and it is ‘Ani’ (for Igbos- people of Nigeria) that maintains the social morality. Woman represents some aspect of Earth Mother. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Okonkwo, the protagonist takes refuge in his motherland, when he is exiled for seven years. Uchendu, the younger brother of Okonkwo’s mother explains the notion behind the African saying ‘Mother is Supreme’: “A child belongs to his father and his family and not to its mother and her family...And yet we say Nneka – ‘Mother is Supreme’...A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland” (1958: 134). In many Nigerian tribal societies women are conferred with complementary social status to support their husbands in economic development

of their family. But in some male dominated societies, men control the activities of household and its economy. Women have no say in decision making on issues pertaining to the entire village. It is the male elders of the village that make decisions on vital issues. Discussing the position of women in precolonial Nigeria, Mara Rojas has observed that, “women in precolonial societies held a complementary position to men although patrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures predominated Nigerian societies” (32: 1990).

Men writers employ ‘Mother is supreme’ as a Mother Africa Trope /Earth Mother and identifies woman with nation, as a ‘pot of culture’ which functions both formally and thematically to valorise African culture and analogizes woman to the heritage of African values, an unchanging African essence. However, the trope elaborates a gendered theory of nationhood and of writing, one that excludes women from the creative production of the national polity or identity and of literary texts. A feminized Africa thus becomes an object of male gaze, a passive object-nation. Thus metaphorically she is of the highest importance, practically she is nothing. This trope also explains the male-female power relations of domination and subordination.

For centuries, African women languished on the fringe of their universe; neglected, exploited, degenerated and indeed ‘made to feel like outsiders’. Contemporary Nigerian novelist, Cyprian Ekwensi’s novels by close analysis of women characters’ reveal that the themes are male-biased. Jagua in *Jagua Nana* (1961) is not a poor exploited woman who needs to be rescued. Ekwensi exposes the corrupting influence of urbanization in Nigerian woman to give up her traditional roles of mother, wife and daughter for other options of luxury. Also in *People of the City* (1954), Aina, Dupeh and Beatrice are depicted as femme fatales, seducing innocent men. In the novel *Jagua Nana*, prostitution is not related to the female social condition in patriarchal societies. Rather it is a metaphor for men’s degradation under non-preferred socio-political system – a metaphor which encodes women as agents for moral contamination in society. Ekwensi’s novels of social evils in Nigerian society have highlighted only the singular

role of the female as prostitute while they have maintained total silence on the pernicious role of the men who visit and trade in 'female flesh'. Okello Oculi, a novelist and poet from Uganda also has depicted postcolonial urban Africa in the same vein as Cyprian Ekwensi, with its night clubs, dance halls, corpulent businessmen, contractors, political sycophants and prostitutes. But even as they portray urban reality, they deliberately fail to see the prostitution as the product of a colonial legacy. Taken out of a stable rural economy, women in most parts of Africa were inevitably made to fend for themselves in an alien and hostile environment. Forced to eke out an existence, they were most often sexually exploited.

In Africa, the condition of the black race deteriorated under the rule of the white man. The main factor in this respect was the dislocation which affected the old village community and disturbed the natural balance between male and females. For men of all races and nationalities - Europeans, Indians, Chinese and African - there aroused a heavy demand for the sexual services of women, who happened to live under extreme poverty. Prostitution was not generally a serious problem in the third world before the intrusion of Western Colonialism. Most people there lived on agriculture, which encouraged early marriage and child bearing. For the rich, there was the system of concubinage and polygamy. Here and there some form of respectable prostitution was permitted for other sections of the urban population. In some places prostitution were attached to the temple, or – as in India – to the courts...they were all carefully trained and educated for the practice of their profession, and some of the respect and appreciation due to them is reflected in the *Kama Sutra*. ...All this quaint and rustic form of harlotry, which continued well into the twentieth century, was destined to give way to the more virulent form of capitalist prostitution introduced by the European colonialists...In India, the terrible conditions to which women were reduced by the colonial soldiers prompted the British parliament in 1888 to send a departmental committee to investigate the practice of prostitution in the army camps where prostitutes were encouraged and allowed to live...Imperialism

necessitated the despatch of a massive number of men in the form of soldiers, sailors, administrators and entrepreneurs to the colonial world and the result was a tempting demand for the sexual services of the native woman. In some places the industrial and social dislocation which encouraged prostitution in Europe was repeated in the colonies, and the colonialists went so far as to use prostitutes as a managerial weapon. In Ghana, for example “the factor used to discipline African workers was to take away their common whore. In other parts prostitution was encouraged by the police as a good source of income and by the trading companies as a chance for the consumption of liquor and Western good” (Khalid Kishtainy, 1982: 63-64).

In much of the African literature and criticism, the role of woman has to large extent been looked at from within the perimeters of home as mother, wife, lover or prostitutes. In Western fiction women have often been reduced to, and aligned along a limited spectrum from saint to bitch. For example, the virgin is a powerful symbol, embodying purity, love, heaven and beauty. In African fiction the virgin is usually absent as a type. Cyprian Ekwensi uses the Western stereotype and gives us the portrait of a good woman or wife as opposed to the bad woman or the harlot in the *Jagua Nana*. Ekwensi portrays the character of Jagua as a kind of woman all men fantasise about and a kind of woman men need, to initiate them into manhood, to sustain male ego and pander to it. But she has no identity except that of harlot, a sexually liberated woman.

Elechi Amadi, another Nigerian novelist presents in his novel *The Concubine* (1966), the life of Ihuoma, an exceptionally beautiful and well-behaved young woman. Amadi's sexism circumscribes his heroine's entire existence and the very title of the novel reveals the rigidly sexual mould in which Ihuoma has been cast. Amadi portrayed Ihuoma as a model traditional wife, showing 'great devotion to her husband, in every way she could think of'. Throughout the novel Amadi has shown Ihuoma as loyal and obliging and never repulsive. By making Ihuoma gentle, timid and totally dependent on man, perhaps Amadi wants to establish the patriarchal

notion that woman's life and existence is incomplete without the company of man. Implicitly *The Concubine* is a thoroughly misogynistic novel, its ideological function being to legitimate and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Like *Things Fall Apart*, it is concerned with the gender balance in Igbo society. But in Amadi's rendering of this theme, it is not the over-valuation of masculine values, rather the pernicious influence of female sexuality that threatens to destroy the social order.

African women writers have documented a truthful picture of the plight and suffering of women from their own experiences. They attempt to examine some of the African institutions affecting the interests of women, and have advocated rejection of those which are detrimental to their progress. They do not simply accept Western concept of mother, but question obligatory motherhood and the traditional favouring of sons. They see utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy as they show concern for children and for sharing household responsibility. They have also addressed some of the traditions influenced by colonialism and prevailing modern environment.

Literature in general and fiction in particular reflects the contemporary culture and social interactions of any country. As such it gives insight into the set-up of society, traditions, norms and the social position or status of women and men which regulate human relationships. Literature depicts the human drama in the backdrop of society where the lives, values and attitudes of men and women are undergoing major social changes.

2. Motherhood as Power Institution: Empowerment and Resistance

Motherhood is essential for the happiness of woman

And her ability to control her life

Filomena Chioma Steady

Motherhood is one of the most important contributions women could make to her family and to the nation. The concept of motherhood is a cherished one: caretaker, nurse, protector, and provider, a font of wisdom and a dispenser of a never-ending stream of love and comfort. These ideals are a lot to live up to, especially when the term “mother” is shared with the even greater symbols of Mother Nature, the mother country, and the Mother of God.

Throughout history, women are constant victims of society’s ideals. Traditionally, women were defined physically and intellectually as the ‘weaker’ sex, in all ways subordinate to male authority. There are certain rules imposed and standards implemented that women must follow. They are expected to comply with these ideals set by the society and, as a result, opportunities are limited to them and their importance in the society are abbreviated.

The Indian woman has been living in the male dominant, patriarchal, traditional, religious, caste and class ridden society. She has been living a life of being oppressed, exploited, victimised in the name of social and cultural restraints. The system of patriarchy hardly gave an individual identity to the Indian woman leave apart recognition of her talent and entity. She has had to maintain the tradition of tolerance, patience and persistence. She has had

to endure all kinds of exploitation – physical, mental, psychological, emotional apart from social, religious, cultural, economic and political exploitation. But even in oppressive conditions she has kept intact the ideals of womanhood and has survived and so this symbolizes her strength and her unique culture of survival.

