

**Portrayal of Females in Indian English Feminist
Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema during
1975-2005**

THESIS

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Under the Supervision of

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Portrayal of Females in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema during 1975-2005**” and submitted by Sushila Rathore, ID.No. 2003PHXF416 for award of Ph. D. Degree of the Institute embodies original work done by her under my supervision.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mankind has witnessed females assuming various roles, backed by the societal approval and disapproval. Though she has remained at the hub, society has treated her quite unpredictably, sometimes banking solely on her for inspiration and sometimes utilizing her merely as a commodity. These fluctuations have also helped in shaping the society which depends on the unfailing support of females. A tale that has traveled through the ages gets reflected through various media as well. In this depiction, women have always cherished an indispensable position; and this practice has provided a holistic approach to the delineation of human affairs. Indubitably, a woman has always been intrinsic to societal structure and her stature has endured ever-shifting flexibilities. A time came when she recognized her prowess as an individual, started taking independent decisions and also focused on her individual progression. This transformation gave a powerful jolt to the established norms of society.

In the Indian society, a woman had always been in the secondary position, taking pride in carrying out all the duties religiously and seeking satisfaction in serving others only. However, when she started nourishing her own dreams by acknowledging and pampering herself, society could not help noticing the change. Obviously, this transformation which shook the deep buried accepted norms for the conduct and place of woman also changed the way she has been presented and interpreted. By now, the means of entertainment have also taken different individual forms. Two powerful media, Fiction and Cinema which have established their credibility by appealing to the masses, have not only captured the

change but also duly reflected the shifting focus. These two media with their individual appeal wield the power to reach out to maximum people with greater force.

Fiction, which feeds the imaginative cult of the readers, forced them to sit and take notice of the change that women have brought about in their status in the society. Cinema also, with added visual effects, has the power to satisfy the most trustworthy senses of all, i.e. eye. So when the shift in the position of women got projected through Cinema, it intensely reached out to people of even far-off areas. More importantly, the change in the portrayal of women from traditional ideal woman to an independent individual, possessing the power to emerge free and assertive, has been superbly reflected especially through Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema.

In the vast stream of literature, female writers in Indian English Fiction have taken the lead in bringing forth the internal strife of the females leading towards progression. These writers have carved a specific niche for themselves by seriously exploring the mental and physical world of females. The hitherto repressed voice of the female has been provided a unique podium through these writings. Commercial cinema, also known as the popular cinema, showcases the stereotyped image of females due to its commercialism. Parallel cinema, on the other hand, by revealing the actual status of females places her in the hub. Different from its counterpart (commercial cinema), Hindi Parallel Cinema has neither tried to beautify nor restricted the image of females. It has brought in the realistic reflection of females. In comparison to the present scenario, a drastic change has come in the on-screen image of women. Initially, it was of an ideal wife, mother, sister and daughter but with the surge of feminism in the social, political and literary arena, cinema

has emerged as a powerful tool of mass communication; consequently, the projection of female has also undergone a metamorphosis. The present study attempts to study the portrayal of females in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema.

The objective of the study is to analyze the projection of females by highlighting the prominent themes. Its primary focus lies in exploring the intensive themes and the progression of females that have been dealt with in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema. An in-depth analysis of each novel and film would be done to show the emerging power of females as individuals. As the period 1975-2005 witnessed numerous changes in the socio-economic status of females, the fiction and the films of this period have been considered for this study.

Relevant literature has been examined to trace the areas already covered and the areas still left out for exploring further. The literature survey reveals that few individual studies have been carried out to study the projection of females in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema. However, it was difficult to trace a comprehensive study that presents the projection of females in both these art forms. Moreover, the studies have so far focused more on Hindi Popular Cinema than on the Hindi Parallel Cinema. In addition, the analyses carried out so far on the portrayal of women in these art forms have not adequately reflected the changing face of women. As Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema are instrumental in bringing about a change in the minds of people in a society about the perception of women, this study has selected these two forms and has analyzed the image of woman as portrayed in them. Indian English Feminist Fiction has been considered for the study as all the writers have delved

deep into the consciousness of the females by making them central to the plot of their novels. Similarly, Hindi Parallel Cinema has been taken up as it is the cinema which specifically deals with the issues related to females as the core of its theme.

The Indian English Feminist Fiction authors namely, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur selected for this study are renowned and established. Exposing the variegated ideas related to a female, all these living legends reflect the changing times. The period selected for this study encompasses all the major developments and changes that have come in the lives of women and hence gets reflected through Indian English Feminist Fiction. Representative of their time, the writers have been successful in giving a new dimension to the image of females specifically engraved in the minds of the readers. Revolutionary in the themes and their treatment, they have aptly projected the change in the image of females. Moreover, these authors have been the successful trendsetters in the world of female portrayal.

In addition to the critical recognition acquired, the authors have also won several prestigious awards for their works. Shashi Deshpande has won the Sahitya Akademy Award for her novel, That Long Silence in the year 1988. Similarly, Anita Desai's novel Fire on the Mountain (1977) has won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Her novels Clear Light of Day (1980), In Custody (1980) and Fasting Feasting (2000) were short listed for the Booker prize. Similarly, Manju Kapur has also created ripples in the literary sphere by receiving the Commonwealth award (1998) for the Eurasian region for her maiden novel Difficult Daughters (1998).

Popularity in the literary world speaks volumes about the credibility of the authors but the study limits itself only to the trendsetting novels. The authors have been chosen based on the projection of the forceful progression of females. Nine literary masterpieces such as Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993) and Small Remedies (2000), Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975), Clear Light of Day (1980), Fasting Feasting (2000) and Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters (1998) and Married Woman (2002) have been chosen for this study.

Similarly, the six films namely Bhumika (1977), Arth (1982), Mirch Masala (1985), Astitva (2000), Daman (2001) and Satta (2002) selected for this study are award winning and represent the era known for revolutionizing the image makeover of females. An indicator of the society, these films represent the kaleidoscopic contemporary society in which so many changes have taken place in almost all the spheres, especially the status of women. Hinging on the same line, the award winning films of the parallel genre are also remarkable. The film Mirch Masala (1985) has won seven awards in various categories such as best actor, best actress, best choreography, best director, best music and best screenplay. Bhumika (1977) has also bagged three National awards for best actress and best screenplay and also won the Filmfare best movie award for the year 1978. Moreover, this film has successfully brought in several integral aspects related to the lives of working women. The film Arth (1982) has got the 1984 Filmfare awards for best actress, best screenplay and best supporting actress. Astitva (2000) has also received several awards such as the National Filmfare best actress critics award, star screen award for best actress and the same award for best story also. Daman (2001) has won the National film

award for best actress. Satta (2002) has won two awards, a star screen award for best actress, and popular awards for best newcomer and best performance in a villainous role. Due to wide popularity, they have left an indelible mark in the minds of the viewers. Prestigious awards conferred on the films speak a lot about their significance and this study has taken into consideration those films which have given new direction to the evolution of females.

This study comprises of six chapters starting with the introduction in which the background, selection criteria, significance and general plan of the study are given. The second chapter discusses the genesis of feminism as a movement in social, political and literary arena with a special focus on women as a subject in the literary works of the female writers. The chapter also focuses on the upsurge of feminism in Indian English Feminist Fiction. The third chapter talks about the origin and growth of Parallel Cinema. In addition, it also puts into perspective the history of the projection of females in cinema with a special focus on Hindi Parallel Cinema. The fourth chapter focuses on the depth of female psyche by highlighting the prominent themes present in the works of fiction discussed. All the novels are discussed with a special focus on the treatment of each theme by each author. The next chapter brings into picture the forceful progression of females in the selected films by analysing the various intensive themes present in them. The chapter discusses these themes in detail by giving all the translated versions of the dialogues delivered by the actors in the films selected for the study. Finally, conclusions sum up the study by emphasizing the future scope and the relevance of the study.

The study is expected to add more value to the existing body of the literature related to the projection of females in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema with its wide coverage of the prominent themes. A fresh look into the portrayal of females by examining their intensified progression over the last two decades may offer fresh insights to its readers and viewers into the multifaceted aspects of a female's life. The changing status of women as reflected through these major art forms of the society brings to the fore the role they can play in revolutionizing the perception of the masses. Thus the study helps to understand the two-way impact – one, of the art forms on society, and the other, of the society on the art forms which reveals the degree of importance each one carries in shaping the future of the coming generations.

CHAPTER 2

**A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INDIAN ENGLISH
FEMINIST FICTION**

Females being an indispensable status part of society have continued to captivate the attention of everybody, be it philosophers, thinkers, politicians, literary critics or literary theorists. Disparity between the sexes and placement of men on a high pedestal has been dominant since times immemorial. This incongruence has given rise to the exploration of the term 'woman' theoretically as well as critically. Consequently, different people have made an attempt to define or refer to *woman* in their own way. The religious scripture Bible says, "Then the lord God made the man fall into deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him" (Quoted in Prasad 2001 : 5). Plato, the great thinker and philosopher, in his book The Republic has expressed his views on woman, 'It is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are 'cowards or lead unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation'. This downward progress may continue through successive reincarnations unless reversed. In this situation, obviously it is only men who are complete human beings and can hope for ultimate fulfillment; the best a woman can hope for is to become a man.

However, these definitions have been a thorough reflection of universality of the traditional thought that 'woman' is the weaker sex. This outlook has sown the seeds of inequality between *Man* and *Woman*. The position of women has always been subjected

to change in the society. In Hindu religion, the status of women has suffered various upheavals. In Hindu civilization the position of females has seen various ups and downs. Surprisingly, they have been not only severely subjugated but revered also. Manu, the law giver has stated in one of his laws, “To be mothers, women were created and to be fathers, men. The teacher is ten times more venerable than sub-teacher; the father a hundred times more than the teacher but a mother a thousand times more than a father”(Quoted in Prasad 2001 : 2). Though, the statement appears to upgrade the status of women, in the same book, he has also highlighted the flipside by assigning a prominent position given to sons in family and society in comparison to daughters.

An eminent philosopher, Rousseau asserts that weak bodies contain weak minds. As a result, he discourages females from too much physical activity and uses their weakness as another proof of inferiority. He suggests the development of physical powers in males and personal charms in females. He opines that a woman's education must be planned in relation to man; she should always be in subjection and never be free to express herself. Thus, he has also stressed the marginalized status of women.

Gradually, this stark inequality gathered momentum and consequently, a need was felt around the globe to fight against this injustice. Women raised their voice for equality in all the spheres-political, religious, economic, spiritual, social and literary and their fight was named feminism. Feminism, mainly a social theory and political movement acquired a concrete shape in the nineteenth and twentieth century, though it has its roots embedded in antiquity. Different critics have put forward their views about the origin of the term ‘feminism’. Ellen DuBois has discovered in her feministic research that the usage of this

term originated in France. Linda Kealey while writing about feminism found the term used to refer to 'New Woman' in Canada and US. Toril Moi referred to the words 'feminist' or 'feminism' as political labels which support the aims of the New Woman's Movement which emerged in the late 1960's. *Feminism* as an ideology has undergone several alterations in social as well as literary arena and has acquired different connotations with the passage of time. An examination of the following definitions propounded by prominent critics as well as theorists clarifies the term 'Feminism'.

In Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, "feminism" is described as "the doctrine advocating social and political rights of women equal to those of men." It further elaborates it as "an organized movement for the attainment of such rights for women."(1994 : 523).

Lisa Tuttle has defined it etymologically; since it is derived from latin root 'femina' meaning "having the qualities of the female", it is the movement of females related to female issues. (1986 : 107-8)

Sushila Singh feels, "Feminism is neither a fad nor a logical extension of all the civil rights movement. The inequities against which the feminists protest - legal, economic, and social restrictions on the basic rights of women-have existed throughout history and in all civilizations." (1997 : 13).

Maren Lockwood Carden says, "The new feminism is not about the elimination of differences between the sexes; nor even simply the achievement of equal opportunity; it

concerns the individual's right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person."(1974 : 2).

Shulamith Firestone opines, "To understand why women are subordinate to men we require a biological not an economic explanation...and just as the ultimate goal of communist revolution is, in a classless society, to obliterate class distinctions, the ultimate goal of feminist revolution is, in an androgynous society, to remove sexual ones."(1970 : 12).

Simone De Beauvoir, one of the premiere exponents of feminism was not far behind in this race when she opines in The Second Sex (1949) that the terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers:

In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electric poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity....A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. (Beauvoir 1997 : 15).

In the light of the above quoted theorists and critics, 'feminism' refers to a powerful alertness of woman's identity, and interest in feminine problems. It is not confined merely to the promotion of women's rights.

The widespread concern for women's rights did not take proper shape until 1848. Hence, the first movement dates from 1848 with Seneca Falls Convention convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and others which called for legal equality with men,

alongwith full educational opportunity and equal compensation. Thereafter, the Woman Suffrage Movement gathered momentum and gradually the social movement started showing its signs in the political arena also. The Woman Suffrage, the right of women to vote, was first seriously proposed in the United States at Seneca Falls in July 1848, but it acquired the right shape in Britain.

Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary document A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) was the first landmark expression in this movement. In this treatise, she has retaliated against Rousseau's theory that men and women are different by nature. Moreover, she has advocated that as women are in no way less than their counterparts, they should be given equal rights. Though, there were various protests by women separately in their own countries, the organized movement started in Great Britain. John Stuart Mill, the most influential of the British Advocates in his Subjection of Women (1869), one of the earliest as well as most famous arguments for the right of women to vote, gave an outlet to his views on the need for equality among men and women:

...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes –the legal subordination of one sex to the other-is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mill 1989: 3).

The proclamation brought to the fore the idea that not only females but males have also come forward to help females achieve this equality. In India also, though the condition of females was the same, it were the male members who raised their voice against the injustices meted out to women. Eminent scholars like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami

Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, etc., came forward to enable females to share an equal footing with their counterparts.

Primarily a social movement, the feministic movement slowly sprawled into other arenas such as political, literary, etc. In the literary world, the female writers felt the need to ponder over the role of women as presented in the texts. They decided to start a separate canon of women's writing in order to give a complete picture.

Broad and varied, literary criticism started before the 1970's with the first and second waves of feminism. Concerned with politics of women's authorship and the representation of women's condition in literature, it had culminated in women's studies and gender studies by third wave authors. Since the arrival of more complex conceptions of gender and subjectivity and third wave feminism, feminist literary criticism has taken a variety of new routes. It has been closely related with the birth and growth of queer studies and no wonder, the representation and politics of women's lives has continued to play an active role in criticism.

Feminist thinkers opine that the literary texts are based on the ground of a power struggle between the sexes and the text makes it appear natural. In their view, a woman in the text is stereotyped. The roles conferred on her not only make her weak but also limit her position to merely a sexual object-completely dependent on males with no identity of her own. A woman is eulogized through the use of patriarchal terms like 'Mother Earth' and 'Mother Nature' to restrict her individualism. In addition to this, certain sociological assumptions formed in the society create discrimination between the sexes. Simone De Beauvoir also vouchsafes that a woman is not born but rather grows to be a woman.

Further, she postulates that sex is a biological phenomenon while gender is constructed by the society. Thus, certain qualities like weakness, patience, etc; are attributed to women which in turn facilitated the males to confine the identity of females to homes. This notion was challenged by the feminists as this inequality has no biological foundation. Hence, they promoted the urgent need to have a separate standard of writing by women.

Feminist criticism has political streaks as well. This emphasizes the connectivity among economic conditions, work-place conditions and political supremacy based solely on gender. Furthermore, feminists in the 1980's and 1990's era further elaborated feminism by encompassing local, racial and regional gender oppression based on specific factors. Till this period irrespective of racial or regional differences, feminism centered around a single idea which gave a common platform to females. Later on, it developed into various strands like Early feminism, Psychoanalytic feminism, Political feminism, Socialist feminism, Marxist feminism and Poststructuralist feminism. As feminism became a well-established literary movement, there have been varied theorists and critics who advocated their views regarding the status of women. A multidisciplinary movement, encompassing political, social, and literary fields, it has its hold in all these varied areas. After paving their way for equality in other fields, they entered the world of creative writing as well. Despite getting lukewarm response in the initial stages, they tried really hard to establish their worth as writers. Thus, literary feminism took time to get into a proper shape. These writers were greatly benefited with the feminist writers who have explored the male-female disparities in their works. Literary critics such as, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Elaine Showalter, Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Luce Irigaray, Helene

Cixous, Gayatri Spivak, etc., in their fields have campaigned for the rights of females in their own ways.

Virginia Woolf has analyzed the gender prejudices prevalent in the academic practices in her works A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938). In her opinion, female researchers find it difficult to pursue their research. The obvious reason is the inequality prevalent in the patriarchal university institutions based on gender and dominance of males. Apart from this, language is also gendered and biased which the female writers are forced to use. She supports economic independence and separate space for females. Simone De Beauvoir, another literary supporter as well as a socialist, in her treatise, The Second Sex explains the subordination of women as a succeeding sex. She postulates that woman has no identity of her own; she is defined as the other of the male. This otherness is crucial as all the national, racial and individual identities are based upon this difference of male from the female. In her words, "Woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her...He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the other."(1997 : 16).

Kate Millet's Sexual Politics (1968) which lies at the crossroads of critics in literary, cultural criticism and political theory is a major criticism of standardized male authors like Lawrence, Norman Mailer and Henry Miller. Elaborating on the man-woman relationships in the works of these writers, she has advocated that males reinforce gender oppression based on sex. According to her, females are stereotyped as prostitutes, unchaste women and virgins on the basis of sexuality and all these arrangements that

reinforce sexual relationships have extended into other domains like ideology, biology and socio-cultural institutions like family, education, psychology and religion.

Another literary critic, Elaine Showalter has also contributed to the literary field with her revolutionary works, The New Feminist Criticism (1985) and Speaking of Gender (1989). In these works, she has proposed specifically a female framework for the analysis of women's literature. She has advocated for 'gynocriticism' a completely new model based on women's experience and rejected the blind dependence on male theories and male models. In her opinion, gynocriticism looks at the genres, themes, history and structures of writing by women and also the progress and rules of female literary tradition. Elaine Showalter has highlighted through her work the ways by which the female writers have been kept out of the literary group during the nineteenth century period. At that time, the writings by the women have been termed as trivial and limited in scope. As a result, she has identified three critical phases in the progression of female literary writings:

In this book I identify the Feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonyms in the 1840's to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960. (1999 : 13).

Ellen Moers's work Literary Women (1976) was among the early attempts to discover the women's literary tradition. Her work explores the influence of women writers on each other. The living history of female writers from the eighteenth to the twentieth century also gets highlighted through her works. In her discussion on literary feminism, she has discovered a new heroic structure for the female voice which she terms as 'heroicism'. It

includes traditional characteristics like loving, caring and the more radical one namely, education.

Luce Irigaray's denunciation of male representative order has been regarded as the radical feminist phase of the movement. In her works Speculum of the Other Woman (translated 1985) and This Sex Which Is Not One (1987), she opines that in all western discourses woman has been allocated an inferior status in comparison to man. As psychoanalysis has always adorned ideology of the males, Irigaray attempts to unearth a feminine order of meaning so that a sexual identity of woman might be constructed. Moreover, she has proposed a feminine writing practice. In order to highlight a positive picture of female, a different arrangement of meaning is required and hence she looks for new linguistic modes of expression to project the female self. Further, she argues that if a woman wants to have her own individuality, she must challenge the phallic description of the symbolic. For her, writing is an effort to portray the real image of a woman.

Helene Cixous, another important literary critic, through her essays such as The Laugh of the Medusa (1975), Sorties (1975), Coming to Writing and Other Essays (translated 1991), and The Newly Born Woman (translated 1986) attempts to determine a writing style that is fluid, transgressive and beyond binary system of logic. After the study of all the western discourses, she has reached the conclusion that this binary opposition is prevalent everywhere. In addition, this binary hierarchy is always linked to violence in which the feminine term always gets eradicated. In her own words, "Intention: desire, authority-examine them and you are led right back...to the father. It is not possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for women in the calculations." (Quoted in Nayar

2002 : 102). A woman is exchanged as a possession from fathers to husbands to maintain patriarchy. Thus, the males gain power, authority and pleasure in this exchange but the woman is a loser. Similarly writing is also a structure by a sexual opposition that favours the male thereby reducing writing to his laws.

Limning women experiences has been the sole aim of all the feminist writers to find expression for their predicament. Due to the increasing awareness, feminism became an area of concern to the literary people throughout the globe. It all started globally when a fresh look was taken to examine the portrayal of women in the texts written by women. As result, Indian women writers also joined the race. Indian women have left their mark in almost all the fields and literature is not an exception. Consequently, a significant number of the female writers in Indian English Fiction also had tried to highlight realistically the traumas of Indian women.

Indian English Feminist Fiction has a long and riveted history with numerous novels to their credit. They have made a significant contribution to the strife of the females for equality by projecting their problems through their texts. As B. K. Das puts it that earlier women have been “presented in literature from their (males’) viewpoint”, but now women writers have taken the command and these days “presented in the writings of female writers from their point of view.” (1998 : 143).

A closer introspection reveals that the depiction of women in Indian English Feminist fiction has diverse shades. In the initial stages, the focus was on women struggling for survival without any qualms with village as a backdrop. The later female writers project

urban class working females who are conscious of their self and hence represent the changing society. Suman Bala validates the above mentioned point when she says:

It is significant to note that there are three categories of women as projected in Indian Fiction. First, we have rural women-poor, hardworking and sincere – as portrayed by Kamala Markandaya. The most representative of these is Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In the second category, we meet educated middle class women who are married and are working as well – like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya in *That Long Silence*. And finally, we meet women of the upper strata society from the urban milieu. These are women who are socialites, have easy morals and do not find extra marital relations – like Paro in Namita Gokhle's novel *Paro* and the female protagonists of *Nayantara* Sahgal and Shobha De. (2001 : 10).

Women as depicted by all the prominent novelists also fall more or less in the same category. However, there is a steady change with respect to the societal upheavals and other external factors. The earlier writers' focus was not very revolutionary as the females in the society lacked strength. Restricted to domesticity and the conventional norms, they neither recognized nor possessed the thinking directed only towards them. In general, Indian women are passive, patient and self sacrificing and tend to sacrifice everything for the welfare of their family. With the advent of education, awakening has come in the Indian women. The change in outlook has brought about a metamorphosis in modern Indian women. Romila Thapar adds further to the above argument, "The role, status and position of woman has far from been static, ranging from what it thought to have been a position of considerable authority and freedom to one of equally considerable subservience" (Quoted in Bai 1996 : 61). Thus, they have started thinking about themselves as individuals having a separate identity. Hence, the present-day writers explore the same in their works.

Irrevocable plight of women was unearthed by the prominent women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy, etc., with great skill. They have encased all the facets of the life of an Indian women belonging to different strata of society. It started off with Toru Dutt and carried on further by numerous other writers of acclaim. She has written two novels named Bianca (1878) and The Young Spanish Maiden (1878) with autobiographical shades. Females have been projected as typically Indian-uncompromisingly sincere and extremely reverent for values. Despite belonging to Spain and France, psyche of her characters is Indian.

Besides, Toru Dutt the other women novelists which deserve mention are- Raj Lakshmi Debi who has written The Hindu Wife (1876) or The Enchanted Fruit (1876), and Mrs. Krupabai Sathianadhan who has produced, Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life (1894) and Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life (1895). Mrs. Ghoshal is another important women novelist from Bengal, whose novels An Unfinished Song (1913) and The Fatal Garland (1915), (a historical novel) have been translated into English. Novelists like Santa and Sita Chatterjee wrote novels Tales of Bengal (1922), The Cage of Gold (1923), and The Garden Creeper (1931), first in Bengali and then got them translated into English.

Exerting main thrust on the life behind the *purdah*, Cornelia Sorabji is another novelist of distinction who has highlighted the curbed existence of Indian women. She is best known for Love and Life Behind the Purdah (1901), Sun-Babies: Studies in the Child Life of India (1904), and Between the Twilights (1908). In all her works, she has tried to touch

upon the sufferings of a female confined behind the veil. Moreover, in her works she has shown virtuous women in a very positive light. Her realistic projection in her fiction corresponds to Plato, the classicist, who has spoken on the same line, “We shall have to train the women also, then in both kinds of skill, and train them for war as well and treat them in the same way as men.” (Quoted in Prasad 2001 : 4-5).

Similarly, Iqbalunissa Hussain has also tried to explore the identical situation in her work Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household (1944) with special focus on a typical muslim family. The female finds herself captivated not only to the four walls but also behind the veil. Apart from these well-known novelists, there are other talented writers also who have contributed in their own individualistic style to vast mainstream of Indian English Feminist Fiction. Among them one name is Vimla Raina, who has written a historical novel Ambapali (1962), the story of Ambapali, a very beautiful, celebrated and honoured dancer and the first woman to be admitted to Buddha’s fold.

The aforementioned novelists have enriched Indian English Feminist Fiction before independence by providing it a direction. Distinctive novelists have joined the race after independence and have elevated it to greater heights. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor, etc., are among the most exceptional writers.

Personification of talent and versatile writing, Ruth Praver Jhabvala holds a significant position as far as Indian English Feminist Fiction is concerned. She has to her credit various meritorious works like To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion

(1956), Esmond In India (1958), A Backward Place (1965), The Householder (1960), etc.

Her novel Heat and Dust (1975) has also won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize. Her works reveal a lot about the urban middle class Indian life, highlighting domestic problems of an average joint Hindu family with the subtle backdrop of the occidental and oriental values. Shyam M. Asnani focuses on the same aspect when he states:

R. P. Jhabvala writes about the furious social scuffling in the present day India. All her novels are full of local colour and clamour, dealing with the young who are inert, romantic and not-too-wise, and the old who are cool, calculating and rigid. She describes the head-on collision between the traditional and the modern, the east and the west, and the confusion that follows in the wake of these collisions (1985 : 8).

Her first novel, To Whom She Will (1955) presents a marvelous picture of Indian society with a special focus on its customs, facts, temperament and relationships in marriage and love. It also discusses the terrible consequences of partition not only on the natives of India but also on the refugees. The novelist's thrust area of writing is the upper class of North India with a special emphasis on people living in joint families. Another work, The Nature of Passion (1956), deals with a modern young girl, Nimmi who wants to discard all the old customs, myths and traditions. The story revolves around this character's fight for the cause of a woman's emancipation. She manifests her sense of freedom by visiting the clubs, playing tennis, keeping short hair and attending lectures on English romantic poets. She does all these things against the wishes of her community. Her other works, Esmond in India (1958) and A Backward Place (1965) talk about the encounter between East and West and the incompatibility in marriage due to amalgamation of different cultures. In The Householder (1960), Jhabvala gives an accurate account of remote

village life. Her prestigious work Heat and Dust (1975) talks about two English women and their struggle for survival due to indecisiveness. Moreover the clash due to different cultures is an added obstacle to their search for self-fulfillment.

In comparison to Ruth Praver Jhabvala whose fiction concentrates on the dilemma of females arising out of cultural differences, Kamala Markandaya writes with a sharp insight into the problems encountered due to economic constraints. With economic and political life of India as the backdrop, the main focus is to showcase the pathetic plight of Indian women. Her projection of females comprises of highly submissive, traditional, adaptive and enduring females. As a writer of prominence, she is an acute observer of the changing Indian society in post independent India. Consequently the women characters in her novels do not belong to single strata but from all the stratum of society-poor, middle, upper and even the royal ones. The most common thing in her novels is the unflinching quest for fulfillment, a vivid picture of the position of females and the issues related to their lives.

Her work of fiction includes Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1955), A Silence of Desire (1961), The Coffer Dams (1969), The Nowhere Man (1972), A Handful of Rice (1966), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977) and Possession (1963). Her novel Nectar in a Sieve dexterously highlights the traditions and rites of Indian villagers. Apart from these features, it highlights the existential struggle of Rukmini, the heroine. A victim of poverty, she has to marry Nathan. Undulating in her dedication towards her husband, she undergoes all the sufferings and remains loyal to him till the end of her life. In another novel entitled Some Inner Fury (1955) she shifts her setting from pastoral to

urban in order to reveal the life of upper class section of the society. It is a love story of Mira and Richard. Restrictions imposed on Mira create rebellious overtones in her; consequently, she becomes a strong asserter and does as she likes. Still, despite being a lover of freedom, she does not discard her traditions and ultimately sticks to her roots.

In her work, A Silence of Desire (1960), the character Sarojini is a typical middle class housewife of strong religious codes and rituals whereas her husband is completely different because of his inclination towards Western culture. Her husband does not like her excessive inclination towards spirituality. Thus, after sensing her increasing alienation and tilt towards it, he tries to persuade her to avoid this irrational thinking. Conversely, Sarojini becomes successful in changing his attitude towards her as well as towards religion.