In the colonial period in India, many reformers questioned the subordinate position of woman in Indian society. With Raja Ram Mohan Roy many other social ameliorates came forward to annihilate injustice meted out to women. They tackled social evils such as *sati*, fate of widow, widow re-marriage, polygamy, child-marriage, denial of property rights and education to women. Though such social reform movements of the 19th century and the nationalistic movement of the 20th century helped a lot in improving the condition of Indian women yet “for society as a whole, sex roles, stereotype images and the Indian woman’s conception of herself and her role in life remained virtually unchanged” (Agnew 16). Traditionally, Indian culture is a male-dominant culture. Indian woman ‘covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention, ignorance and reticence’ in life (as well as in literature) had no autonomous existence. She was what Sylvia Plath calls her, “the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow effacement at the wind’s hand” (157). With the influence of western education and culture, in the twentieth century the Indian woman has re-emerged as a new being. The Indian woman today is no longer a Damayanti. She is a Draupadi or a Damini or a Nora or a Candida or a Joan of Arc. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and political revolutionaries like Gandhi and Nehru lent a new dimension and a new direction to the Indian woman. It is true that men have almost always held women to be somehow inferior to them, treating them as if they belonged to a different species altogether. Even when they walked romantically lyrical over them they never regarded women as equal to themselves. All the important spheres of life were controlled and managed by men; women being relegated to the position of mere housewives, mothers, daughters etc.

This anomaly was bound to be resisted. The industrial revolution and feminism ushered in a changed outlook on life and raised the level of human consciousness and women were not left unaffected by the developments. The new circumstances forced them to raise their voice, with growing awareness more and more women came forward to champion their cause. In India, since ages a woman's role in life was strictly compartmentalized; she was a daughter, a wife or a mother. In all these roles she had to adhere to certain appointed norms; she had no separate identity as a human being. Things are changing now-a-days especially amongst the sections where education and material prosperity have ushered in a degree of enlightenment. Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, woman's place, position and especially the question of her identity are the major issues in India also. With feminism as a new way of life, a new perspective came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman's role in the society.

Indian society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. According to Sarabjit Sandhu, "The position of woman appears to be very strange. Like a pendulum she is swinging between the contrasting forces of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality and revolt and compromise" (quoted in Pandey 46). In India, the woman is neither free nor dependent. She is lying somewhere between the two. However, the urge for identity and independence is present in Indian womenfolk. A new woman has taken birth who questions submissiveness. In common with all women all over the world, Indian woman is also voicing her desire to be emancipated, to get rid of the unjust restrictions on her and the pervasive discriminations against her. She is seeking the right to be regarded as a whole human being, not simply as an adjunct to her male counterparts. Due to rapid increase in women's education in the last three decades, women's thinking and mode of living in India, have undergone a considerable change. The new generation of women in India

desire to assert themselves. The questioning and the challenging note are found in the works of the novelists.

In the changing pattern of society, because of the spread of industrialization, new scientific invention, rapid spread of education; a woman – particularly the educated one – has started to feel the uneasy burden of suppression or subjugation. She has become vocal in defining her identity. She is multifaceted and identity is no longer linked with the man's she is with. But at the same time the social perception goes on hammering into her unconscious, weighing her down mentally. She experiences a conflict between her personal values and larger social practices. The social and cultural assumptions prevent her from making contact with her own self. And this has resulted in her schizophrenic tendency. A woman in general feels insecure, in a male dominated atmosphere and Indian woman's psyche faces alternate moods of hope and despair of glow and gloom in her odyssey for identity and freedom. Women "have very limited freedom . . . Either society, religion or tradition control them and more often than not religion, traditional morality are used to exclude women from power and knowledge and reinforce patriarchal authority" (Jain 2001, 84). Thus an overview of the image of Indian woman reveals that she has always been at the receiving end in India. Even in the present times the lot of an economically independent woman is no better. She has to perform double duties (burden). She is never thought of as an independent individual taking her own decisions.

Woman in early Indian English fiction suffered mostly owing to the infidelity of her husband or the stigma of childlessness. Meena Shirwadkar observes that early works of Anand and Narayan are dominated by the male point of view. They have both shown girls as subordinate creatures, as pictures of pity and suffering (47). Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and Manjeri Isvaran present woman in the traditional image of the *Pativrata*. She is an object of pity and has no will of her own. To suffer in silence is her only life. In Anand's *Coolie* (1936), Laxmi, wife of Hari, lives in sub-human surroundings but sticks

to her husband without grudge or grumbling. Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) presents Rukmini as a dumb, docile wife who bears no malice towards her husband despite his extra-marital affair. Manjeri Isvaran presents Jagadamba as a silent sufferer in his novella, *Immersion* (1951). R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) presents Raju's mother as an innocent naïve woman, a mere shadow of her husband in contrast to Rosie (heroine). Thus in early Indian English fiction there was endless variety and monotonous similarity. The ideal of womanhood was motherhood, that marvellous, unselfish, all suffering, ever-forgiving mother. The Indian woman had only one facet. She was nothing, less than nothing, and she had to wait for a few decades to assume an existence and a name or identity.

In the post-colonial period many women writers have staged their protest against the double responsibility of women. This protest is voiced in many forms in Indian English fiction. Not only women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Jhabvala, Jai Nimbkar, Shobha De but male writers like Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar etc., dwelt on tortured womanhood. Women's fiction gives clear picture of the changing woman in the Indian society. A pathetic image of Indian womanhood was presented in Mulk Raj Anand's fiction. Tagore brought woman out of the kitchen into the parlour. His women characters, some, show the feminine strength who throw a challenge to the orthodox, hide-bound society. Many writers have proved their mettle in presenting the picture of woman and the thorns which prick her in the society preventing the required necessary growth. Society lays impediments in front of women that restrict her from self-realization. Given a chance, a woman can prove to be the best warrior to fight against the adverse situations and proceed towards the heights of social dimensions. The image of Indian womanhood is found in many of these works.

Modern African fiction deeply concerned with womanhood and motherhood has dramatized various facets of women busily engaged in restructuring the society exposed to the

onslaughts of the West. The most important factor with regard to woman in traditional African society is her role as mother and the centrality of this role as a whole. Glorification of Africa and African women has been an important mission of every committed African writer and especially African men writers in colonial and postcolonial eras. However, the ideology perpetuated by patriarchal society that woman could achieve happiness only through marriage and motherhood relegates women to become the slaves to men in the name of marriage. In African Literature, the 'Mother Africa Trope' is deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition and the sexual imperatives it had encoded shaped the writings of such diverse authors as Senghor, Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi etc., and implicitly shows the inherent favouring of certain issues in men writings notwithstanding the social reality as depicted in women writing. Postcolonial women discourse often compares patriarchy with colonial power, the imperial gaze, with the male objectifying gaze. The colonized nation is thus compared to a woman, not quite an independent subject; the bearer, not maker of her own meaning.

The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe is a good example of how female characters are portrayed in a popular and widely known pre-colonial Africa novel and as well illustrates the writer's ideology. This novel embodies the typical ideals of the woman as the nurturing mother and also describes mother's family as a tireless force whose good is to ensure the continuity of African culture and its people. The best example that illustrates the use of female in Achebe's novel is the fact that the main male character, Okonkwo, must be exiled to his motherland for the misdeed of accidentally killing one of his own tribesmen. The theme 'Mother is Supreme' in the novel shows the female as the mother figure that is there to nurture and save the men from themselves, and it endorses the African tradition which considers "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland (*Things Fall Apart*: 122). Achebe's mythic

concept 'Mother is Supreme' also illustrates his veneration for mother roles. However, Achebe's mythic concept 'Mother is Supreme' never goes with 'Motherhood paradigm' given by Amadiume. The recognition of the motherhood paradigm means that "we do not take patriarchy as given or as a paradigm" (*Reinventing Africa*: 21), which is quite contradictory to heroic conceptions of Okonkwo's character and the potential of man as celebrated by Achebe. Yet the concept 'mother is supreme' equally signifies that it doesn't shift the focus from man at the centre and in control to the primary role of the mother in the economic, social, political and religious institution. Explicitly, Achebe's exemplary efforts to naturalize motherhood carry an implicit male bias. Women are respected in African society for nothing, but for their ability to procreate. Motherhood thus has been described in glorious terms as the 'pinnacle of womanhood'. What is at issue, however is not mothering as a physical fact, but the social position and importance given to motherhood, and the meaning of mothering. As Mohanty put it: "That women mother in a variety of societies is not as significant as the value attached to motherhood in these societies. The distinction between the act of mothering and the status attached to it is a very important one – one that needs to be stated and analysed contextually (*Under the Western Eyes* 1991:60). The challenge thus is to find out what motherhood in Africa is about. This will reveal the differences between motherhood in Africa and in the West. If Amadiume points to African women's power being based on "the logic of motherhood" which according to her is a notion that may empower or disempower as it tends to be in the West. She argues further, that the issue of the structural status of motherhood is the main difference between the historical experiences of African women and those of European women, but she also realizes that "the very thought of women's power being based on the logic of motherhood has proved offensive to many Western feminists. It is easy to see why this is so since in the European system, wifhood and motherhood represented a means of enslavement of women. In the African system of matriarchy, it was women's means of empowerment" (*Reinventing*

Africa 1997: 114). Also for Oyewumi, the position of the mother, whatever the norms of marriage: “links the mother to the child and connect the children of the same mother to the child and connect the children of the same mother in bonds that are conceived as natural and unbreakable...The idea that mothers are powerful is very much a defining characteristic of the institution and its place in society” (*Family Bonds* 2000: 1097).