Focused on the life of two women from diverse cultures, Possession (1963) revolves around the differences in their actions and reactions. Caroline represents the British culture and hence possesses a very strict attitude towards the natives of the colonies. Anusuya, on the other hand, is a refined, quiet, and a broadminded girl. They also share differences in their feelings for Valmiki, their lover. Anusuya nurtures true feelings for Valmiki whereas intolerant and selfish Caroline nurtures a hollow relationship without any emotional bonding. Her work, A Handful of Rice (1966) is a story of Nalini's marriage with Ravi, a trainee to her father's tailoring profession. A silent sufferer, Nalini emerges as an embodiment of endurance and patience. Another highlight of this novel is the injustice meted out to females due to discrimination between the sexes. The birth of a daughter is never considered a happy occasion for the family; however, when the

question arises for sustenance, she is expected to bear all odds. K. S. Narayana Rao validates the same:

Markandaya's novels deal with contemporary Indian society, which is a traditional society in a state of flux and change, and reveal a spectrum of moral attitudes on the part of the characters that people the fictional world, which include the traditionally moral, the immoral and the amoral attitudes. Although her moral characters are never relegated to the background and are, in fact, better drawn than their male counterparts, it is usually the men who get away with their delinquent sexual conduct (Quoted in Myles 2006 : 25).

In The Coffer Dams (1969) the evolution of Helen, remains the center of focus. In her quest for freedom, Helen leaves her husband. She considers humanism above materialism and that is the sole reason for her to drift towards the natives of India. Her affair with Bashiam, an Indian is also her effort to assert her own likings. Eventually, she achieves emancipation through the execution of duties on both the fronts- material and interpersonal relationships.

The Nowhere Man (1972), throws light on the problems faced by the character Vasantha due to diversity in cultures of India and England. Deeply rooted in her culture, she brings up her children also in the same vein. Hence, she gets crushed when her son Laxman marries an English girl. Embodiment of contentment, she confesses her marriage to be a happy one despite all odds. In her work Two Virgins (1973) Saroja, presents the image of an ideal womanhood in consonance with other women protagonists by the author. Similarly, the women characters of The Golden Honeycomb (1977) also highlight the themes of liberty and duty.

Psychological profundity that is noticeable in her novels, places Anita Desai on the top in the coterie of feminist female writers. She has created a specific niche for herself in the literary world by giving an insight into the psychological aspects associated with the lives of her female characters. Her novels are primarily oriented towards females as she writes about their problems as a daughter, a wife, a mother and a sister. Distinctive in comparison to her counterparts, her women characters are not average but peculiar in their intellectual thinking and spirit of questioning. K. R. S. Iyengar seems to vouchsafe the same for her:

Her forte is the exploration of sensibility-the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. The intolerable grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions is necessarily reflected in the language, syntax and imagery, yet the readers first impression on reading Anita Desai's novels may very well be that the emotions are too many, and are often the result of excessive cerebration on the author's part and not always determined by the movements in the consciousness of the characters. Nevertheless, Anita Desai's is an original talent that has the courage to go its own way... (1973 : 464-465).

She has several works to her credit like Cry the Peacock (1963), Voices in the City (1965), Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971), Where Shall We Go this Summer (1975), Fire on the Mountain (1977), Clear Light of Day (1980), In Custody (1984), Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), Journey to Ithaca (1995), Fasting-Feasting (2000), The Zigzag Way, (2004) and others.

In Cry the Peacock (1963), Anita Desai has dealt with various themes in order to expose the inferior status of women in the society. In comparison to other novelists who have

portrayed women either as strong or scrawny, she has tried to delve deep into the psyche of female exposing precisely the misery, the turmoil and the anguish faced by a woman in this male dominated society. This novel by the writer is more concerned about showcasing the sensibility of an Indian woman rather than focusing on external environment. Various devices have been employed in order to exhibit loneliness of Maya. An oversensitive girl she gets married to Gautama, a down-to-earth lawyer, quite opposite to Maya. Overpowered by the prophecy of an astrologer that one of the partners would die after her marriage, she loses her mental and marital equanimity. Incessant introspection of this prediction makes her very insecure about her existence and she starts thinking of ways to save herself. Her desire to live is so paramount in her mind that she not only kills her husband but puts her life also to an end. Thus, Cry the Peacock by the author is revolutionary in Indian English fiction as for the first time the focus of the story is entirely based on the mental and psychological condition of the female character and her thinking.

Quite similar to Maya, Monisha the protagonist of another novel entitled Voices in the City (1965) is desirous to live a happy and free life in Kalimpong and Darjeeling away from the struggling life of Calcutta. She grapples with her inquisitive mind which has got many questions. Perplexed sometimes, she considers death the best way to get rid of problems. Ultimately, after absolute failure in her efforts to compromise with life, she puts her life to an end. On the contrary, her sister Amla develops a compromising attitude. She has sensed the futility of having contrary thinking to her husband and hence compromises and acts accordingly. Thus, the novel highlights all the shades of life through varied images of women.

Innovative in its approach, the novel Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971) brings to the fore a working woman as the lead character for the first time. Sarah, the heroine is of English origin. Despite this discrepancy, she marries Adit, an Indian immigrant. Though she is not an Indian, she has the inherent qualities of Indian women like adjustability and tolerance. However, due to incompatibility in the marital bonding, Sarah finds her real self lost. Hence, estranged and dissatisfied, she decides to terminate the relationship. Through this novel, the author has skillfully highlighted the problems faced by working women to sustain themselves. As has been rightly pointed out by Hari Mohan Prasad:

In her there is a real split, a real dilemma, a real suffering, but she triumphs over all these. She is a silent volcano, not dead, yet not bursting. She understands dev, she knows her mother well, keeps a balanced relationship with friends and visitors, and shows a feeling for Adit. Right from the beginning she has been quiet in her response. Dev's long arguments and heated discussions of other friends never disturb her calm (Quoted in Myles 2006 : 41).

Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975) highlights the heightened sensitivity of Sita, a middle aged woman who finds her life meaningless even after marrying a successful businessman. Neglected childhood due to her father's excessive indulgence in mysterious activities makes her feel alienated from the rest of the world. Hence, she fails to connect herself to the outside world. Thus she finds everything around herself meaningless. Impractical and an introvert, she thinks that all her problems would be cured by magic. Overpowered by her impractical thinking, she leaves her husband but ultimately realizes the futility of her step while she is face to face with the tragic reality; she understands the uselessness of her stance which lacked any practical insight. She wavers between her uncompromising attitude and her urge to survive. Ultimately on realization of the futility

of her adamant attitude, she tries to come to some understanding with her husband, Raman.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) traces the journey of a woman Nanda Kaul who suffers the infidelity of her husband only as a passive individual. On the other hand, Ila Das, her friend is quite opposite to her and possesses the strength to rebel. The innumerable sufferings undergone by women get highlighted through other females also. In Custody (1980) depicts the confinement of the characters Deven and Sarla in alienation and loneliness. In Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), the author dissects the minds of the characters; Hugo and Lotte and brings to light the trauma and isolation suffered by the characters when they are caught between two different societies.

Another novel entitled Journey to Ithaca (1995) revolves around the secluded existence of two foreign women characters, Laila and Sophie. In Fasting Feasting (2000), the author has tried to trace the journey of Uma, the central character from innocence to maturity. The author has portrayed the females in diverse shades in this work. Uma, the protagonist and her sisters Aruna as well as Anamika are victims of gender discrimination broadly. The novel aptly highlights the aftermaths of this prejudiced treatment. In her recent novel The Zig-Zag Way (2004), the author unfolds the story of Betty Jennings and her adjustments to a new life in a new place.

Recognized as well as cherished for her politically charged novels, Nayantara Sehgal is another distinguished writer in Indian English Feminist Fiction. Her writing is characterized by effortlessness and her daring attitude to keep herself informed about the latest political developments. Her novels underscore the contemporary incidents and

reality behind politics shrouded in artistic colour and objectivity. Apart from politics, her writings also emphasize the search of Indian women for sexual freedom and identity. Her works are A Time to be Happy (1963), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), The Day in Shadow (1971), and A Situation in New Delhi (1977), etc.

A Time to be Happy (1963) talks about the congress party activities of 1942 while in Storm in Chandigarh (1969), she highlights the after effects of division of Punjab into two states of Haryana and Punjab. The Day in Shadow (1971) is motivated by the political movement of the society and A Situation in New Delhi (1977) focuses on the Naxalite movement, the student unrest and repercussions of Nehru's Death. Extending an equal treatment to private and political worlds, this novel fuses the events with the characters. The female characters in her novels have not been portrayed to extremes. They are neither the subjugated pawns nor overpowering viragos; instead her projection is more on a humanitarian level.

Winner of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, Inside the Haveli (1977) by Rama Mehta also created ripples among the readers. The novel focuses on the disparity between ethnicity and society in urban and rural life. It revolves around the story of Geeta, a modern girl of Bombay who has to lead a secluded life behind the veil in the *Haveli*.

Lending voice to the females' ordeals has been the centre of attention for Shashi Deshpande, another prolific writer in English. She has dealt with almost every issue raised by the women's movement in India regarding the subordination of women like rape, child abuse, son preference, denial of self expression, deep inequality, deep seated prejudice, violence both mental and physical, binds of domesticity, forced silence, etc.

Her writings form a firm step to break the long silence of women in India. She has emerged as an outstanding novelist on the literary scene as she has to her credit various award winning novels and short stories. Her prominence in the literary world has been further endorsed by Suman Bala:

As one who has taken up a women's cause most ardently, she represents India and contemporary Indian literature, especially in the English speaking world, with great distinction. Acclaimed by the reading public, decorated by the Sahitya Academy and other literary organizations, she is regarded as a forceful writer, with an excellent command over English language and her constant dialogues with her readers. (2001 : 9).

Her fiction includes Roots and Shadows (1983), The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993), A Matter of Time (1996), and Small Remedies (2000), Moving On ((2004), In the Country of Deceit (2008),etc. She has been termed as the feminist writer, as she herself states,

Despite marriage and motherhood, I felt very incomplete, even dissatisfied. That's when I read Betty Friedan's 'The Problem without a Name'. I felt: I'm not only a woman. I'm not only a mother. I'm not only a wife. I'm not only a female. I'm a human being with a mind. It gave me a lot of unhappiness that my intellect wasn't being connected to my female self. I was always Mrs. Deshpande, Raghunandan's mother; Vikram's mother ...that anger ultimately translates into feminism. (Quoted in De <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/09/04/stories/200309040115030.htm>).

Her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) is the story of an educated woman Sarita; her fight not only with the society as well but also herself. Despite her professional success, she has to suffer humiliation and torture in the hands of her husband as well as her parents. A victim of gender discrimination, she has to bear the burden of

killing her brother which she has never done. Thus, the novel talks about the journey of Sarita from self-denial to self-identity.

Her notable feminist work, Roots and Shadows (1983) is a story of rebellious Indu, the lead character. She marries against the wishes of her parents but the marriage fails as it does not give Indu much-desired love and affection. The novel highlights rape in marriage, an idea hitherto unexplored in Indian English Fiction. There are other women characters through which the author highlights the sufferings endured by women. Though other women characters accept their fate with silence and compromises, Indu refuses to do the same. However, she lives with her husband, but on her own terms without sacrificing her individuality. Her primary work, That Long Silence (1988) has won the author the Sahitya Academy award in 1990. It is a story of an Indian housewife Jaya who remains silent in order to adhere to the role of traditional Indian wife, but in the end, after a long introspection, breaks it.

Similarly, The Binding Wine (1993) too highlights the struggle faced by women who are strong assertors as well as bold spokespersons. The female protagonist Urmila in this novel has surpassed all the earlier female heroines in terms of her independent way of doing things, without any dependence on males. A Matter of Time (1996) is a novel that narrates the stories of four generations of women Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. Manorama, mother of Kalyani forces her to marry Sripati, which leads to infinite sufferings for Kalyani and a loveless marriage without any communication between husband and wife. Kalyani's daughter also suffers the same fate. Through all these women characters, the author has very skillfully drawn the picture of silent suffering

women as victims of the norms-bound society. Small Remedies (2000) explores with aplomb the journey of Madhu revealing to herself the problems of the past and the possible remedies for the troubles in life. Apart from Madhu, the work also projects an independent and ambitious female in Savitribai Indorekar and a sociable woman Lila. Her recent novel Moving On (2004) narrates the story of middle class families and reinforces the concept of faith as an important adhesive that holds any family together. Her latest novel, In the Country of Deceit (2008) talks about a woman Devyani and her love affair with an already married man. She continues with this relationship already aware of the transitory nature of this association. Apart from this, the novel tracks the sufferings, evasions and lies that surpass the people who are caught in the web of deception.

Namita Gokhle is another important writer in Indian writing in English. Applauded worldwide, her first novel Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984) has created a stir by its frankness in the early 80's and pioneered the sexually frank genre for which Shobha De is famous. In this novel, she has satirized the upper class of Delhi. Her other works include Gods, Graves and Grandmother (1994), The Book of Shadows (2001), etc.

Realistic and matter-of-fact, Shobha De portrays the glamour surrounding the life of aristocratic class of women without any reserve. She focuses on the elite class of Bombay in her novels. Her works include Socialite Evenings (1989), Starry Nights (1991), Sisters (1992), Strange Obsession (1992), Sultry Days (1994), Snapshots (1995), Second Thoughts (1996), Spouse: The Truth about Marriage (2005) a documentary, etc.

Socialite Evenings (1989) discloses the story of Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite who moves out from her failed marriage and tries to discover life on her own. She defies the notion that a women's life is insecure without a husband by living her life independently as a self-sufficient woman.

Set against the background of Bombay film industry, Starry Nights (1991) unfurls the journey of Asha Rani from a mere puppet in the hands of her mother and other men to a mature individual having a purpose to achieve. Apart from this, the hypocrisy and the pretentious reality behind the life of film stars have also been underscored. Sisters (1992) unfold the story of two sisters Nikki and Alisha who suffer from the same disillusionment in the hands of their husbands and support each other in times of crises. Both the sisters struggle on their own and achieve a stage of realization after undergoing all the hardships in their relationships.

In Strange Obsession (1992), Shobha De reinforces the same theory that a woman gets real tranquility and protection in her husband's home. In addition to this, she has highlighted lesbianism and the deceptive beliefs of caste and class. In Sultry Days (1994), the author portrays different arrays of women and hence, their varied attitudes. Some women are weak whereas some are strong who have the urge to fight and emerge as independent individuals. Bold portrayal of sexual imagery in Snapshots (1995), created a furore among the readers. Second Thoughts (1996), is an open study of a female's struggle in a metropolitan city and the imbroglio in which she cannot maintain a balance between conventions and modern values. The author has explicitly explained the trauma faced by a woman to save her marriage and at the same time her own self.

Another sophisticated and talented writer blessed with a wider range of talents is Bharti Mukherji. The chief focus of her writings is the Indian women's struggle for identity, the phenomenon of migration and also the problems suffered by Indians in a foreign culture. Her works include The Tiger's Daughter (1972), Wife (1975), Jasmine (1989), The Holder Of the World (1993), Leave It To Me (1997), Desirable Daughters (2003) and The Tree Bride (2004). The novel The Tiger's Daughter (1972) revolves around the story of a young girl Tara Banerjee, who goes to America for higher studies and marries an American of her choice. Later, she finds it difficult to live in an alien culture and comes back to India, however, to her dismay, finds herself isolated. Thus, the novel revolves around the sense of loss of identity that the character has suffered due to the diversity of two opposite cultures.

Her novel Wife (1975), centers around the sense of alienation the female Dimple suffers due to her incompatible marriage in a different culture. Frustrated and restrained, she kills her husband. Jasmine (1989), another work of fiction, broadly applauded all over the world traces the journey of a woman's self discovery. Mukherji's next novel, The Holder of the World (1993) is a story of the pangs of displacement and the joy of change arising out of the union of two diverse cultures. Based on the concept of immigration, the novel Leave It To Me (1997) has completed the trilogy which began with Jasmine and continued with The Holder of the World.

Desirable Daughters (2003) is based on the well established notion of the Indian society that the daughters are undesirable in a family and the mothers who give emphasis to the birth of daughters are also looked down upon. Thus, the plot of this novel is constructed

in defiance to this popular belief in Indian society. The Tree Bride (2004), another work of fiction by the writer explores the tragic life of Tara Lata Ganguly whose bridegroom dies and in accordance with a Bengali legend, she is married off to a tree. Hence, the novel explores not only the isolated existence of Tara but also the marginalization of females from the hub.

Ancient Promises (2000) by Jaishree Mishra, another writer of significance in Indian English fiction is an auto-biographical novel which gives a true account of her own life. Her other works are Afterwards (2004), Ancient Promises (2000) and Accidents Like Love and Marriage (2001), etc. Afterwards (2004) is a story which explores the power of love, joy and sacrifice in the life of a person while Accidents like Love and Marriage (2001) revolves around the incompatibilities between the desires and their outcomes.

Outstanding in the literary sphere, Ladies Coupe (2001) by Anita Nair also raises many questions considered taboo about the role of woman in contemporary India. It deals with certain basic feministic issues that not only shake the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in a traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality. The novel raises the question as whether the role of an Indian woman as a representative of other woman living under patriarchal systems in relation to cultural resistance should be restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers. In such a world, woman's role is limited to reproduction, regardless of her own desires and needs. The heroine of the novel Akhila is a forty five year old spinster, aunt and the only provider of her family after the death of her father. After getting fed up with her multiple roles where she feels that her own inner self is lost, she decides to go on a journey away from familial

responsibilities. In this journey, she meets five other women each of whom has a story to tell. After listening to all these stories and a close introspection Akhila achieves a stature where a spark gets ignited within her to find her true self.

Radhika Jha is another important novelist of Indian English Fiction. Smell (1999), the novel by the writer is a story of a young Gujarati woman Leela Patel whose father is killed during riots against foreigners in Kenya. Almost immediately, she is thrown out of her secure life and forced to lurch from one unsatisfactory situation to another. Through this novel the author highlights the struggle of Leela without anyone in the world to support her.

Gita Hariharan, one of the prominent writers of Indian English Fiction, has established herself in the literary circles with her first work The Thousand Faces of Night (1992). Winner of the Commonwealth's best first book Award for the year 1993, this novel has used myths to examine contemporary women's lives. Used as suggestive devices, myths help in understanding their lives, which on surface seem rather placid and devoid of event. Her other works include The Art of Dying (1993), In Times of Siege (2003), etc.

Blessed with a deep understanding and sharp sensibility, Manju Kapur, has highlighted the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries. She has been awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Writers prize for her first novel, Difficult Daughters (1998). The novel is set against the background of India's partition. It is the story of a young woman, Virmati who falls in love with a married Professor, a hitherto condemned passion in Indian social circle. Married Woman (2002) another successful novel is based on the story of Astha and her married life, a young woman

brought up in Delhi in a typical middle class household. The chief concern of the novel is the unattended wishes of Astha under the vortex of marriage; her consequent retaliation and final return to the same condition.

Winner of the 1997 Booker prize for her novel The God of Small Things (1997), Arundhati Roy is one of the revolutionary as well as acclaimed writers in Indian English Feminist Fiction. Set in the year of 1969, the story of this novel is built around a small town of Ayemenem in Kerala. It is the tale of Estha, his fraternal twin sister Rahel and their divorced mother Ammu. The book addresses the story of these small things in life which might not have gone down the pages of history but deserve special importance. Quite frank in her projection of females, her fiction does not portray females as too weak or too strong. Her portrayal is more in consonance with the recent feministic vision which treats females as human beings. Males as well as the Females are sufferers in their own ways.

Diaspora, generation gap, marital difficulties, miscarriages, etc., are some of the themes highlighted by Jhumpa Lahiri, a contemporary Indian American author currently based in New York. She began her literary career with her collection of short stories entitled The Interpreter of Maladies (1999). In this collection, she has addressed the sensitive issues in the lives of Indians or Indian immigrants. Her first novel, The Namesake (2003) which won her international recognition revolves around the story of Ashima and Arun who belong to India, and then to America. The novel pertinently highlights the dilemma faced by Indians in a foreign setup. Contrary to the other female writers, she comes close

to the modern feministic views wherein women are treated more as human beings and not as spineless creatures.

Kiran Desai yet another writer is a recent addition to Indian English fiction. She has to her credit Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard (1998) and The Inheritance of Loss (2006). Her first novel was a critically acclaimed novel which focused on the themes like migration and diaspora. The Inheritance of Loss (2007) talks about the story of Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, a judge living out a disenchanted retirement in Kalimpong, a hill station in the Himalayan foothills, and his relationship with his granddaughter, Sai. Another element in the novel is the disturbance created in their lives by a band of Nepalese insurgents. Still another concern of the novel is the life of Biju, the son of Mr. Patel's cook, an illegal immigrant in New York.

To sum up, feminism has sprawled in all the arenas such as social, political and literary. Initiated by females, it was supported by stalwarts like John Stuart Mill, Raja Rammohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. Under their guardianship, it flourished and has attained greater heights.

In the literary field, feminism has undoubtedly paved way for the open and undaunted expression of the female writers throughout the world. Eminent writers like Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, Ellen Moers, etc., have examined the position of women in literary works. They have laid a firm foundation for the posterity to explore in their own ways. Hence, the Indian female writers with a quest to portray experiences of women have got an opportunity and have been successful also in their efforts to depict the present situation of females. However, there is a steady progression from the earlier

writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Despande to the present writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai with respect to the type of depiction of women.

In the novels of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala women have been projected as more docile and enduring. Women have undergone tumultuous upheavals in their lives. Moreover, with the advent of awakening in female about her self as an individual, the themes of the later writers got more intensity. Consequently, the portrayal of females has also acquired a broader vision as the writers have projected them not only as passive housewives but also as rational beings. The fiction of writers like Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai falls in this particular era. The projection of females by the present writers has become more mature where they are victimized not by their male counterparts; rather they are the victims of times and the circumstances. Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai project the same. Reflecting the changing times, fiction of Shobha De showcases women of elite section. Consequently, the depiction and treatment of problems also differ.

Moreover, the shift in the thinking and the power of women has also been aptly projected. The modern day pressures and the change in the lives of females has made them more self reliant. Their questioning spirit supports them in their endeavours. The most important thing is their intensity of introspection which makes them look into the relationships around them more critically. Portrayal of females in its myriad forms has fascinated not only the fiction writers but also the filmmakers. With the passage of time, it has grown in richness and complexity in both the art forms. The next chapter discusses the origin and growth of cinema, one of the art forms.

CHAPTER 3

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF HINDI PARALLEL CINEMA

Cinema, an artistic endeavour, covers a wide range of human experience that reflects the attitude of an entire society, community, country or civilization. In a nutshell, it reveals how a civilization works. Therefore, despite being an artistic pursuit, it is a strong document, wherein the society and its surroundings, the mood and temperament of the people are crystallized in the shape of the celluloid. According to Abbas and Sathe, Hindi cinema creates a huge impact on the audience:

In a country, where less than five percent (sic) buy or read newspapers and books, the Hindi film is the only popular form of literature and art for the vast masses of the common people. Their contact with prose is the dialogue that they hear; the only poetry that enriches their lives is the poetry of film lyrics. Hence the importance of the talkie that can educate and inspire the people even while entertaining them. (1985 : 369).

The powerful impact of cinema has also been acknowledged by Urvashi Butalia, “Commercial Indian cinema is the single most powerful medium of communication in Indian society” (1984 : 108). Undoubtedly, cinema goes a long way in forming a bond with the culture of any country. Thus, it is also hailed as “the most prominent culture industry in modern India.” (Rajadhyaksha 2007 : 32).

Cinema influences an individual’s behaviour, perception and position in his culture and society and hence encompasses all the multifaceted aspects integral to society. The issue of projection of women also occupies a unique place in cinema. Shamita Das Dasgupta validates the same idea:

The issues concerning women may be various such as their subordinate and restrictive role in the society, the growth of their identity as an important part of their individual development, psychological and economic independence, suppression of rights, discrimination against women practiced in society, harassment and sexual exploitation, etc. (1996 : 178).

In the initial stages of cinema, only a single stereotyped image of females was portrayed. Thus, the projection of females lacked in diversity. In general, women in Indian cinema have been exhibited through three specific stereotypes: the chaste loyal wife, the dutiful self-sacrificing mother, and the westernized promiscuous bad girl. They have also been depicted as suppressed sufferers. The ideal woman has been a very pure, restricted and passive individual ready to make sacrifices for the well being of her family. As Hegde and Dasgupta claim in their analysis of images of women projected in Hindi films, “the traditional Indian ideals are reflected in her (the female protagonist’s) submissiveness, in the insistence on her marriage and in her confinement to her home” (1981 : 15).

The mythological icons such as Sita and Savitri are shown to be the embodiment of goodness, purity and chastity. Sanctimoniously revered by Indian society, they get manifested through cinema as well. Anjali Ram throws light on the same when she says, “indisputably the Hindu goddess Sita represents one such embodiment of purity, chastity, and the careful control of sexuality, continuously circumscribed within the domain of heterosexual marriage, family and the nation.” (2002 : 33). Thus, the female characters in Hindi films who do not reflect the Sita model turn out to be westernized and sexually violent, responsible for leading the men towards ruin. Moreover, the female characters have also been “often given Western or Christian names,” (Ram 2002 : 34) to further reinforce their transgression and separation from Indian culture.

Variability in the projection of women has been ignored by commercial cinema. It has glorified the idea of Indian womanhood which gets exhibited through her tolerance even after vicious exploitation. Hence, the position of women in the commercial films has never been diverse.

The interests of the audience have formed the foundation of the plots for commercial cinema. Thus, even when the films project the females as educated, they do it in relation to the welfare of the family. The only destination of women in the Indian society is marriage and that has been constantly reinforced. In the films, the role of married woman is clearly defined, and if she fails to abide by the norms, she has to bear the consequences. Her suffering has been shown as the outcome of her mistake and the defiance against her role as a wife. If educated and independent females fail to adjust with the husband or with the family, they move out, get divorce and start living on their own, but that has never been shown in a positive light. This fact has been illustrated by the commercial film Thodi Si Bewafai. (1980). There are many other films which impinge on the same issue. Another film, a commercial success entitled Do Anjane (1976) highlights the same line of thought. There have been films like Dr. Madhurika (1935) and President (1937) in 1930's also in which women have been shown as working and successful but in the end, they have been projected as losers. Despite the efforts of some directors who have tried to project female as a strong character, the number of such films is meager. At the outset, they have been portrayed as mythological figures, but with changes in the society, a transformation has come wherein apart from being housewives they have also been projected as working women. Still in another phase, they have been portrayed merely as ornamental objects just for the commercial success of the film.

Qualities like quest for freedom, professionalism, quest for identity, etc., are not considered positive in females. Considered a threat to the stereotypes deeply rooted in the society, they are condemned through the medium of cinema. Voices of the females had not been paid a serious attention in commercial cinema and hence a need was felt for another streak of cinema. The genre of films where they have got an honest representation is the offbeat streak of filmmaking. The Offbeat Cinema is known through various names, Parallel Cinema, The New Wave Cinema, Art Cinema, etc. In the beginning, the seeds for this type of cinema were sown in Bengal by Satyajit Ray. Ritwik Ghatak gave it a new dimension by using it as a medium to educate people. Mrinal Sen on the other hand imparted a broader vision to it by employing this technique for a diversified audience. Shyam Benegal, another pioneer established it in Hindi Cinema and hence has acquired the prestigious position as the father of Hindi Parallel Cinema.

Comprised of the plots, such as questioning of the social codes, poverty, exploitation based on caste as well as sex, communalism etc., the films of this genre avoid themes of formula films and showcase social realities. Nevertheless, more than any other subject, the favourite themes of the new wave films have been exploration of woman's status and her role in the society.

With reference to the delineation of women as a primary focus of the film, even commercial cinema is not far behind as it has also added some milestones in the women centered genre of filmmaking. Filmmakers such as V. Shantaram, Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy and Guru Dutt of commercial cinema have continued to explore relevant social issues in their films. Among these films V Shantaram's Duniya Na Mane (1937) is a

revolutionary film in which the protagonist questions the social codes and rebels against them. Maithili Rao, one of the well known critics of cinema endorses:

The first screen women to rebel against a marriage whose ideology she does not agree with is Nirmala of V. Shantaram's double version film *Duniya na Mane* (1937) which was titled *Kunku* in Marathi. The woman-as-rebel has dwindled into a stereotype herself. Because a screen image perpetually seeks to reflect social reality divorcing the emotional dimension of a woman from the culture that produced her. In effect, the rebel is most effective when she is rooted in her specific culture. This is probably the main reason why Nirmala is timeless within the history of Indian cinema in terms of the woman's voice rising in protest against a mismatched marriage that has been grossly unfair to the wife. V. Shantaram created our first domestic guerilla in Nirmala (Shanta Apte) (1993 : 75).

Apart from this film, other landmark films such as Mehboob Khan's Mother India (1957), Bimal Roy's Sujata (1959) and Bandini (1963) are particularly important not only in their exploration of the ideology of womanhood but also in the portrayal of bold female characters. Damini (1993), is another film which shows the fight of a woman against the injustice meted out to an innocent girl. The recent feministic films in the commercial streak are Lajja (2001), Mrityudand (1997), etc. In addition to commercial cinema and alternate cinema, there is another cinema known as the middle of the road cinema started in India in the 1970's by directors such as Hrishikesh Mukherji, Gulzar and Basu Bhattacharya. Through this particular cinema, attempts have been made to connect the mainstream cinema to the more artistic and socially aware films. As Gulzar and other directors opine:

Through all this, and unaffected by all this "a middle-of-the-road-" cinema continued to offer fare that dealt with human relationships, human conditions, Indian values and so on.The flag-bearers of this middle-of-the-road cinema were not surprisingly, people who had worked with the likes of Bimal Roy, such as Hrishikesh Mukherji, Basu Chatterji, Gulzar, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Basu Bhattacharya. (2003 : 89).