A review of contemporary African women’s writings like Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Kehinde* (1994), Nwapa’s *One is Enough* (1981), Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Yvonne Vera’s *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Butterfly Burning* (1998), and *Opening Spaces* (1999), Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2005), *Americanah* (2013) and many more; essentially represents numerous elements and new directions in the life of African women. Notwithstanding African women writers’ thematic, this body of work ironically earned the title – aggressive feminist writing or protest writing, which may not answer the disquiet of women writers for bearing ‘admirable silence’ for so long to ‘rediscover woman’. The so-called aggressive feminist writing questions the place of Africa in a world that she is not helping to create and in which she exists only as virtuality and thus it strives to open new paths for research. The need of the hour is to find a critical paradigm with commitment that must resist the temptation to relegate the work of women writers to the narrow group of feminist or protest writers.

It is not surprising that a major part of women’s resistance to male models of the modern should be precisely the status of the “traditional”, particularly traditional structures of kinship and gender. Most negatively it has been argued that the protagonists in Nigerian women’s novels struggle to overcome the cultural and sexual conditioning typical of the traditional patriarchal organization of many African societies. African women’s novels in general and Nigerian in particular deal with their specific problems of romantic and marital choice and offer

tropes for the desire for change and for new construction of gendered identity, but are not merely Mother Africa Tropes as depicted in men writings. These novels presenting the morality of female protagonists show a shift from informal economy in which women exerted significant economic and political power in their own right to the increasingly formalized economy fostered by colonialism and in terms of globalization. Modern African novel by women writers suggests the development of 'new' African consciousness, ensuring better future for Africa and tries to save the women from "a living tradition of suffering and humiliation".

3. Quest for Meaning and Self-Assertion: An Insight into III World Womanhood

Women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant

Elaine Showalter

Third world literature is the literature of the woman, of the black, and other formerly colonised ethnic segments. One of the paradoxical phenomena of the rise of cultural nationalism in the ex-colonies is that the women writers' attempt to give articulation to the woman's own unique agonies and quests which often involves challenging some basic tenets of their respective cultures.

Indian novelists in English have either glorified and idealized their women or exposed their pathetic and pitiable plight. In the novels dealing with East-West encounter, they project the best of their cultural heritage, the quintessence of their country's transcendental, traditional values embodied in *Sita* or *Savitri*. In the novels thematically set against the Gandhian backdrop, they are *Daminis* armed with indomitable courage and unflinching determination. But novels like Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* (1966) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947) which deal with hunger, famine, joint-family and industrialization, women are victims of injustice, cruelty and exploitation. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal look at them differently through their emotional break-downs and psychic turmoil. Woman is often found trapped in a myth of the wife and mother or the animal: "May be she had been an animal, only a nice, obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told. And

in return she had been fed and sheltered” (Sahgal 57). But the new woman protests. In the novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, woman is not a mere goddess or a lifeless engine of propaganda. She passes through a process of transformation which signifies for her a change from bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion, and from weakness to strength. Shashi Deshpande in her novels presents the Indian middle-class educated woman, who is engaged in an unconscious struggle to release herself from the stronghold of a tradition bound society. Deshpande’s women try to transcend it but fail. They raise a protest against social taboos and norms but end up in a stifled whisper. They are neither old, orthodox type nor the modern, westernized variety. They are the familiar Indian women of the middle-class society. Her novels usually begin with an unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alienation, accommodation and adjustment. The conflict in her protagonists is resolved through their desperate unconscious submission to traditional roles. Thus despite the impact of western culture and alien mores and values on them, they remain intrinsically Indian in sensibility. A plethora of women writers have constantly endeavoured to capture the essence of the feminine consciousness through their works and provide glimpses of the “New Woman” who breaks through revered archetypes. Empowerment is only possible when it is coupled with an awareness of the present situation. Indian women novelists present a new woman not an archetypal one in their works. Their vision reminds women that they too are capable of moving mountains and bringing about change, they being the change themselves. The New Woman’s image of the woman is that of an emancipated one who can live life on her own terms. The New Woman portrayed in some novels depicts the woman’s journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self. This awareness is the assertion of her individuality, her willingness to confront reality and not to run away from it. The new emancipated women are non-conformists who are discontented with the rhetoric of equality between man and women. They want to

liberate themselves from the shackles of tradition and exercise their rights for the manifestation of their individual capabilities and the realization of their feminine selves through identity, assertion and self-affirmation. The Indian woman who is new in her outlook also realizes that breaking away is also very painful. The modern educated female mind asks many questions. Modern Indian woman is no longer a child, a baby, a pet, under the control of man – the protector, the master, the guardian. For long, man has treated a woman as a child, but the realization of her new identity liberated her from the chains of oppression. The new woman is struggling to come out of the shackles of her sanskara/s. The modern woman is striving to be free and self-reliant, but then the timidity and difference, the product of the years' slavish and protected life pattern admits impediments. The New woman suffers from many weaknesses, inhibitions and barriers. Sometimes new awareness or identity alienates a woman from her man. Shirwadkar observes: An aspect of new woman - women protagonists project an image of Indian woman - like a frustrated woman, angry wife, in the process of asserting her individuality, - may leave the family or turn to another man other than husband, thus shattering the prime rule of chastity in the individual code (77).

The Hindu moral code known as *The Laws of Manu* denies woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family, and since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* in 1864 a significant number of authors have portrayed Indian women as long-suffering wives and mothers silenced by patriarchy. The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands, the Hindu goddesses *Sita* and *Savitri* serving as powerful cultural ideals for women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, *Sita*, supported by other figures such as *Savitri*, *Draupadi* and *Gandhari*. When looking at these narratives silence/speech can be a useful guide in interpreting women's

responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation.

The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. The novels of some contemporary men writers do not subscribe to this image. Writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Bhabani Bhattacharya have not portrayed Indian women in significant roles in their works. Wherever they have tried to characterise women, it has been in the traditional mould. Raja Rao spiritualises and glorifies the concept of a mother in his work *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960); the girls he describes bend their will to that of elders. The silent, suffering nature of woman as a wife is emphasised by Mulk Raj Anand in *Coolie* (1936) and Bhabani Bhattacharya in *Music for Mohini* (1952). R K Narayan projects the image of a suffering wife in his novel *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), and *The Dark Room* (1938). Manohar Malgonkar focused on the problems faced by women during and after partition of India. In *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), he described women who were rescued from prostitution, restored and accepted by the benevolent men who offered themselves to marry them.

Early Indian novels in English reflects how a girl is unwelcome in the family and explores the reasons behind the traditional view – dowry system and son preference. The reason for joy at a son's birth is important from a woman's point of view also. A son's mother is the proudest person at the time of his marriage. However, the influx of western culture did bring about a change of attitude towards girl especially after independence. We can see a change for example in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954). Kalo, the

blacksmith, would have liked a son to work with him at the smithy, but love for his wife who had died at child-birth made him love his daughter and educate her. He becomes a rebel when he finds the society indifferent to her brilliant academic achievements. In *So Many Hungers* (1947) Rahul, the father-to-be, wants a daughter, but his mother and his wife wish for a son, according to the traditional preference for sons.

It is in the novels of Indian women writers in English and regional women writers that we get more realistic portrayals of women. As stated by K Meera Bai “If traditional women who still retain their individuality make their appearance in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, women who face challenges in their quest for self-fulfilment are seen in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. Likewise, women who opt for modernity for convenience and not out of conviction are presented by Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. Women who use modernity as a licence for licentiousness too can be seen in these novels...” (1991: 35).

Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonical versions. Implicitly, the work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women’s demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression and, thus, re-writing the History of India.

Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) is a subtle study of the immense change that the Gandhian movement of the thirties brought into the life of the Indian woman and yet didn’t let her cross the conventional, the so-called *feminine* boundaries. The novel traces the material and psychological revolution that accompanied the emergence of the woman from within the twin

incarnations of the *Devi* and the *dasi* that has reigned the imagination of the patriarchy since ages. In *Kanthapura*, the ideal woman is projected in the figure of the ever-obedient and eternally suffering Sita. Contrary to this, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) depicts women's issues and problems very deeply. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding and shows that women are not lesser human beings, rather they are sometimes more dignified than men because of their greater human virtues and qualities. They suffer heroically, though they are strong willed. Some of them sublimate their desires in religious faith. She describes the pulls that an Indian woman has to face between tradition and modernity. As stated by William Walsh: "Her particular strength lies in the delicate analysis of the relationship of persons, especially when these have a more developed consciousness of their problems. She has been most successful and at her best, an impressive best, in leading with the problems of the educated and middle class and has a gift for delineating the self-imposed laceration of the dissatisfied (1978: 66).

In the novel *The Day in Shadow* (1991) Sahgal, raises her voice against the economic violence done to a divorced woman by her husband and presents the most excruciating problem faced by a divorced woman, Simrit. In addition to the existential and emotional problems she becomes the victim of financial exploitation by her ex-husband. After divorce she does not feel free. She faces disorder in the usual routine. Simrit's marriage is an example of a woman's patriarchal encasement. Som reduces her to "a utility item, and object for decoration, for possession and for man's sexual gratification" (Arora 56). She is eminently exploitable and lacks the courage to extricate herself from the incapacitating marriage. This is the reason why John Stuart Mill condemns marriage to be the worst form of slavery: "No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is" (The Subjection of Women: 207). This explains Simrit signing of the Consent Terms of her divorce settlement without

comprehending its implications. She realizes later that the document that she unwittingly signs is a legal conundrum, a deliberate act inflicted on her to carry the burden of the highest rates of tax. She is brutally used even after the divorce that is supposed to deliver her from bondage. Her docility and restrained behaviour work against her welfare and peace. The process of divorce with its demand of a redefinition of the self, life, place in society and goals unnerves Simrit. For some “divorce will be the end of something that has become intolerable. What you don’t know is that you are getting into another way of life that can be just as painful, that divorce is only the beginning” (Arora 89). Her fiction also focuses on Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realization. As a woman novelist, Sahgal recognizes that her primary obligation is that of advocating the emancipation of women. She has gone deep into the female psyche in her novels. She describes in her novels how woman is exploited even during the modern times by both the individuals and the society. She tried to portray the sensibility of woman that how a woman looks out at herself and her problems. The clear message Sahgal gives is men and women are equals and peaceful survival depends on mutual respect and understanding, women should have the moral courage to claim the rights and ‘men... were born to lead and educate sometimes to triumph’. (Shadow 236).

Similarly, Shashi Deshpande too reveals with a feminist perspective the revolutionary sentiment of an unusual woman character Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), who revolts against the age-old traditions of orthodoxy and conservatism in order to assert her independence and identity. The issues and themes in her novels arise from the situation of women at the cross roads of a transitional society, changing from traditional to modern. With rare sensitivity and depth, she portrays the dilemma of the educated middle class Indian woman trapped between her own aspirations as an individual and the forces of patriarchy which confine her. G.S. Amur rightly observes: Woman’s struggles in the context of the contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and, most important of all, as human

being is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a writer. (Amur 10). In *The Binding Vine* (1992) Shashi Deshpande deftly handles the juxtaposition of the two situations – rape committed within and outside marriage. The narrator-protagonist Urmila (called Urmi) highlights the despair of two women – Mira, who is a victim of marital rape and Kalpana, who is brutally raped outside marriage and is now on her death-bed. Through this novel, Shashi Deshpande sensitively depicts the trauma of such married women whose bodies are violated by their husbands but who would neither protest nor reveal this to anyone for the sake of social and moral security. She also highlights the plight of the women who are raped outside marriage. Such unfortunate victims often prefer suffering in silence to being exposed to the humiliation involved in publicizing their tragedies. Through the voice of Urmi, Deshpande offers us a glimpse into the lives of numerous other women who are victims of one or the other form of violence, oppression or deprivation.

Independent India has witnessed the various phases of women writing till 1960s the works of women writers mostly deal with male domination, and on themes depicting that patience is the ideal slot, suffering and subjugating were the popular ideas. Literature was a means of reinforcing cultural and social values, in particular the idea of the submissive woman. Women writers during 1970s brought a big change, by transforming their own experiences as women as well as their femininity into literary expression. The 'new woman' replaced the suffering and submissive models as Flavia writes: "The new woman is assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her true self. In these years a Class – Oriental fiction emerged: the woman, who still suffers, but not in silence as she used to be" (1991: 49). Questioning of Sita in Anita Desai's Novel *Where Shall we go this Summer?* (1975) about her fifth pregnancy shows her rebellious spirit and voices a note of dissent and a new sensibility and consciousness which will no longer tolerate the suffocating familial, institutional, political and cultural norms which place her in a humiliating subject status. Women-centric novels of Indian women writers

in English explicitly show women's struggle is not a crusade for sexual and social justice, but a paradigm that articulates a still unrealised striving for self-expression. This concept of 'new woman' as a paradigm also finds expression in postcolonial African literary study which too often has been held captive by politics of gender discrimination.

In *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) Chinua Achebe depicts the problem created by colonisation and illustrates the new role women could play "to bring together as many broken pieces of the tragic history as she can" (1987:82); whereas Emecheta's novel *Kehinde* (1994) is both a continuation of and a challenge to the well-known theme in African women's writing of women's suffering and confusion due to changing ideas of marriage and motherhood. These novels are written in different contexts, but they deal with a postcolonial reality where women characters are polarised into either the 'submissive woman' or the 'cynical modern woman'.

Exploring the interstices of the imaginary and the real, *Anthills of the Savannah* recounts the story of a London-educated Nigerian woman. Beatrice Okah, who boldly opposes the age-old African tradition – the naming of the child only by the father: "...it is really safest to ask the mother what her child should be called" (206). This breaking with tradition suggests a new beginning, ignoring the Western tradition, and African as well. Beatrice serves as a passion and inspiration to men around her with her urge for new culture. Achebe's female character rises above the oppressive patriarchy in order to dismiss male superiority. Beatrice represents a small minority of women in 'a lop-sided system in which the African men received a higher education. Having transcended these barriers, she earns respect from her male counterparts and joins the revolutionary elite to combat the oppression inflicted by the military dictatorship. But when read this novel of Achebe in comparison with his other novels like *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*, which show women in submissive, inconsequential roles, we find a discernible change in the style of his female portraiture. All his novels except *Anthills* speak of the Igbo traditional society dominated by males, where female characters feature only

in minor traditional roles. Nevertheless, Beatrice, a modern educated contemporary figure with a 'determination to be resourceful and self-reliant is depicted in a role that women have occupied many times before in the mythologies of nations, states and politics; she incarnates the ideals and desires of men. It appears her character is 'old wine in a new bottle'. To this observation might be added that the scope of the role accorded to her has been minimised in an attempt to keep the male characters' achievements at a higher level. She becomes 'the harbinger of new social order' but only as a 'last resort'. The reality of living is that Nigerian men (any man for that matter) will not easily relinquish their domination and allow women to play their part in the forging of a 'new nation'. To be explicit, this is the greatness of Achebe in creating a 'New Nigerian' woman character with an accurate vision of what went wrong in Nigeria. She is also the portrait of a woman of strength who can make a meaningful contribution to the building of a new nation. Achebe is hopeful in the novel that the women-centred ending would seek to link, rather than oppose, the question of African women's roles to the larger problems of the post-colonial nation. Achebe presumes that hope lies not in separating women's issues, but in integrating them, and in looking to women continually in the process of social change. *Anthills of the Savannah* thus seeks to restore the rightful status to women in African society, and illustrates a culture in which women must save the country from deterioration. *Anthills of the Savannah* explicitly contains commentary on the changing roles of women, and it also emphasises that women cannot passively expect men to dismantle their long-standing gender biases. The task of altering the present inferior female image rightfully belongs to every woman. If, for Achebe, Beatrice's assertion in *Anthills of the Savannah* illustrates a culture in which women must save the country from its downfall (a role accorded to a woman in keeping with African communalism), Kehinde in Emecheta's novel goes further to explore the extent to which a woman can realise her primary role not only as a mother but as a wife as well – a dialectic subverting powerlessness of women to authority which I eventually would like to

relate to Emecheta's as well as to Achebe's writing. It is significant to consider here the responsibility of the Third World writer that Achebe expresses in *Anthills*. In Chapter 12, Ikem Osodi, the *alter ego* of Achebe in the text, speaks before an audience at the University of Bassa. At the end of his speech, the chairman states '...that writers in the Third World context must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibility of professing prescription' (148). Ikem responds by shouting 'writers don't give prescriptions.... They give headaches!' (149). The point I would like to make clear is this; Achebe as a Third World male writer has given a 'headache' to his fellow male writers to consider the prominence and importance of female roles in the postcolonial context. What he has provided to his female counterparts is a prescription for the social problems of African societies. However, Emecheta's novel *Kehinde*, though depicts the coming of age protagonist bringing about the emergence of femaleness yet considered as culturally inappropriate because of her extra-marital affairs. Kehinde, the new African woman, of a more radical brand will probably wish to define the terms of her womanhood, yet she is attempting to disapprove the traditional practice of polygamy in a modern setting.