Films like Parichay (1972), Abhimaan (1973) and Koshish (1972) are examples of this genre of filmmaking. Women portrayal has found a significant place in most of the films by Basu Bhattacharya. The plot of his films focus on man-woman relationship in marriage. Films like Anubhav (1971), Avishkaar (1975) and Aastha (1997) explore in-depth the problems encountered in a marital relationship due to ego clashes and extramarital affairs. Aastha is particularly famous as it explores adultery in marriage, a subject untouched and considered a taboo in Indian society. Moreover, this film brings out the trauma felt by the female under the pressures of marriage.

Despite a few, many films have projected females merely as objects of beauty which in turn adds to the commercial aspects of the film. Conversely, due to its vivid portrayal of the suppressed desires of females, Alternate Cinema has proved to be the stepping stone for the female-oriented films. Parallel Cinema has been defined by the critics and writers in various ways:

It is an absolute negation of the popular cinema in which individual ambition or action has to be sacrificed to, or is motivated by, the common weal. It is a new and unfamiliar, though tentative, process of individuation in which the alternate cinema is engaged (Vasudev 1986 : 1)

Drastically different from the commercial cinema, the most common concern of this cinema is its paramount concern for the society. Aruna Vasudev, an established critic of cinema, clarifies the term Parallel Cinema:

India's New Cinema can be understood in the context of Commercial cinema. To the promoters of all-India commerce, the only admissible cinema is a mix of song and dance, rape and chase, fighting and cabaret, high drama and comic opera, religious sentiment and filial piety, modern bric-a-brac and ancient superstition. It is a mixture that defies any infiltration of creativity; its formula cannot be varied, except in minor window dressing. It is like the same film being made again and again. It rules out audience participation: entertainment is poured out of the screen as out of a tap turned on. When boy and girl are in love, they must play-act, and it must be obvious that they are play-acting. If they seem to be really in love, it embarrasses the audience, which has been brainwashed not to expect real events or feelings. (1983 : 39-40).

Commercial cinema also known as traditional cinema offers a striking contrast to this genre. It lessens the intensity of the issues and provides unrealistic solutions. Hence, sans social relevance, the films sustain the status quo- love the parents, offer prayers to God, live only for your husband, make sacrifices for your family and lead a flawless life. In order to attain commercial success, the filmmakers try their best to attract the audience. Consequently, the films are technically sound but brazen in content. Pendakar thinks on the same line:

Audience are mesmerized by the slick imagery that carries them into another world where men with superhuman qualities successfully conquer all odds, including bad landlords, greedy industrialists, corrupt politicians and sadistic policemen. Women generally are the icing on the cake –upholding traditional virtues of virginity, devotion to God and family and service to men. (Quoted in Gokulsingh 2004 : 12).

Artistic films search for and sensibly project the problems and inequalities prevalent in the society. Critics have varied viewpoints regarding the distinction between commercial and parallel cinema. Chidananda Dasgupta says, “The difference between art cinema and commercial cinema in India is simply the difference between good cinema and bad-between serious films and degenerate ‘entertainment. The new cinema in India is a creation of intellectual elite that is keenly aware of the human condition in India”. (Quoted in Datta 2003 : 20).

However, Rinki Roy Bhattacharya (in personal communication) brings forth the striking contrast between commercial and parallel cinema:

The polarization between commercial and artistic cinema occurred in the 1960’s when renowned directors such as Guru Dutt (1965), Mehboob Khan (1965), and Bimal Roy (1966) were replaced by a new breed of directors, mainly graduates of the Pune film Institute or film society members. Notable in this emerging group (some already discussed here) and claiming parallel status were Basu Chatterjee (cartoonist in the tabloid Blitz), Basu Bhattacharya (assistant briefly to Bimal Roy), Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani (graduates of Pune institutes), Shyam Benegal (from the advertisement media), Ritwik Ghatak (who scripted Bimal Roy’s Madhumati and was a professor of film Direction), Adoor Gopalakrishnan (from Kerala), and Mrinal Sen (who worked as an apprentice in sound recording studio) (Quoted in Gokulsingh 2004 : 95-96).

In the initial stages, the basic structure of films was inspired mainly by the mythology and mythological figures. Raja Harishchandra (1913) is the first film in the history of Indian cinema by Dada Saheb Phalke, the pioneer of Indian cinema. The prominent themes of that time have been the politics of that period, caste system, problems of westernization, protest against arranged marriages etc. The films like Devdas (1935), Achhut Kanya (1936), Balayogini (1937), Sikander (1941) etc., were based on the above stated themes. The condition of the film industry was really pathetic, without any financing and strict censorship. Films were considered as a leisure activity of uncivilized people. After the independence, the government felt the need to save the endangered classical arts and hence cinema became an area of serious concern.

With the surge in industrialization, a new class emerged and with a view to cater to their demands for entertainment, formula films came in vogue. Characterized by extravagant sets, fantasy, music, dance and emotion, everything was exaggerated and cinema became larger than life. Amidst all this show of fantasy, some filmmakers wanted to make films which differ in the theme as well as in the form with a purpose to provide a three-hour entertainment.

Setting up of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) gave a much-needed boost to such aspirants of Indian filmmaking. Cinema became a movement, and the filmmakers associated with it significantly contributed in giving a new direction to cinema. Apart from this, other vital development had been the first International Film Festival of India held in 1952 which played a key role. In this festival, films shown from different countries had given a breath of fresh air to the Indian filmmakers. Until then, they had

confined themselves to the Hollywood and British films; however, the festival opened new vistas by screening films like Rashomon (1950), Yukiwarisoo (1939), and Bicycle Thieves (1948). Bicycle Thieves (1948) by Vittorio De Sica based on Neo-Realistic approach has opened new avenues for the Indian filmmakers.

In addition, the Film Finance Corporation also played a prominent role in boosting the morale by granting loans to the aspiring filmmakers. Consequently, in the search for alternatives, the need for an alternate or parallel cinema was felt. Sumita Chakravarty traces the aesthetic debate surrounding new cinema and says, “film-makers may contest the hegemony of the commercially based, profit-driven popular cinema was to search for alternatives in the name of a higher calling to the art of the motion picture” (1993 : 235).

Jill Nelmes further validates the rising of Parallel Cinema:

While many bemoaned the demise of the romance and the rise of violence in the newer films, the 1970's also signaled the establishment of '**art**' or '**parallel cinema**', that tried to offer an alternative to the commercially driven 'formula' films. Dispensing with stars, songs and spectacle in favour of serious themes, these films adopted the classic codes of western narrative cinema, with a linear narrative set in a fictional world of spatial and temporal verisimilitude. This move towards realism had already been started by Satyajit Ray in 1955. (1999 : 407).

Many directors have contributed in the genesis of parallel cinema but Pather Panchali (1955) by Satyajit Ray has changed the entire outlook of the people towards cinema. The film has won the “Best Human Document”, a special award at the 1956 Cannes International Film Festival. Due to the worldwide success and instant recognition of the film, cinema has acquired a new connotation as a form of art.

In Hindi Film making before Satyajit Ray, there were other directors too who have instilled a breath of fresh air amidst formula ridden films and one such director has been K. A. Abbas. His autobiographical film Naya Sansar (1941) has been new in the treatment as well as theme; it is about a journalist who operates under the pressure of a successful businessman. Dharti Ke Lal (1946) his first realistic film has showcased the conditions of farmers of Bengal at the time of famine. Chetan Anand another key figure has made a noteworthy contribution with his film Neecha Nagar (1946). Bimal Roy has joined the race with Do Bigha Zamin (1953), a film about the struggle of the peasants and their ultimate defeat in the hands of landlords.

A stark exposure of reality, these films did not get recognition and hence failed in their attempt to attract the audience. On the other hand Pather Panchali (1955) by Satyajit Ray has been a highly successful film, which has established the alternate cinema in the real sense of the term. Wimal Dissanayake opines:

Ray's first film was first in many ways: the village as a setting, signifying possibly a quest for the 'real' India physically and, a more personal sense, psychologically; neo-realism as an idiom; a cast of non-professionals; classical music composed by Ravi Shankar; a rigorous structure based on western music, combined with a profoundly Indian sensibility characterized by a sense of wonder, the evocation of aesthetic emotion, of suggestion rather than the explicit statement. (Quoted in Vasudev 1986 : 15).

Satyajit Ray entered the field of films by constituting the first film society of India in Calcutta, along with Chidananda Dasgupta in 1947. He has tirelessly worked by writing several articles for creating awareness about good cinema. Aparajito (1956) and Apur Sansar (1959) follow the sequel to complete the Apu trilogy. Apart from Apu Trilogy, his other films are Mahanagar (1963), Charulata (1964) etc. His films are just opposites of

commercial cinema. Although, all his films are in his regional language except one film in Hindi entitled Shatranj Ke Khilari (1977), they have got a touch of humanism and universal interest. His films demonstrate remarkable humanism, elaborate observation and subtle handling of characters and situations. The success of his films has broken all the myths regarding serious films that they lack entertainment, present only in commercial films.

Despite making films based on other subjects, he has made films in which he has tried to show women and the issues related to them. His film, Charulata (1964) adroitly depicts the inner tensions faced by a woman. Pratiwandi (1970), Asani Sanket (1973) and Jana Aranya (1975) are some of his films which project the struggle of females for survival and their consequent action to safeguard their lives.

Satyajit Ray is not the only director who got moved by tragic incidents. Ritwik Ghatak is also very sensitive to human plight. His films realistically reflect his own tragic experiences born out of the biggest man-made tragedy in human history, the Indian partition. He has significantly contributed in giving a new shape to cinema as being a refugee of partition; he himself has undergone the problems encountered by the refugees. Hence, his films bear a stamp of the sense of defeat and deracination. Influenced by the films of Eisenstein, the master filmmaker, Ritwik Ghatak has also made politically radical films. His intention has been to use his films as a weapon for social change, as he himself admits:

When I thought of the cinema I thought of the millions of minds I could reach at the same time. This is how I came into films; not because I wanted to make films. Tomorrow if I could find a better medium I would throw away the cinema. I don't love films ... I have used the cinema as a weapon, as a medium to express my views...and to educate people (1982 : 8).

Distinctively ahead of his times in the projection of his themes, he failed to get due recognition. Unfortunately, the film critics in India neglected his talents during his short lifetime. He was a permanent absentee from film festival circuits and film awards. It was only after his untimely death as a chronic alcoholic in 1975 that critics of India started noticing the brilliance of his films. Gokulsingh supports the fine texture of his films, “No better contrast between the commercial success of Indian popular cinema and the box-office failures of some of the artistic films could be found than Ritwik Ghatak’s films. His films were not ‘hits’ and his genius has only quite recently been acknowledged” (2004 : 96).

His films include Nagarik (1952), Ajantrik (1958), Bari Theke Paliye (1959), Meghe Dhaka Tara (1961), Komal Gandhar (1961), Subarnarekha (1962) among which some of the films pragmatically represent the predicament of women.

The film, Meghe Dhaka Tara (1961) reflects the struggle of a refugee girl to save her poverty-stricken family. She is a victim of exploitation; her family members always torment her by saying that she has not done enough for the family. In the course of her grim struggle, she suffers from a deadly disease and ultimately dies. The film represents the biased attitude towards a girl child who works and lives only for their survival. At least two of them “‘*The Cloud – Capped Star*’ (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, 1960) and *Subarnarekha* (1965) are acknowledged masterpieces whose stature has only increased with time” (Gokulsingh 2004 : 96).

Widely known for his diversified filmmaking, Mrinal Sen, another key figure in this genre has entered the world of art through Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) in

1943. It was he who laid the foundation for Indian parallel cinema. “Mrinal Sen’s Bhuvan Shome (1969) considered to be the origin of the New Indian Cinema has influenced a whole lot of filmmakers, made on a tiny budget, won the award of Best Film, Best Director and Utpal Dutt for best actor.” (Gokulsingh 2004 : 96).

He has started his career by making films in Bengali but later on made films in other languages as well. He made his first film Raat Bhor in 1956. Deeply influenced by the leftist ideology, most of his films deal with social and political themes. In most of his films, he discusses in-depth the complexities of the middle class urban life of Bengal.

Mrinal Sen has won the National award for best film four times. His films have been screened at a number of International film festivals and have also won several awards. He has served as a jury member at the Cannes International Film Festival. His major films are Raatbhor (1955), Neel Akasher Neechey (1959), Baishey Sraavan (1960), Punascha (1961), Abasheshe (1963), Pratinidhi (1964), Akash Kusum (1965), Matira Manisa (1966 - Oriya), Bhuvan Shome (1969-Hindi), Ichhapuran (1970), Interview (1970), Ek Adhuri Kahani (1971- Hindi), Kolkata 71 (1972), Padatik (1973), Chorus (1974), Mrigaya (1976,Hindi), Oka Uri Katha (1977-Telegu), Parasuram (1978), Ek Din Pratidin (1979), Akaler Sandhane (1980), Chalchitra (1981), Kharij (1982-Hindi), Khandahar (1983-Hindi), Ek Din Achanak (1989 - Hindi), Mahaprithibi (1991), Antareen (1993 - Hindi), etc.

Though the framework is set in Bengal, he has made an attempt to show the multifaceted aspects of Indian life. Hence, he has made films in different languages like Hindi, Oriya and Telugu. Besides his contribution to the launch of realistic cinema, he has also been

active in making female oriented films. In comparison to his contemporaries Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, he is more seriously engaged with the gender issue. His film Ek Din Pratinidin (1979) is a study of female identity which focuses on the theme of the unjust treatment of a working woman.

Mrinal Sen's legacy has been continued by Shyam Benegal whose work is considered central to the history of Hindi Alternate Cinema. Renowned for his women centered films, his contribution to parallel genre of filmmaking cannot be overshadowed. Ranajit Guha supports the same, "Today Shyam Benegal is considered the father of Parallel, or Indian new wave, cinema in India." (Quoted in Datta 2003 : 1).