Kehinde Okolo, a Nigerian woman, emigrates to England with her husband Albert and lives there for eighteen years. However, when she returns to Nigeria, having tasted freedom and affluence in London, she cannot stand the noise, dirt and the chaotic hustle bustle. Most shocking is her subservience to her husband. Not able to approve of her husband's choice to be a 'polygamist' in conformity with African tradition, she longs for total freedom and finds ultimate in her individuality and self-sufficiency. However, the vision of Kehinde includes a keen search for human, social, sexual and political values within a harmonious social order. Emecheta's vision in creating a role model, Kehinde, who refuses to sacrifice optimism to dry cynicism, expresses her stand as an insatiable and unshakable optimist, who never wavers in her belief in the ability of human beings to create a better world than the one they live in. She

is not afraid to advance her moral idealism in a world which now scoffs at such actions of women that are considered as threats to African traditions and customs.

The women depicted in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Kehinde* do not meekly accept the cultural, social and political conditions imposed on them. The spirit of resistance and social violation is partly reflected in their changed attitude towards marriage and motherhood. But under pressure and compulsion they are forced to go by their inheritance of traditional womanhood performing their supportive roles. Many of these power mechanisms surface in times of crisis, shedding of the demeanour of submissiveness, extracting other modes by which African women would have access to power. Similar to Beatrice's character in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Emecheta's Kehinde also is a new breed of Nigerian woman in the making. Both Beatrice and Kehinde belong to a new set of characters that have emerged over the years in Nigerian literature, characters who are searching for what can be referred to as 'the third force', not a replica of Africa's traditional past, nor a model of the West, but a new, different, and especially African way. The concept of 'New Woman' offers a portrait of one who tries to emancipate her from the restrictive norms of conduct imposed by the male-dominated tribal set up. Both Beatrice and Kehinde show this spirit in totality. African communalism, as Stegmann (1974: 84) states "implies a standard or value of submergence rather than self-realisation". In traditional African societies, the role of every individual is to keep the tradition and ensure continuity of the clan for its coherence. However, there is a shift from the collective to the personal, from committed to the individual in the recent women's writing. This shift is expressed by the quest for identity. This questioning for identity is in a way lead to self-exploration which pervades the entire production of contemporary women writing that gives the heroine a questioning status, thus enabling a woman to be away from the mythological and constraining stereotypes. However, despite the relative expansions of space and voice, the emerging image of women is still that of a "suffering woman being". It can be

added that in contemporary women's writing the suffering is modern, urban and globalised, and that in real life, just like in fiction, women do still suffer. Notwithstanding the contemporary African women confront individual problems as the African society grapples with gender, class, ethnic and other social inequalities. It is high time for male and female African writers in the contemporary era to retrace their roots, and in the process, finding a point of convergence that will provide greater meaning to the interactions of the male and female in the search for a construction of an African feminist standpoint based on African cultural specificities. The literary genres should emphasize showcases of complementarity at the individual, family and societal levels. Practices that are considered inimical to development like widowhood, polygamy, succession rites, incest, tribal conflicts, discrimination against the girl child, forced marriages, occultism etc., warrant a stronger interrogation without any biases and prejudices. This will fill the missing links and gaps by re-situating the role of men and the dignified place of the African woman in the African literary landscape in a globalizing world context.

4. Breaking the Bonds: New Woman and Search for Individuality

When “the repressed” of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning with a force never let loose before

Cixous and Clement. The Newly Born Woman

Literature as the mirror of social change and custom is the focal point from which one can gather the sociology of the culture and learn about women’s place within it. The common African ambience after colonial impact is seen in the Negritude Movement, a rallying cry that spurred the masses to awaken to the value of their own native culture and to break free of the psychological and physical shackles of colonial power. As per the maxim of Taine, literature is the product of time, race and milieu. As such, we find the social upheavals of the time reflected in the writings of the period. This is particularly true of African literature which has always faithfully mirrored social changes.

Women writing in Africa, which saw the light of the day only in recent times, assigns to itself the function of bringing out the history of women and their experiences through the centuries. This other side of the story reveals information about African women who were silenced by the master-narratives that focused on the canonized racial and sexual superiors. African women writers on one hand, have succeeded in liberating women from the mystique of motherhood, and, on the other have, presented womanhood within the concept of larger social problems. Motherhood is essential for the happiness of woman and her ability to control

her life. But Western concept of it appears to be different and contradictory, antifeminist in argument. African feminism attaches much importance to the centrality of children. The condition of women in African society is fraught with contradictions and oppositions, emerging from the colonial situation in Africa. African women writers today narrating their own experiences to show the plight of African woman have taken a militant feminist stand to question the traditional attitude to womanhood and to find rightful place for women in society.

The topic of the self has long been significant in feminist philosophy, for it is pivotal to questions about personal identity, the body, sociality, and agency that feminism must address. Simone de Beauvoir's provocative declaration, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other," (1997: 205) signals the central importance of the self for feminism. To be the Other is to be the non-subject, the non-person, the non-agent—in short, the mere body. In law, in customary practice, and in cultural stereotypes, women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated, diminished, and belittled, when it has not been outright denied. Throughout history, women have been identified either as pale reflections of men or as their opposite, characterized through perceived differences from men and subordinated as a result of them; in both cases, women have been denigrated on the basis of these views. Since women have been cast as lesser forms of the masculine individual, the paradigm of the self that has gained ascendancy in Western philosophy is derived from the experience of the predominantly white and heterosexual, mostly economically advantaged men who have wielded social, economic, and political power and who have dominated the arts, literature, the media, and scholarship. Gendered conceptions of the self, contribute to the valorisation of the masculine and the stigmatization of the feminine. The masculine realm of rational selfhood is a realm of moral decency—principled respect for others and conscientious fidelity to duty—and of prudent good sense—adherence to shrewd, fulfilling, long-range life plans. However, femininity is associated with a sentimental attachment to family and friends that spawns favouritism and

compromises principles. Likewise, femininity is associated with immersion in unpredictable domestic exigencies that forever jeopardize the best-laid plans and often necessitate resorting to hasty retreats or charting new directions. By comparison, the masculinized self appears to be a sturdy fortress of integrity. The self is essentially masculine, and the masculine self is essentially good and wise.

The portrayal of women as abject victims of the patriarchal family has been challenged and modulated in contemporary feminist philosophy. An early feminist who aimed to revise traditional, implicitly masculinist, autonomy with a conception of freedom that incorporated women's experience was Beauvoir. According to her, 'women' is a category imposed by society; women's selves, then, are also in large part imposed on them by society, and in her view women would do well to take hold of their claims to freedom and choice and thus reclaim their freedom and selfhood. Implicitly, feminist reconstructions of the nature of the self are interwoven with arguments that draw out the emancipatory benefits of conceiving the self, in one way rather than another. But as stated by Katherine Frank, the contemporary African fictional heroine has “the fundamental problem of divided self and she is torn between the two antagonistic identities: her communal bred sense of herself as an African, and her feminist aspiration for autonomy and self-realisation as a woman” (1987: 26). Beatrice Stegmann has observed in her article “The New Woman in Contemporary African Novels” that the major thrust lies in the inherent paradox of the African communalism, which according to her “implies a standard or value of submergence rather than self-realisation” (1974:84). In traditional African societies, the role of every individual is to keep the tradition and to ensure continuity of the clan, for its coherence. But the ‘new woman’ or ‘feminist’ as Stegamann observed, rebels against such traditionalism because she evinces “a theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity rather than her kinship relations where she has responsibility to realise her potential for happiness rather than quantitative financial worth, and

where she must reason about her own values rather than fit into stereotyped tradition” (1974: 89).