His contribution to the Hindi New Wave Cinema is remarkable. Most of his early films have not only been artistically superior but also commercially successful. He has pioneered films with women as strong characters. Considered remarkable and famous as a film director, he allocates women the central role in many of his films. He has made films which raise questions about gender exploitation in a male dominated society. His films thoroughly challenge middle class morality and well accepted ideas of womanhood as ideal wife and mother. Ankur (1974), first film by Benegal, has established the alternate cinema in Hindi. Memorable for its engrossing details of rural life, Ankur exposes brutal and indifferent feudal system. This film has launched New Cinema in Hindi in the real sense; Aruna Vasudev confesses the same, "The 'new' cinema was just beginning in India, new modes of perception and technique for both film-makers and audience were still hazy and barely formulated. In the context of its time, *Ankur* was a major step." (1986 : 40).

Shyam Benegal has not only established parallel cinema but has also given a platform where the voice of women finds a specific place. All his films reflect the turmoil and struggles faced by a woman in her life. His focus varies from a village woman to a woman in a city fighting for her existence on her own.

Focused on the life of a teacher's wife and her fight for her rescue, the film Nishant (1975), brings to the fore the woman's strength as an individual. After being abducted and gang raped by four zamindars the woman takes the command in her own hands and fights against the injustice. The husband is shown as a weakling who does not openly come forward to help her. The film is remarkable as it textualizes the epic Ramayana and gives it a temporal meaning by offering a solution to the problems of the female character which is a representative of her mythological counterpart Sita. Charandas Chor (1975), Mandi (1983), Trikaal (1985), Antarnaad (1992), Suraj Ka Satwan Ghoda (1992), Mammo (1994), Samar (1998) and Sardari Begum (1996) are some of his prominent films.

He made movies on different themes, for instance Bhumika (1977) is a film that revolves around the woman's search for identity and self-fulfillment. The film is broadly based on the life of well-known Marathi stage and screen actress of the 1940's, Hansa Wadkar who has led a flamboyant and unconventional life. The film focuses on the different roles a woman is expected to perform without any flaws. The work also seriously dwells over the issue of female's struggle for freedom and a bold assertion of her sexual choice, an issue never been dealt with such aplomb by any other film. Junoon (1978) and Kalyug (1981) are other films exploring reality in different situations. His other films like

Manthan (1976) and Aarohan (1981) have many common elements. Manthan is set against the backdrop of Gujarat's fledgling dairy industry, in which Benegal has addressed the viewer in a strict cinematic language bereft of commercial skills. All his films have very practically portrayed the contemporary evils present in the society and the hardships an individual encounters in relation to the surroundings in which he lives.

Mandi (1983), yet another breakthrough in the arena of women oriented films by him attempts to highlight survival of woman at one end and struggle to attain freedom on the other. Till date, Mandi is the only film that revolves around the system of prostitution in the suburbs of Hyderabad city, with the main focus on the brothel threatened by land grabbers and construction promoters.

His film Suraj Ka Satwan Ghoda (1992) centers around a bachelor who recounts over two evenings to a group of his friends, the stories of three women who have come into his life at different periods of time. Rich in texture, it becomes abundantly clear that more than love stories, his films are reflections on the shifting social values. In the film Samar (1998), he has used the film-within-film style with ironic humour and self mocking wit to expose the reality of caste prejudice. An award winning film, it questions the ideas of growth and draws attention to the deep seated prejudices about class and caste that still holds a place in the mind of audience.

The film Hari Bhari (2000) is purely feministic and suggests that one way of alleviating the misery of Indian women is through education. The film deals with the rather sensitive issue of women's reproductive rights and gender equality. Set in a village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, it is a story of five women from three generations of a rural

Muslim family. Zubeeida (2000), his famous film also talks about the problems faced by a female in this society where she has to struggle a lot to maintain her individuality.

Deeply inclined to show the underlying aspects present in the society is M. S. Sathyu, another director. In 1974, he has made a film Garam Hawa. Quite different from his counterparts, his film hovers around the impact of partition on the lives of common people. Some of his films such as Kaneshwara Rama (1977) and Chitegu Chinte (1979) were in his own regional language Kannada. He has made one more Hindi film entitled Kahan Kahan Se Gujar Gaya (1985). According to Sathyu, a film should have pessimism, because that makes it realistic. His main purpose has been not only to give entertainment but also to make people aware about the existing conditions and hence his films are mainly inspired by the politics of his time.

Mani Kaul is another director of this stratum of filmmaking. His first film Uski Roti (1969) has explored new forms of expression, defining much of New Indian Cinema's formal vocabulary. His other films are Ashad Ka Ek Din (1971), Duvidha (1973), Ghashiram Kotwal (1979), Satab Se Uthata Admi (1976), Dhrupad (1982), Mati Manas (1984), Siddheshwari (1989), Nazar (1989), Idiot (1991) and Naukar Ki Kameez (1999), etc.

Keeping pace with the other directors, Kumar Shahani has to his credit, films like Maya Darpan (1972), Tarang (1984), Khayal Gatha (1988), Kasba (1990), Bhavantharana (1991), Har Adhyay (1997), etc. Born in Larkana in Pakistan and settled in India after partition, he has graduated from the University of Bombay and the FTII. His film Tarang has dealt with the subject of prostitution wherein the female initially hesitates but later on

starts demanding money to further the worker's struggle for better wages and living conditions. Money has been used as an extended metaphor both sexually as well as an item of exchange. Simultaneously, it becomes the basis for women's dependence and independence.

Saeed Mirza, another figure of art cinema, attempts a free-flowing narrative under the influence of Brazilian films which mainly focus on the working class of Bombay. He has worked in the advertising industry before joining FTII, Pune. In collaboration with K Hariharan and Mani Kaul, he has made a film Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai (1980), Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho (1983), Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro (1989), Naseem (1995), etc.

Ardent observation of women's internal strife places Ketan Mehta on the top in the coterie of renowned directors in Alternate Cinema. He has to his credit six feature films, seven documentaries and a television serial. With an explicit direction of comedy, satire, violence and revelation of the struggles faced by women in the society, he has won himself the reputation of being the most perceptive and talented representative of the rising generation of filmmakers. His very first film Bhavani Bhavai (1980) has won him instant acclaim. His films have been selected for various International Film Festivals including Nantes (France), Moscow Film Festival etc. and have also won numerous awards over the years for best art direction, best editing, best jury, best film, etc.

Mirch Masala (1985) is one of Ketan Mehta's breakthrough films as it has created a history in the female oriented films. In this film, the director has aptly projected the marginalized status of women as well as their strife against injustice. Revolutionary in the

term of its bold portrayal of women, this film brings to the foreground the collective strength of females which has devastating effects on males. Despite the inclusion of illiterate women, the film undermines the immense strength and potential wielded by woman. His films, known for their realistic projection of the society's upheavals belong to the parallel genre of filmmaking. Apart from this, other famous films are Maya Memsaab (1992), Aar Ya Paar (1997) and Mangal Pandey : The Rising (2005).

Contrary to his contemporaries who have shown women merely as puppets in the hands of men, Jabbar Patel, another director of this genre has portrayed them as rational creatures, with a mind of their own. His film Subah (1983), the Hindi version of a Marathi film Umbartha presents the same questions an urban woman puts forward in order to know her place in the society. It shows the urge of the educated woman not only to lead her life according to her wishes but also to question their relevance. This is a story of an educated woman who is not contented with the conveniences and comfortable life within the household frame. As she is educated, she wants to seek satisfaction by working on her own and utilize her education according to her own wishes. A daughter, husband and a nice home alone do not satisfy her; thus, she wants to do something of her own choice. She expresses her desire to work in a women's reformatory to which her husband readily agrees. In the rest of the film, fighting for the justice of the women in the reformatory, she moves towards her real self. Thus, Jabbar Patel also does justice to his female characters.

Popular for his socially relevant, realistic and contemporary films, Govind Nihalani started his career as an associate of Shyam Benegal and also as a cinematographer in

Richard Attenborough's Oscar Award winning film Gandhi (1982). He has been directing films since the late seventies. Born in Karachi, his family has migrated to India during the partition of 1947. His first directorial venture is Aakrosh (1980), a film based on a real story. Converted into a film script by the eminent Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar; it has made a huge impact on the audiences all over India.

His film Ardh Satya (1983) based on a story by Dilip Chitre is also one of the highly recognized films of the era. It has dramatically changed the way Indian cinema used to portray the police as it exposes in stark details about the police-politician criminal nexus. Over the years, he has directed films which are known for the manner in which they grab the viewer's attention. The films he has directed include Aakrosh (1980), Vijeta (1982), Ardh Satya (1983), Party (1984), Aaghat (1985), Drishti (1990), Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa (1997), etc.

Radical and quite ahead than his contemporaries regarding projection of the relevant issues integral to the society, Mahesh Bhatt is yet another director who has given a new meaning to realistic cinema. He has made films in which he depicts women as strong characters and as individuals having the will, understanding about the inequality and an urge to fight against it. His film Arth (1982) has proved to be a turning point for women centered films. In this film, he has uncovered the male hypocrisy and paradoxically allowed the female to be the final decision maker. Moreover, the extraordinary success of this film has allowed the absorption of parallel cinema language into mainstream cinema. Arth, a film about female autonomy has been largely successful due to the feminist theme. His film Saaransh (1984) is set against the backdrop of unscrupulous and

unhealthy atmosphere of politics. It unfolds the trauma of an honest teacher whose son gets murdered and he has to struggle a great deal to get justice.

Muzaffar Ali is another director who has carved a niche for himself with his films Gaman (1979) and Umrao Jaan (1982). In his film Gaman, he has portrayed the life of a rural person who comes to Bombay to fulfill his dreams. Failed to get much recognition through this film, he had made another film Umrao Jaan (1982) based on the autobiography of a courtesan. The film has won him great recognition because of the apposite projection of the seemingly real lifestyle of courtesans.

Amidst the coterie of directors, there are prominent female directors also who have given a new dimension to feministic films. Immensely inspired by Shyam Benegal, almost all the female directors of his period like Sai Paranjpe, Kalpana Lajmi, Aparna Sen, etc. have acknowledged Benegal as the inspiration for the choice as well as treatment of their subjects. Sai Paranjpe, a new entrant in comparison to all these male directors has explicitly stated the difference between commercial and parallel cinema:

There is an unfortunate distinction in India, between Good cinema and Commercial cinema. We have a strange unwritten code. The artistically made films should not succeed at the box-office; the commercial film must never make sense. The time has come to challenge these norms. I believe in good cinema and I also believe in having an audience for my films. I would never compromise my aesthetic values or commonsense in order to ensure commercial success. But then I feel that is no longer necessary. (Quoted in Vasudev 1986 : 58).

Her successful venture Sparsh (1980) is a love story of the blind principal of the school and a beautiful widow. This film has flagged an exciting era of women's films based on humanitarian issues or female oriented subjects. Another film by her is a comedy, entitled Chashme Buddoor (1980) in which she has shown the struggle of three young men to win

a woman's love. Her yet another film Katha (1983), is an allegory based on the hare and tortoise theme.

Daughter of a renowned critic and filmmaker, Chidananda Dasgupta, another female director is Aparna Sen. She has also acted in films and in 1981 made her debut as a film director with 36 Chowringhee Lane which has won commendable reviews from critics. The film is about an aged English teacher who still lives in Calcutta, three decades after independence. For this movie, she has won the Best Director Award at the Indian National Film Awards. The film has also won the Grand Prix (The Golden Eagle) at the Manila International Film festival. Aparna followed up this early success with several other films, notably Paroma (1984), Sati (1989) and Yugant (1995). These films examine the feminine condition in Modern-day India from a different perspective. Mr. and Mrs. Iyer (2002), is a love story set against the harsh backdrop of Hindu-Muslim sectarian violence in India, and has won Aparna a third National Film Award for her direction and an acting award for the actress Konkana Sen Sharma. Her latest film is 15 Park Avenue (2006) which deals with a schizophrenic girl's relations with her elder step-sister.

Groundbreaking and controversial director as well as screenwriter, Deepa Mehta is known for her films Fire (1996), Earth 1947 (1998) and Water (2006). Revolutionary in her treatment of women, she challenges Indian minds and hearts with her new age filmmaking. The film Fire is set in contemporary India and has been highly controversial due to its explorations of gender, marriage and sexuality. Earth, is a story about the partition of India in 1947 from the vantage point of view of a young parsi girl. The film

Water is set in the 1930's and focuses upon the difficult lives of a group of widows living in an impoverished condition in an *ashram*.

An established woman director, Meera Nair has initiated her career by directing four documentaries. Her 1991 film Missi sippi Masala has profiled a family of displaced Ugandan – Indians living and working in Mississippi. Mira Nair stresses the fact that she prefers to create entertaining films that touch subjects close to the heart. She says, “I’ve to admit – I am a shameless populist! A scene that gives you homework or confuses the audience ...woh nahi hoga meri picture mein.... “I am far better suited to telling stories about flesh and blood characters than to mounting special effects extravaganzas,” she explains.(2007 : 3).

Her master piece, Monsoon Wedding (2001), a film about chaotic Punjabi Indian wedding, has been awarded the prestigious Golden Lion Award at the Venice film festival. Her latest film is The Namesake (2007) which has been premiered in the fall of 2006 at Dartmouth College, where Ms. Nair has been presented with the Dartmouth Film Award. Some of the other films by her are Kama Sutra-A Tale of Love (1996) and Vanity Fair (2004). She is also in the pre production for the upcoming film, Gangster M.D. a remake of the Bollywood blockbuster Munna Bhai MBBS, a film in the Munnabhai series.

Undeniably established in the world of cinema, Kalpana Lajmi is again a legendary filmmaker, widely acclaimed for her critically acclaimed female oriented films. Her famous film Ek Pal (1986) addresses female sexuality. Rudaali (1992) is another film which is set in the world of professional female mourners and Darmiyaan (1997) explores

the lives of eunuchs. Her next powerful feministic venture is Daman (2001), the story of marital violence inflicted on a woman and her consequent escape. Her latest film is Chingaari (2006), one more women centered film which revolves around the love story of a prostitute in a tiny village of North India.

In consonance with these directors of realistic cinema, Madhur Bhandarkar has also used the medium of cinema to explore the integral issues related to females. Chandni Bar (2001) is a successful attempt by him. Critically acclaimed, this hit film pragmatically portrays the struggling lives of bar girls in Bombay. In this film, the director has given glimpses of the existential difficulties faced by a single woman in this male dominated world. The protagonist of this film joins the profession of dancing in a bar just to earn her livelihood. After marriage, she decides to leave it but the desire to educate her children and also the circumstances direct her to the same situation and even her daughter also has to join the same bar. The stark reality and the nudity surrounding the city life find representation in this film. Satta (2002), another film by him is based on the struggle of a woman for justice in the corrupt world of politics. Unacquainted with the illegitimate practices which form the base of politics, she boldly defeats the males and learns to display the power despite being a woman. His next film, Page 3 (2005), has been awarded three prizes and has been very well received by the critics as it skillfully exposes the hypocritical lives of elite class. Corporate (2006) is another film which has again been praised by the critics. Known for his socially relevant and hard hitting films, Madhur Bhandarkar has made a female as the central character, as has been witnessed in four of his films. His latest release is Traffic Signal (2007), a film about the travails of people

living around a traffic signal in Mumbai and Fashion (2008), a film about the girls aspiring to become successful models in the world of glamour.