Flora Nwapa’s protagonists – Efuru, Idu, and Amaka are the perfect figures of ‘new women’ as defined by Beatrice Stegamann. Their lives are the epitomes of self-worth in the realisation of which they rebel against African traditions. These women characters without ignoring their commitments, try to exercise their choice in fulfilment. Efuru, the protagonist of the novel, *Efuru* (1978), is a good natured woman fulfilling her duties both as wife and daughter-in-law as well. She is also noted for her business acumen, wealth and resilience. She flouts the conventions of marriage and patriarchal traditions by marrying Adizua without bride price being paid to her father. In reading Efuru’s rebellion, Florence Stratton states: “...but what Efuru does not yet know is that in choosing to be Adizua’s wife rather than her father’s daughter, she has merely exchanged one inhibiting role for another” (1994: 93).

But for Efuru, it is not a question of exercising her choice between her father and her husband. She satisfies both her father and her husband by insisting on payment of the bride price. She marries the man she loves and is rehabilitated in her natal home. In a way, Efuru is more a reformer than a rebel. She is an agent of change in the sense that she bends the rules for her own purposes. Idu, the protagonist of Nwapa’s novel *Idu* (1970), also flouts the convention of wife-inheritance when her husband passes away. She decides to end her life through starvation thereby resisting the role of the disenfranchised widow who must submit to. Yet another such character is Amaka, the protagonist in Nwapa’s *One is Enough* (1981), who shows the option open to women reduced to the position of underdogs even after a marriage because of childlessness. But she decides her future by abandoning her husband. Settled in Lagos, not only does she succeed in business, to the envy of others, but also, has two children by another man whom she refuses to marry. She takes utmost care of her children and devotes much of her time to promote her contract business. Amaka’s refusal to marry indicates that

“one husband is enough” in keeping with the tradition. It is a radical departure from the example of Efurū, a woman deeply rooted in the traditional way of life remarries but also fails in her second attempt for conception of child.

Nwapa’s central figure questions tradition but through authorial subconscious intervention appears to return to social convention. Though ‘marriage’ as an institution is under serious inspection by Nwapa, she examines this institution from the point of view a barren woman. She also takes up the issue of economic aspects woman’s lives. The financial status of women within and outside marriage has been critically examined by Nwapa. According to her women must become economically independent like Efurū or Amaka in order to combat hardships of womanhood. Emphatically she shows in her novels how emotional or financial dependence upon men cost women in their very existence. Nwapa’s treatment of marriage in her novels is positive in comparison with that of Buchi Emecheta, because though Nwapa highlights the problems and makes the implicit demand for improvement, yet she never rejects the institution of marriage and the association of family in her novels. She believes in bringing balance and harmony in family and society. She wants to tone down the voice of resentment and wishes for better understanding between the two genders within the family structures. Her novels *Efurū* and *Idu* emphasise this womanist point of view of Nwapa in contrast with Buchi Emecheta’s feminist focus in her novels.

The traditional approach has forced women to stay in deprivation for centuries. A sense of guilt grips them the moment they perceive elements of rebellion boiling within them. This sense of mental slavery and subjugation is one of the major reasons of backwardness among women. There need not to be any compulsion for war of wits or whimsical reactions among the two genders for a respectable space for women in society. It is a psychological problem that can be solved by proper grooming and balanced approach towards life and society. This is what seems to be the essence of women’s writing irrespective of the country they belong to.

The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a creative surge in Indian Writing in English in general and in women's writing in particular. After the writings of the triumvirate comprising Raja Rao, R K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, the second generation that contributed to the works of their preceding counterparts, includes some eminent women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur among others. These women writers depict the Indian woman in all her changing faces, fires and fervour. The renaissance of the Indian woman began with the Independence. Gandhiji's clarion call of 'Swaraj' brought woman out of the four walls. She had no identity or individuality, but with the changing political scenario, the social stage also underwent a dramatic change.

The modern woman has become more aware of her potential; she is mentally and physically equipped to take stride with the fast changing values of life. Yet her journey cannot reach its zenith without the support of her companion's comradeship. Most women writers such as Kamal Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others seldom portray the psychic tensions and anxieties of today's woman in a traditional society. Desai explores these troubled realities and presents them in accordance to the present day's understanding. In Jhabvala's the precedence is on the social background of the central character. In Sahgal's fiction the focus is on the social life of the upper class aristocrats., while in Markandaya, the political, social, and cultural background is depicted. Desai shifts the locus from the external to the internal. She uses the language of the interior. Her novels give a faithful expression to the "long smothered wall of a lacerated psyche and tell the harrowing tale of blunted human relationships". In *Fasting and Feasting* (1999) Desai explores the social value system that affects woman, whether she is in a conservative environment as the Indian society or the advanced American one. Desai's work is a part of a new style of writing, dealing with foreignness and dividedness. In *Fasting and Feasting* Desai

preens through the cultural boundaries and reflects the universality of human aspirations and dilemma. The world by and large is an institution; there are prescribed roles, and expectations for all, and especially for women. The universal mother figure is idealised by every religion, culture, society and country, thus woman as a mother or grandmother is a significant archetypal image of the world. A woman is expected to fulfil these roles besides being a wife or a sister, while in living up to these expectations she loses her own identity. Uma, the protagonist of *Fasting and Feasting* is a curious mixture of ancient values and modern outlook. After the failure of two unconsummated marriages she stays back with her parents. Uma's childhood is spent in caring for her brother and her youth destroyed by the two avaricious men and her middle age by pampering the demands of her family. She seeks solace in her books and slowly becomes assertive about her wishes. Though her little acts of rebellion may not mean much, but her attempt at achieving small victories is proof of her ability to shape her own destiny. In Uma, Desai sees the image of a new woman, a unique combination of the old values and the new spirit.

In her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arundhati Roy deconstructs the stereotypical characters of women and gives a message that women can play an equal part with men, only if they gain a distinct voice of their own and learn to transcend the traditional barriers of their silence. Roy attacks the age old attitudes and constructs such as phallogentrism – the view cantered on or emphasising the masculine point of view – which has social and religious sanction. By focusing attention on the plight of women and social injustice, she has established the ever-changing role of women in Indian postcolonial literature. The protagonist, Ammu – a mother of a son and a daughter – a divorcee is a rebel, who embarks on a journey with a man she loved - an untouchable thereby defies the world altogether. Implicitly *The God of Small Things* subverts the existing social order by bringing down the privileged dominant sections to the margins and by pushing the others towards the centre. She seems to assert that a woman is

a being. She is not an appendage of man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own way to salvation.

The contemporary Indian Writer Manju Kapur focuses in her novels the predicament of middle class educated Indian women, their quest for identity, marital compatibility and sexual fulfilment, their expectations leading to a sense of frustration and disillusionment. Though her sphere is constrained to familial roles in her novels yet she suggests that the potential of a woman is such that she can be an artist and a mother both simultaneously, providing an outlet for the liberated talents thereby empowering women in today's complex world of competitions. Manju Kapur thus has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. She raises innumerable issues that are deep-rooted within the family-revolt against the age old tradition, the search for identity and the place of women in Indian society. Narrative of Manju Kapur's first novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) set in 1940s, revolves around the institution of marriage, which has received recognition and approval in all cultures, in all times. However, her novel signifies marriage as a patriarchal attribute that decides the complete suppression and defeat of women's identity. In her quest for identity, Virmati, the central character of the novel rebels against tradition. She is impelled by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter. She has therefore, plunged into a dedicated effort to carve an identity for herself as a qualified woman with a faultless background. The circumstances do not allow her to assert herself as an independent woman in her life-time. While in the generation of Kasturi, Virmati's mother, woman's role was confined to child bearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati took some bold and radical steps in joining the political movement for India's freedom, asserted the need for education and independence for woman. As a nonchalant representative of the middle generation, Virmati breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women. After

forcing Harish - a Professor of English and father of two kids - to marry her, she finds her status as a second wife problematic owing to the antagonism of family members. She remains a social misfit as contemporary social ethos does not yet approve of such an alliance. Virmati is the emblem of the new woman of the forties who wanted to walk hand in hand with men. She rejects the kind of life led by her mother, fights for women's independence and a respectable social status.

Her other novel, *Home* (2006) reveals a universal truth that joint families can both obliterate and preserve women's maturity and individuality, sometimes the journey for women could be a self-alienation to self-actualisation. *Home* is story of three women's negotiation in life: Sona, Sona's daughter Nisha, and Sona's sister Rupa. All women in the story are unhappy for one or the other reason. Sona is beautiful and married to a rich businessman, but unhappy as she could not conceive for many of her married life and forced to take care of Vicky. After ten years she is blessed with a daughter first and later then a son. Whereas Rupa is unhappy because of not being beautiful and rich as her sister, moreover she is also childless. Rupa started a small business to improve her economic condition. The third generation is more assertive and wants to negotiate for her rights; Nisha fights for her happiness; as she is educated, she has a modern approach towards life and relationships. She falls in love with a boy of low caste and economically also poor. She feels humiliating as her dreams are shattered by her family. She makes her father agree to support her for an independent business. Nisha proves herself capable of living independently, yet agrees to marry a middle aged man as a compulsion not from the family but even she feels her life is incomplete without a man. Eventually she leaves her business contentedly for the sake of her children. It's not Nisha's loss, it is only her way of settlement which many women do when they have to bear the liability of their children along with their job, and sometimes they willingly choose their children and family. Kapur's next two novels *A Married Woman* (2007) and *Immigrant* (2008) are about marital discord. Her

protagonists Astha and Nina of these two novels respectively are educated who want to assert their rights. These protagonists neither adopt extreme aggressive, revolutionary way, not they are adhering to the stereotypical roles; they are balanced personalities who realise their potential and rise as good negotiators.

Shobha De is a modern Indian novelist, essentially a feminist writer, who recognises upside down in marginalisation of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. Shobha De's first novel *Socialite Evenings* (1989) is about the journey of a prominent Bombay socialite Karuna from an ordinary middle class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Her novel *Starry Nights* (1991) narrates the story of a film star Asha Rani who leaves no stone unturned to achieve her goal. Her novel *Strange Obsessions* (1992) depicts lesbian relationship. *Second Thoughts* (1992) deal with the story of a middle class Bengali boy and a young bride who is more in love with the city Bombay than her groom. This novel offers a slice of urban life and it is an explosive tale of love and betrayal that exposes the hollowness of Indian marriage system.

Anita Nair, the first Indian writer based in India to be on the Picador USA select list for Spring 2000, in her monumental novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001) depicts the voyage of self-consciousness for the realisation of self and ultimately the reaffirmation of female identity against male domination. Akhila's train journey in the novel is a symbolic journey through her own consciousness in which she not only seeks her freedom but also gathers confidence to protect her individuality and womanhood. As stated by Palmer "Writers of fiction take a micro-cosmic unit of society one particular sexual relationship – one particular family, and use it as a symbol into a wide network of social cultural and political structure" (1989: 68) Anita Nair uses the train journey as a symbol of an introspective journey within the consciousness of each character to establish that each woman possesses sensibility to realise the selfhood against a

well-defined socio-cultural structure that depends on the hegemony of ruling class. Implicitly Anita Nair in *Ladies Coupe* answers the questions that every woman would have faced in her life – the questions relating to her place in society.

The concerns of Indian women writers in English cannot not much different from the African counterparts as their respective countries share a number of socio-economic and political characteristics. Besides coping with native patriarchal ideology women of Nigeria and India bore the brunt of colonialism too. Hence their sufferings are more or less identical in nature. The ideology of social change is the creative force behind the works of some of these Third World Women writers.

5. Conclusion: A Saga of Woman's Problems

'Give me space ...space just not to exist
But live. Let there be space for smiles,
Give me space... Space for laughter
Why live if laughter dies'?

Monika Verma

Women learn in many ways to suppress their selfishness, and by doing so
suppress also their self-esteem. If most men hold women in contempt it is no greater than the
contempt in which women hold themselves

Carol Fitzgerald

Indian and Nigerian writers have been very conscious of their cultural heritage and its preservation. They have displayed a strong sense of social commitment in their literary creations. The social fallouts of colonial rule in both the countries have been depicted by almost all Indian and Nigerian literary personalities right from the initial years of development of English literature in their respective countries. Even though the early literary works of both the countries reflect the influence of Western style of writing, the nationalistic temper is dominant and explicit in them.

Men writers in these literatures were more concerned with the social and moral aspects and they identify women with tradition and the self-denied role of mother, whereas the women writers endeavour to subvert the androcentric world of men writers. As women writers earned a place in literary histories of these countries, which was denied to them just because of gender,

they attempt to dismantle the gender codes inscribed in the male tradition. They began to use “literature as a weapon” to quote Senegalese Mariama Ba, in their effort to define their individuality and to assert their economic, social and cultural independence.

In a post-colonial context, whether African, Caribbean or South Asian, English language carries with it a whole history of patriarchal myths and symbols whether originally instituted by the colonial power or later by primarily male-dominated movements towards nationalism and independence. There are obviously parallels between the experiences of women’s oppression in previously colonized territories or the Third World countries and women’s oppression worldwide. Contemporary women writers through their fiction have chosen to talk back, moving from silence into speech and standing for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible.

Third World women’s writing represents diverse female narratives and voices through different themes and styles. Shared concerns involve a commitment to portray women’s narratives of oppression as structured by various powers, given that the female experiences represented in women’s literature are functional in Third World feminism, which attempts to deconstruct the global sisterhood model and the figure of the “universal woman” in order to acknowledge women’s heterogeneity in theoretical and literary discourses. It depicts women from several developing cultures adopting reconstructive methodologies in order to theorise and challenge oppression. Female liberation and social change can be located in the discourse of Third World women writing which links socio-political practices and local identities to issues of female specificity and writing. The Third World feminists seek cross-cultural solidarity and a framework that focuses on issues of grounding the local and the universal, on women’s roles in redefining their identities, and on differences as a way of promoting solidarity. The significance of this study is to further the research for comparative

study in depiction of women's status and representation in the fictional works of African literature and Indian literature with the advent of feminism and tremendous change in the trend of stereotypical portrayal of marginalised, invisible, submissive women characters in the shackles of exploitation and oppression to 'individualised, asserted and awakened New Women' characters.

Because the privileging of man in African societies has involved an erasure of identities and subjectivities of many women, it invariably follows that reconstituting this cultural erasure is a hard and tenuous journey. When women try to claim status as individuals, cultural expectations such as their maternal roles act as constant bottlenecks to return them back to their prescribed roles as subordinate beings. There's always a reminder that a woman's place is to be found in the domestic sphere and her voice is not to be heard. Seeing the necessity of freeing women from the tyranny of the inscribed body with its perceived duality of presence/absence, Beyala seeks to restore to the African woman, or to her fictional counterpart, not only an imagined reality, but also a human nature that is capable of bonding and finding comfort with other women. As the writers interrupt the hegemonic definitions of the women's lives, they suggest that the act of transgressing the patriarchal law can be both a place for "radical openness and possibility" as hooks proposes (*Yearning* 149) and at the same time a place for pain and alienation. The narratives show that accounts of how women in African societies alter the dynamics of power involves sustained efforts in crafting possibilities of redemption in spaces created in and disseminated by social practice. Through the various subversive strategies, the writers encourage their readers to re-examine both the patriarchal and postcolonial gendered ideologies. Their novels affirm a continuous challenge and resistance to the hegemonic power discourse in postcolonial Africa, particularly when they display liberating tools like "safe spaces" that empower women to speak and listen to each other. In that sense, the African

women writers are seen forging new paths as they recollect a distorted woman's past and commit to articulating and sharing a liberating women's future.

The disturbing picture of woman in women's writing is not something new or unique only to Nigeria, Senegal or Cameroon but it is the predicament of women all over the world. Like Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Indian woman writer, Nayantara Sehgal, also delineates with keen perception and sensitivity the problems and suffering of women in marriage who feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, and shows her own reaction in her novels. Most of her women are aware of the injustice done to them in marriage. As they go out of their homes, they go in quest of their freedom. She seeks to interpret the rigid concept of virtue and chastity through her women characters who have a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. In a way, Sehgal shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man's equal. Dealing with the problems of women in their married life Shashi Deshpande, another Indian woman writer, describes the pathetic life styles of Indian women and also suggests measures for amelioration. Dealing with the sensitivity of immigrant women, Bharathi Mukherjee articulates the frantic desire of women for an authentic communication with their own selves as well with the society. Sense of alienation and loneliness are the basic themes of the most of the Indian women writers, but among them, Gita Hariharan portrays the present day intellectual women as existentialists and very much aware of their ephemeral existence.

In this study an attempt has been done for comparative study of the representation of womanhood and motherhood in African and Indian women writings, certain new perspectives on female sensibilities and sexuality are surfaced based on which, this study tries to formulate the reasons for women's oppression and subjugation in the societies of India and Africa respectively. This study reveals that the women in their respective societies are trying hard to redefine man-woman relationship and carrying out their joint responsibilities towards self, family, children and nation building process. They have displayed a strong sense of social

commitment to bring about social and intellectual awakening in their respective ways. The approach of Third World Women writers towards problems faced by women in their respective societies is more holistic and humane than their own men who doubt their intentions and resent their progress.

Indian Women writing in English is being recognised as major contemporary current in English Literature. Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space and their subject matters often considered superficial compared to the depiction of the replaced and oppressed lives of women. However, the Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Nonetheless, Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart's. The majority of novels written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers and question the prominent old patriarchal domination, implicitly showing they are no longer puppets in the hands of man. A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women centred approach, that seeks to project and interpret experience, from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks, "There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries" (1975: 91).