Keeping pace with the stalwarts of Hindi parallel cinema, Mahesh Manjrekar is another film director who has made both types of films commercial as well as realistic. He is known as a director, an actor, producer and writer. Credited with direction of films like Vaastav (1999), Astitva (2000) Viruddh (2005), etc, he has also projected females in all shades. Astitva is based on the story of a woman fighting for her identity. In this film, the sexual autonomy of females has been dealt with dexterously, a hitherto condemned practice for women in Indian society. The protagonist leads her life compliantly in the beginning despite her husband's oppression as she finds herself guilty. On the flipside, when her husband comes to know that his wife has a son from an illegal relationship with her music teacher, he abuses her intensely. Aditi gets furious at this reaction of her husband and challenges his hypocrisy.

Hinging on the same line, Meghna Gulzaar is another prolific director in this genre. Her film Filhaal (2002) is based on surrogate motherhood and endeavors to explore the complexities arising out of this. Woman-oriented in subject, the film meticulously underscores the different aspirations of two intimate childhood friends and their different outlook towards life as for one leading her life in domesticity is a pleasurable thing whereas for the other the career is more important. The film beautifully delineates the change in the females with respect to motherhood.

Another talented director who has created ripples with his film is Shahla Raza. His film Chameli (2004) unravels the hardships undergone by a sex worker in her struggle for

existence. The focus of the film is primarily on the stark truths surrounding the lives of sex-workers as they are considered the lowest in the societal structure and most vulnerable to all the corrupt forces. In addition, the film also brings to light the awareness that has come in this class and their right to reply in the negative.

Hirdesh Kamble's film Pranali-The Tradition (2008) is the latest addition based on the age-old tradition of Devdasis in India. The film highlights the problems of a prostitute in the society. The heroine of this film finds herself in a problematic situation when her child is denied admission. After finding herself in a quagmire, she derives inspiration from an NRI who persuades her to work with other co-sex workers to get a legal sanction for prostitution. Thus, the film tries to place the prostitutes on a humanitarian pedestal so that they should not be sidelined just because of their profession.

To conclude, cinema in India plays a prominent role in influencing the perceptions of people in the society. Position of women in the society has always been in a state of perpetual subjugation and the same has been mirrored through the medium of cinema too. Simultaneously, with the change in the society regarding the place of females, cinema has again taken the lead in projecting the same. Hence, it has an extensive and rich history in presenting the problems of the women in the society and still in the present withholds the same tradition. The position of women has undergone various shifts in the society and has never been without controversy in Hindi commercial films. The success of such films depends to a large extent on the projection of females and keeping the profit in mind the commercial cinema makers have projected the females accordingly. Consequently, despite a few films which have created history in the meticulous and real delineation,

females in commercial cinema have only acquired the place of ornamental objects without any concrete relevance.

However, the realistic mode of filmmaking has successfully projected their true conditions. Initially, the representation of women has been more on the lines of conforming to the vested beliefs in the society. Hence, most of the films have tried to portray the females as embodiments of Sita and Savitri, epitome of wifely qualities. On the other hand, with the passage of time a change has come in the society and the same has got manifested in films as well.

Alternate Cinema, known to be more concerned with the realistic projection of females has portrayed their problems in more stark terms. Initiated by Satyajit Ray, it has been taken further by Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak. Apart from making films on contemporary subjects they have also been involved in making films based on the life of females under stereotyped male domination. Alternate cinema has been established in the Hindi cinema by Shyam Benegal who has significantly changed the outlook of the people towards cinema. Primarily concerned with the predicament of females, the main focus of his films has been the projection of female in different shades - housewife, working women, prostitute, village woman, etc. Almost all his films superbly narrate the struggles of the females in the course of her peregrination from a mere innocent to a mature individual. In addition, other important directors like Ketan Mehta, Jabbar Patel, Muzaffar Ali, Saeed Mirza, Mahesh Bhatt, etc. have also been pivotal in providing a solid support to the voices of females in their films. Despite these male directors, female directors like Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Sai Paranjpe, Deepa Mehta, Meera Nair etc,

have also been very active in generating cinema of meaning, wherein the females find a specific place. All the films known to be the milestones regarding females cause have set the tone for women oriented films. Although with the passage of time, alternative cinema has receded due to the popularity of popular cinema and hence its aesthetics has become absorbed into mainstream cinema. Still, some directors like Mahesh Manjrekar, Madhur Bhandarkar, Shahla Raza, Hirdesh Kamble and Meghna Gulzaar etc, are actively participating in the projection of female oriented subjects. However, the projection of the ordeals of females has been an active area of interest for the Indian English Female writers of Fiction also which is discussed in the forthcoming chapter.

CHAPTER 4

**REVELATIONS OF UNFETTERED EXPRESSION OF
FEMALE'S VOICE**

Females have undertaken a long and unending journey of trials which has been intently focussed on by acclaimed Indian writers. Among these writers, the female writers of fiction have successfully pioneered the tradition of limning the experiences of females. Apposite reflection and dexterous projection of the ordeals of women forms the crux of most of the work of these prominent writers throughout the world. Having initiated by writers such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Hannah More, etc., this tradition has been taken further by other women writers in different countries. Indian English Feminist writers have also joined the race and projected the trials of females with a holistic vision. The writers have not only delved deep into the minds of their characters but have also analyzed the external contributory factors responsible for their state. Indian English Feminist Fiction has a long history to cherish in this realm. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherji, Anita Nair, Anita Desai, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy, etc. are some of the prominent women writers.

Existential anxieties, alienation, search for self, self-imposed silence, assertion of freedom, marital incompatibility, craving for professional identity, urge for independence, etc., form the core of their works. Though each of these novelists focuses on the different aspects of a woman's life, the common thread observed is the oppression, both subtle and blatant. Female writers project the female protagonists in different shades

irrespective of their inherent identities, like mother, wife, and sister. In the fiction of Anita Desai, the main idea revolves around the female's sensitivity where she feels herself alienated from the rest of the world. Thus, the female in her works develops in the course of existence, her own eccentric world with respect to her relationships. R. K. Gupta has something similar to say, "Mrs. Desai projects the present trend in Indian English Fiction as she represents the welcome, creative release of the feminine sensibility which began to emerge after the world war second". (2002 : 13).

Anita Desai is recognized as a writer who focuses on the psychological sensitivity of females. She has carved a niche for herself by adding a new aspect to Indian English Feminist Fiction. Her field of exploration is the internal self of the females, their agonies, mental yearnings and traumas faced by them.

Where Shall We Go this Summer (1975) by Anita Desai deals with the predicament of a woman protagonist Sita. The prominent themes which highlight her dilemma are indecisive spirit, her alienation, quest for a meaningful place in her life and finally her contemplation leading to realization.

One of the main themes projected through this work is the **indecisive spirit** of the protagonist. Deprived of care, belongingness and love, especially in her childhood, the desire to be wanted by someone gets intensified in Sita. After her marriage, she fails to get the attention and compassion from her husband. Practical in thoughts as well as in action, her husband gets excessively involved in his work which upsets her.

She has spent her childhood amidst people who were fascinated by the magical charisma of her father. Witnessing her father cure everything impossible she nurtures a fascination for utopian attitude which casts a deep and negative impact on her personality. The novelist sums up her fantasized self when she considers the happiest moment in her life to be the love scene between an elderly Muslim man and a woman without any dialogue. Impressed by the sight of their selfless and unreserved love scene, she feels sorry for her own state:

He looked down at her and caressed her face-so tenderly, so tenderly. I (Sita) have never seen such tender, such gentle movements....the man and the woman never looked at anyone else, they looked at each other with such, such a strange, strange expression- I can't forget it. I can't explain it. Tender, loving, yes- but in humanly so (146).

Her attitude towards her home and her family completely changes after this incident. Her already confused mind gets more distracted drawing her away from reality.

The reason for her distanced attitude has its roots embedded in her neglected childhood. During her tenure on the island, she has never seen contented relationships; hence, relationship does not carry much significance for her. Her mother leaves her; her father is too busy with his own affairs; hence, insecurity becomes an inherent part of her life. Her marriage with Raman also is a sort of bargain as he has married her out of pity. After the death of her father, he marries her to safeguard her already a victim of internal dilemma. Dearth of mutual compatibility between them makes her crave for self-fulfillment. Further, the contrast in their natures is also one of the hurdles as he is a very practical and business-minded person whereas she is an impractical person. Moreover, the absence of contentment in relationships is also an added factor in increasing her disbelief in human

relationships. The mystery surrounding her father's occupation and her mother's leaving make her doubt the sanctity of relationships. All these incidents in her life make her shirk from her relations which separates her from her husband and her children.

Obsessed with magic, her father has never bothered about the whereabouts of his children which in turn creates a feeling of segregation in them. Her brother and even her sister Rekha, the most loved child of her father, leave immediately after his death. Their callous attitude compels her to think about the irrelevance of relationships. Even her mother is a victim in the hands of her father. She leaves him and runs away from the home just because of his total involvement in the magical activities. Sita's close encounter with this fragmentation in relationships is one of the primary reasons for her detached and alienated attitude.

Unable to perceive the real cause of the problems in her married life she thinks that they can be resolved by magic. Hence, immaturity in thoughts never lets her decide the things in the right direction. Her act of leaving her husband just because she does not want to give birth to a baby reveals her weak spirit which does not want to adjust. Her weakness also inculcates in her the idea to escape from the responsibilities. R. K. Gupta says very poignantly, "The title of the novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is highly suggestive. The interrogative feature of the title is symbolic of the uncertain state of the heroine's mind, of her awareness and of her indeterminate fate" (2002 : 116).

Her illogical reasoning weakens her decision making power which comes to the limelight when she fails to decide her own priorities. Her lack of worldly knowledge and immaturity can be attributed to her father's unfair treatment towards her. He is fond of

her elder sister due to her deep involvement in his religious assemblies. On the other hand, Sita does not contribute in such activities.

Another cause for her weak spirit is the insecurity which centers around her since her childhood. This aspect of her character is quite similar to the protagonist Usha of the film Bhumika wherein in her moments of insecurity she longs for her grandmother. In her childhood she goes to her grandmother and even in her youth after her death she seeks for that security in the songs sung by her. Similarly the heroine Sita of this work of fiction wants to go to Manori as it signifies a protective shield for her. Apart from that she lacks qualities like boldness and courage, essential to survive and face the harsh realities of this world. Her lack of strength is clear when she goes to Manori in order not to give birth to the baby. Her confused mental state comes to the fore through her conversation with her husband, “You said you don’t want it. Now you say you do want it. What’s up? What’s up?”, “I mean I want to keep it-I don’t want it to be born.”(32).

Sita’s impractical attitude towards life can be attributed to the fact that her life in Manori has been far away from practicality. Her father is the only man who is her close relative. After his death when Raman marries her, she hopes to fulfill the void in her life. On the flipside, his impractical self further makes her feel detached. Despite leading a secure life in a city with her husband and children, she feels her life to be devoid of any charm. As a result of excessive busy schedule, her husband fails to pay attention to her likes; hence she feels estranged. Sans anyone to share her feelings, loneliness captures her mind. Deprived of a significant status in her father’s house, she wants it from her husband; on failing to get it, she finds herself too insignificant.

Monotonous existence of the city adds more to her isolated existence, thereby making her life more complex. Her childhood has seen sacrifices and concern for others, accordingly when she visits the city, the indifference exhibited by the people becomes unbearable to her. She never feels herself as a part of them and remains an outsider. Incessant brooding over the same issue of dullness shuts all doors of knowledge for her and she gradually **alienates** herself from everybody, another theme depicted in this novel.

The tediousness, disinterest and the growing tilt towards commercialization make her crave for the innocent life of the island. Moreover, the dearth of compatibility with her husband also is one of the prime reasons for her to take this decision. Her husband does not offer her any solace when she gets pregnant for the fifth time. Sita terms the dullness present in the city life as madness and expresses her desire to her husband to move away. Raman gets shocked at this behavior of hers and questions her doubts. Sita deems all the activities of her children as madness, for instance, the fighting of the kids and their actions to tear away the books and the other unnecessary activities like the gossip of the maid servants and their fights.

Considering it as sheer nonsense, her husband tries to make her see not only the irrelevance of these things but also makes her understand the difference between reality and illusion, “he mocks at her, so you’re running away-like the bored runaway wife in -in a film.”(33). Sita hates the dull and drab life of the city without any real pleasure and sans variety; thus she nurtures the **quest for a meaningful place** in her life. Selfishness, greed, craving for money and other materialistic pleasures make her question the credibility of these things. Hence, in the midst of all these practical and harsh realities of

life, she finds herself leading a meaningless existence. She cannot relate herself to the strictly commercial life without any significance. The activities which she watches for instance, the fight of the eagle and crow indicates to her the increasing cruelty in this world. Through the meticulous use of symbols writer has skillfully highlighted the predicament of the heroine. Disillusionment captures her mind and she longs to run away from this tedious life.

Motherly instincts also fail to compensate for the isolated life. Due to her out-of-the-way attitude, her kids' stops having intimacy with her, thereby making her a stranger in her own house. They feel more comfortable with their father than with her. Her understanding narrows down to her own self, failing to understand the real cause of her monotonous existence. She wavers between her notions of significance and insignificance. Considering her life as burdensome and even her pregnancy as imposed, she goes to Manori.

Coming to Manori is her step towards seeking solace from the dull life of the city. Conversely, her decision receives a severe jolt when the children start keeping distance from her. They stop sharing things with her and her daughter Monika shares her anguish with her father. Her action to secretly inform her father the desire to get admission in medical reveals her intimacy with her father and not with her.