The portrayal of woman in Third World women's writing as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. The contemporary women writers from many African nations and Indian women writers are striving against the age old slavery and suppression. We see the emergence of new women in the novels of Flora

Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba, Yovanna Vera, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Bharathi Mukherjee, Anita Nair and many more writers. They represent their heroines defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and aspire self-reliance through education. They nurture the desire of being independent and leading lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined and action oriented. One thing is notable here is that, these writers sometimes have shown their heroines caught within the strong holds of patriarchy, either compromised themselves or adapted themselves to the needs of men in their life. They are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the extremely imposed requirements of their masculine societies – like the one we find in the character of Nnu Ego, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, who yearns for liberation and for fulfilment as a woman, while still respecting the traditional concept of manliness. Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by, or seethe with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others. Some of these women characters like the wives of Okonkwo in *The Bride Price*, Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, in an attempt to enlarge their lives, become active agents and collaborators of patriarchy and abusively treat their co-wives. Some characters resist, but in doing so could not overcome the pull of traditionalism as the character of Akunna (*The Bride Price*), who though educated, could not overcome the superstitious beliefs about paying the bride price, becomes a victim and dies. She becomes a schizophrenic, and her personality fragments by her desire both to accept and to reject her condition. With the exception of the few like Adaku (*The Joys of Motherhood*), Kehinde (*Kehinde*); who through ingenuity and great courage triumph in their struggle out of patriarchy's shallow grave; are sacrificial victims. Though they are the New Age Women in the world of African letters, the ingenuous African society does not accept them as epitomes of African Womanhood. The third

generation Nigerian writer Adichie in her novel, *Purple Hibiscus* shows women with contradictory behavior about African customs and traditions. Mama Beatrice and her sister-in-law, Ifeoma are the antithesis to each other. Adichie portrays Beatrice as conforming to the patriarchal dictates of their society that place value on male children. Despite the violence her husband, Eugene, inflicts on her body and psyche, she praises Eugene for not listening to the members of his *umunna* (extended family) who wanted him to have more male children. Adichie further portrays Beatrice as conforming to the dictates of a patriarchal society that affords a woman respect only when she is married. Beatrice internalizes the patriarchal dictates of her society, which views women without husbands as inadequate or incomplete. Ifeoma a widow, though contributes to the society as a university lecturer, her achievements are undermined based on her gender. Bewildered and failing to understand the idea of a woman achieving personhood without a man, Beatrice is obviously appalled by the idea that a woman can even think of existing without a husband because culturally that is unacceptable and unheard of. In other words, what Beatrice means is that it does not matter even if a woman is being abused in her marriage. As long as she has a “husband to crown her life” (*Purple Hibiscus* 2005, p. 75), she has to endure all the pains and confines of that marriage. Beatrice, whose social and economic existence is tied to her abusive husband, is trapped in a patriarchal order which does not give her economic and social empowerment to break away from her oppressed status in life. Eugene’s behaviour is a good example of male domination reinforced by patriarchy. She sees futility in breaking away from Eugene because of over depending on her husband in everything, whether economic or social. She is also afraid of losing respect as a married woman and also for leaving her prominent husband. Beatrice’s fear of starting afresh on her own reminds us of Ramatoulaye in Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (1981), who refuses to leave the husband who neglects her after taking a second wife. Similar dilemma also disturbs Indian women, which makes them to live a life of self-negations, compromises and

adjustments. Focussing on the themes of silence, gender differences, passive suffering, and familial relationships, Shashi Deshpande explores the man and woman relationship in four generations of women in her novel, *A Matter of Time* (1996). This novel traces the transformation of the ideology from the stage of the internalization of patriarchal values through awareness of the value of female bonding and self-identity to assertion of women's rights. *A Matter of Time* is a story of urban middle class family of Gopal and Sumi and their three daughters – Aru, Chara, Seema and opens with Mohan walking out his marriage with Sumi causing trauma to their children. Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru belong to four generations of the same family, each representing a specific mode of experience. Manorama is a typical product of patriarchal value system, for she resented the birth of Kalyani, her daughter, as she wanted a son. She forces a marriage between two unwilling partners, her daughter Kalyani and her younger brother Shripati and she even holds Kalyani responsible for her sorrows and calls her an enemy. But it is Kalyani who represents the survival power of women in patriarchal system. She maintains a stoic silence becomes a powerful tool of resistance when it is practiced with lack of participation in the social power relations. This novel tries to penetrate and analyze the very predicament of human existence and solve the paradox of life.

In spite of the acclaim won by Third World women writers for presenting a more balanced portrait of the female character, so much still remains to be done by a way of creating awareness and continuing to work towards the empowerment of all women. As Segun asserts in her work, "Challenges of Being a Female Writer in a Male-Dominated Developing Society", women must have a strong voice in civil society, considering that they form more than half the population. Women's organizations should act as pressure groups to end male dominations, not only of the cultural and social spheres of life but also in feministic writing, which according to her is severely limited because "female writers confine writing almost exclusively to the domestic scene, thus giving the

impression that patriarchal society is justified in excluding women from the public arena. Their themes centre mostly on love, marriage, motherhood, barrenness, marital infidelity and rape. There is thus the paradox of woman who claims equality with man but does not venture into the male preserve, politics” (2001: 298).

Feminist writers must tackle the systems that oppress and subjugate women. This is a way of helping women “unlearn the lessons of past, engendering their new awareness of their inherent borne of their new awareness of their inherent strengths and potentialities for effecting change in their society as equal partners with men” (Segun 300). Now it has become an imperative that women writers should be prepared to play dual roles in society as writers and as women. Admittedly, the task ahead for women writers is far from easy, considering that the female voice is unheard in male canon of world literature, but women have an additional commitment to employ their art to place women at the centre of development and change. Theirs should be the sort of empowerment that reveals to women their potentialities, for so long suppressed by male domination. It is important to reiterate further that education is indispensable in women’s causes and invariably gives them the confidence they need to look inward and begin to shake off the many years of cultural and religious indoctrination and realize their complementary role and indispensability to the male. Finally, it is fitting to conclude with these words by Elaine Showalter as cited by Chukwuma: “In women’s hands—in women writers’ hands—lies the regeneration of the world. Let us go with our tongues of fire consecrated to an entirely holy work, cleansing, repairing, beautifying as we go, the page of the world’s history which lies before us now” (19).

Major Findings of the Study

1. The study reveals the sufferings of Third World women in patriarchal societies, As the oppressed womenfolk.
2. The traditions and customs of Third World societies are misogynistic in nature and thus are responsible for sufferings of women.
3. Women are the victims of patriarchal domination, which is basically responsible for identity crisis in women's life.
4. Education of women help them as a weapon to resist and protest against their miserable condition in the society.
5. Self-reliance through education is the way out for women to find identity in life.
6. Sometimes women themselves are responsible for upholding patriarchal norms and thus they are the perpetrators of patriarchy in the families.
7. Polygamy is one of the major cause of women's sufferings in African societies. Though it is accepted as a major cultural norm in Africa, yet it is very oppressive of women in their life in various respects. It effects their life socially, psychologically, emotionally and results in health hazards.
8. Third World women are very much prone for son preference, one of the concept of patriarchy. This is very much seen in African and Indian societies. Girl-child is always neglected in the family and this ultimately results in low self-esteem in girls.
9. Son preference leads to commodification of girls for bride price in African society, whereas it leads to dowry deaths in Indian society.
10. Empowerment of women in Third World nations is looked down as something

untraditional and against to culture in orthodox families. Even in so-called progressive societies too it is considered as a major factor for a rise in divorce cases.

11. Contemporary women's writing in Third World countries focuses on the empowerment of women through self-sufficiency. Yet it is considered by male literary canon as something domestic and inferior in value and thus never given an equal representation in the world of literature. Thus women's writing has been considered as a separate genre with lesser literary values.
12. There is a tremendous shift in the focus of women's writing in Third World countries in the portrayal of women. Present writings are more radical in depicting mothers are not so sacrificial in nature and wifehood has been shown as a site for resistance against patriarchal domination.
13. Third World Contemporary Women's writing never hesitates to focus on lesbianism as an alternative way of relationship or sisterhood in the world of gender disparities or discrimination.
14. Marriage as an institution losing its value in Third World countries, thus the women writings are focusing more on marital discord as a major factor for prostitution as a means of living in social and economically backward families.
15. Sexual abuse of women within the close relations or families is also one of the main focuses of Third World women's writing, which also reflects the reality of present society. In the same way, honour killings which are carried out in the name of social status are also find focus in women's writings of Third World countries.

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