Sita craves for being a sensible woman. She feels that had she been given a chance she would also have led a sensible life and devoid of distractions and illusions she is leading now. She admits her deep seated secret urge for creativity, "If only I could paint, or sing or play the sitar well, really well, I should have grown into a sensible woman...I should

have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings. How to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning” (117). This deep **contemplation leading to realization** that whatever she has been doing was not right and realizes that to live, she needs perception and maturity. She realizes the fakeness surrounding the magic of her father. She regrets her decision to come to that place which has lost its charisma. On the other hand, she has to face a lot of difficulties. The non-availability of food and comfort troubles her and she finds herself isolated from her own children. She feels as if she has not done justice to the children by bringing them to Manori. They have to spend their life on this island which lacks the essential things for life. The boredom of the children as they have no company to play and interact pricks her consciousness. Uncivilized Miriam and Moses are the only people with whom they can play. Regretful of her decision, she tries to play with the children as within herself she feels sorry and blames herself. All her actions to keep the children happy bring to the fore the revival of her suppressed motherly instincts. Moreover, her perception acquires a new dimension which brings her closer to relationships. The inscrutability that haunts her about the magic and mysterious activities of her father comes to an end and she realizes the stark truth lying deep beneath the things. She has never allowed the reality to enter her mind by remaining immune to it. Her visit to the island proves in a way an enriching experience for her as only after coming here she comes closer to truth. Anita Desai in her interview with Atma Ram endorses the state of realization in Sita:

Of course if one is alive, in this world, one cannot survive without compromise-drawing the line means certain death, and in the end, Sita opts for life-with compromise-consoling herself with Lawrence’s verse, with the thought that she is compelled to make this tragic choice because she is a part of the earth, of life,, and no one can no more reject it than the slumberous egg can or the heifer or the grain (Quoted in Bande 2000 : 106).

Her improbable attitude also marches towards sensibleness. Initially, she tries to convince Menaka, her daughter to opt for art as a career and not science but later on when Menaka calls her father she gets a shock and understands that nothing can be imposed on children. Moreover, she realizes the importance of father in the life of children and also to some extent in her own life as she starts feeling safe and secure after his arrival, “she stood back so that he could enter. As he did, she felt comfort, security, and dull, safe routine walk in, in quiet, grey strides” (120).

The indication that children are more close to their father and not to her torments her deeply but the action of her daughter to call her father makes her think about her place in the life of her children. Motherhood, an inseparable aspect of a woman’s life daunts on her and she realizes the mistake she has committed by bringing them to the island. Suresh Kohli rightly points out the change in the character in comparison to her earlier works when he says, “one distinct change: Sita neither dies in the end nor kills anyone nor does she become mad. She simply compromises with her destiny” (Quoted in Gupta 2002 : 115).

After the arrival of her husband on the island, her conversation with her husband also makes her comprehend the futility of her living in a shell created by her. He makes her realize the truth and advises her to face the world and seek happiness not in the others but the people who are her own- He and her children. After the conversation Sita perceives the truth in Raman’s logic, “One should be grateful in life in only a matter of disappointment, not disaster” (143). The dichotomy prevalent between the life of city and

island indicates her confused state of mind. Island stands for magic away from reality whereas city implies reality. T. S. Anand points out:

Her desire to bear the child and return with Raman to the land signifies her return to life, community and society in spite of the debased dullness of life, the calamity, the lies and the moral buggery, the odium, the detritus of wrong and sorrow dropped on every heart, for existence is not possible in an insulated stage of being rather existence implies being with others. (Quoted in Gupta 2002 : 110).

Anita Desai has portrayed females as eccentric and weak in her initial novels. Quite the reverse, Clear Light of Day (1980) presents woman not only as strong and bold but also compromising and adaptive to the situation. She has undoubtedly marched ahead with this work by giving a comprehensive and varied account of a woman's existence. The prominent ideas dealt with in this work are display of the free spirit of a woman, existential anxiety and awakening about life's eternal truth.

Bimla, the lead character, displays her boldness and assertion in all her actions. Uncompromisingly sincere and independent, she does not depend on any male for support. In this regard, she is unconventional in terms of the other characters delineated by the author. Meera Bai says very truly, "Bim is entirely different from the earlier women of Anita Desai in that she imbibes the qualities of independence, courage and service. Challenges inspire and stimulate her and her 'self' rises to meet them instead of shrinking and escaping" (1996 : 98).

Marriage, considered to be the supposed quintessence for women, seems trivial to her in comparison to her familial responsibilities as she says, "Bim gave a snort of disgust. 'I don't know why they are in such a hurry to get married,' she said. 'Why don't they go to

college instead’” (140). Traditionally the male has been depicted as the bread-earner as well as the provider; Bimla Das presents a sharp contrast in terms of boldness. Through the meticulous execution of her responsibilities, the novel highlights the shift of the household responsibilities from the male to the female. Complete discard of all worldly pleasures bring to the fore her commitment towards her family. She is working as a lecturer and earning so that she can look after the needs of the family. Hence, the display of the **free spirit of a woman** is one of the most significant ideas advocated in this work

Bimla, is strikingly a new woman. Independent frame of mind present in Bimla Das resembles her counterpart Son Bai in the film Mirch Masala also. Though there are differences with respect to the circumstances they undergo in the course of their struggle for survival, the common thing observed is the indomitable spirit to lead their life independently without any dependence on the males. The free spirit of Bimla gets highlighted through her caring attitude for the family. Her parents are supposed to be the representatives and the foundation of the family. On the flipside, they are projected as people oblivious of their children and engrossed in themselves. They visit clubs, play cards sans any consideration for their children and hence the whole family depends on Bimla for their needs.

Intelligent in academics and in handling other vital responsibilities, she does not lack any single trait expected to be present in the custodian of the house. She is undoubtedly, “A born organizer, she was petrol leader of the Bluebirds when still a small pig-tailed junior, later of the Girl Guides, then captain of the netball team, class prefect, even-gloriously, in her final year at school-Head Girl.” (122). Still, she does not crave for a successful

marital life rather her sense of duty towards her family surpasses all her suppressed desires. Since her childhood, she has been independent and bold as is evident from her activities both at the school as well as at home. Of all her siblings, she is the most intelligent also as is evident from her excellent academic record. Tara, on the other hand is shown as a weakling. Comparative analysis of both the sisters brings to the fore the contrast between the immense strength and resolute frame of mind of Bimla and the immature and disorganized nature of Tara. Since her childhood, Tara banks on others. Academically weak, she has to depend on Bimla and for emotional support on her aunt Mira. After marriage, she has to learn these qualities from her husband who hates unsystematic people.

Completely dependent on her husband for everything, Tara does not nurture any notions for independence. Quite conservative in her thinking, she opines that marriage is very important for women, and hence, advises the same to her daughters also. Since her childhood, she has been dependent on others for her needs. An introvert, she does not find it easy to communicate her wishes strongly to her husband. Tara's insecurity gets intensified when she starts visiting their neighbour's house frequently after the death of their parents. There are various instances which clearly manifest the weak spirit of Tara. Extremely hesitant and shy, she receives a severe reprimand from Bimla for not going to the charity trip with the school children. Scared of Bimla, initially she goes but after a week starts avoiding it by pretending to be ill. Bimla feels outraged at this behaviour of Tara and scolds her for not doing anything for the welfare of the society:

Too fine a lady to step into the hospital ward? The smells upset you, do they? The sights keep you awake at night, do they? Oh, you poor little thing, you'd better get a bit tougher, hadn't you-aunt's baby? Otherwise what good will you ever be? If you can't even do this little bit for the poor, what will you ever be able to do when you grow up? (126).

Mira is the person with whom she feels an urge to go and sit by her side. She treats her just like her mother even when her mother is alive. Education does not carry much significance for Tara whereas punctual and organized Bimla is very particular about her studies. Tara's husband Bakul admires this quality in Bimla and always advises her to be like her. Bimla's independent state of mind is clear from her actions to supervise the needs of everyone in the family without asking for any support. Her competitive spirit and inquisitive attitude get revealed through her childhood games which she used to play with her siblings.

Deprivation of parental love does not make Bimla a weakling. Engrossed in themselves, the parents used to spend less time with their children. However, despite the lack of attention, Bimla feels self-sufficient. Bimla Das "nurtures her feminine self through acceptance and accommodation rather than withdrawal and rejection." (Juneja 1987 : 66).

A diabetic, her mother neither possesses the inclination nor the desire to take care of her children. Hence, after the death of her parents the whole responsibility falls on her shoulders. Though she could have also married and settled down with a person of her choice, she discards everything just for the sake of her family. The understanding and maturity exhibited by Bimla is noteworthy. An unaided spinster, Bimla has spent her life in her quest to offer security and care to her siblings and her ailing aunt Mira. The decision to be a spinster for the whole life is also her own as she does not want to leave

her family in crisis after the death of her parents. Her maturity and in-depth thinking as a responsible person is evident from the way in which she rejects the offer of Dr. Biswas to marry him. Her decision to provide her family a protective shield against all odds highlights her maturity. Her complete attention towards her aunt when Dr. Biswas wants her to respond to his question shows her undiluted attention towards the family. Dr. Biswas deciphers her wish and he says pointedly, “Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others- to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them” (97).

Bimla has dedicated her whole life for the well-being of her siblings. Her brother Baba is mentally retarded but he attends to each and every need of him without any grievances on her face. Biswas, the doctor gets hysterical with the type of environment in which Bimla lives. In order to provide her a release, he invites her to a music concert but she refuses, “No, quite impossible doctor. I can’t leave the house”(80). This act of hers directs towards her deep respect for relationships which again is indicative of the same sustained beliefs in the society. Discarding all the pleasantries of life, she has nurtured the youth of her siblings but to her dismay, Raja, her youngest brother ditches her by marrying a Muslim woman against her wishes. This incident makes her quite differential and insecure about relations. She spends a lot of time in brooding over the fakeness of relations as all her siblings leave her alone. Despite any concrete security neither financial nor emotional, she really struggles to lead her life successfully. In her efforts to hold all the responsibilities, the author has highlighted the **existential anxiety** of a female who is leading her life quite alone in this world. Her sister Tara comes and visits her but no one

understands the pangs of isolation she has been through her entire struggle for existence. Bimla has been the source of support for everyone in the family but no one extends the same to her which creates in her a sort of depression and she starts doubting everything.

Existential anxiety has been projected not only through Bimla but also that of Mira, a widow and aunt of Bimla. Mira is a widow who has no one except this family as her husband has died and the in-laws do not bother to take care of her. Considering her as a burden, she has been readily sent back when Bimla's mother requested her to come to her house. Her family members became happy as they have got rid of her.

The life of Mira also showcases the hardships a woman has to undergo in the absence of a male partner. Despite being a virgin; she is punished for the crime which she has not committed. Archetype of numerous sufferings, she indulges herself in household duties of the Das's family. Her arrival is cherished by all the four children Bimla, Tara, Raja and Baba. The affectionate relationship between Tara and Mira gets indicated through Tara's conversations and afterwards also when she remembers her while talking to Bimla. Through the character of Mira, the author brings to the fore an image of a woman who has dedicated her whole life for others. Completely engrossed in the Das's household, she represents the pathetic condition of widows in the society. An existence of a female acquires meaning only if she has got a male partner by her side. Thus, after the death of her husband she has been considered as a burden and her existence has been thrust upon her. Angst for survival gets highlighted through Bimla also who despite devoting her life for the family is unable to get self-fulfillment. Full of frustration, she becomes irritable and eccentric as even Tara tells her the same. Her attitude changes

completely with the indifferent and selfish behaviour of her siblings and she feels pangs of isolation.

Her moment of **reawakening**, another theme in this novel, comes when she brushes aside all her anger and frustration regarding relationships. Till then she has nurtured various expectations from her siblings for whom she has dedicated her whole life but now she feels that real happiness lies within her own self:

Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally (165).

She reaches a stage where all her doubts regarding falsity in relationships vanish and she tries to rejuvenate herself with her fresh insight into the complexities of this world. She understands that real happiness lies not only in these relationships but also within you. She feels one with her relationships and understands the depth of her love for them:

There could be no love deep and full and wide than this one, she knows. No other love has started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger and disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself (165).

Bim feels herself alienated from her siblings as she in the course of her arduous journey of a life full of struggles, wanted them to be with her. However, the failure torments her a lot and she secludes herself but the moment she understands the indispensability of everything as a part of life, she learns to change her attitude towards everything. Hence,

she symbolizes the new woman, “What is predominant in Anita Desai’s emerging women is the desire to harmonize her roles as an individual, wife and mother (Singh 1994 : 125).

This awakening is one of the major developments in the character of Bimla Das. Earlier novels by Anita Desai depicts the female as very sensitive and emotional misfits trying to maintain their individuality by running away from the responsibilities, “either withdrawing into a subjective world ,often acting in ways society considers neurotic or mad; or they cultivate coldness or indifference, refusing to give in.”(Srivastava 1996 : 51). The present novel does not fall in the same cadre and aptly brings an image of an altogether different woman.

The novel, Fasting Feasting (2000) is a recent addition to Anita Desai’s works. It analyses with great aplomb the internal anguish faced by Uma, the lead character in the novel. Gender inequality, suffocated psyche, unfettered quest for freedom and adjustability with the present situation are the intensive ideas presented through this work of fiction. The author has portrayed women in different facets -weak, strong, rebellious, traditional women, etc.

Uma, the eldest daughter in her family, does not get the desired love and affection. Thus, she feels isolated and insecure. She fulfills all the roles assigned to her - taking care of her brother, attending to each and every need of her parents. From the very beginning, the parents depend on her and ironically she never gets her share of importance. She gets overshadowed by her sister Aruna who is not only excellent in her studies but smart in every other sphere also. Brought up differentially, Uma is a victim of **gender inequality**, a prominent theme projected through this work.

Her parents cherish the desire to have a son and when Arun, a son is born, they stop caring for their daughters. Overwhelmed by the birth of the son, they ask her to leave the school. This show of unrestrained happiness at the birth of a son indicates the insignificant status of daughters in the family. Manu has stated, “A man conquers the world by the birth of a son’ he enjoys eternity by that of a grandson; and the great grandfather enjoys eternal happiness by the birth of a grandson’s son” (Quoted in Prabhu 1958 : 242).

Excessive happiness of the father has been aptly summed up by the author, “Papa, in his elation, leaping over three chairs in the hall, one after the other, like a boy playing leap – frog, his arms flung up in the air and his hair flying .A boy! he screamed, a bo-oy! Arun, Arun at last!” (17).

The exclusive concern and care allotted to the son pricks the mind of Uma to a great extent. She has been assigned the responsibility of his brother Arun’s supervision starting from the time of his birth till his joining school. Though she is a weak student she has never been given the freedom to have tutors to teach her. On the other hand, her father arranges tuitions for Arun in all the subjects. Not only this, all the love is showered on the son and the daughters are treated merely as an obligation. This incident has worked positively for Aruna, as just after this incident she starts asserting herself very strongly in all the matters. She cannot digest the open discrimination meted out to her only because of the other sex. Consequently, she never allows anyone to suppress her in any way. Her father has to do everything according to her wishes in her marriage and also in other issues related to her. On the other hand, this instance works rather negatively for Uma as

her innermost self gets smothered as a result of this event. She fails to acquire the courage to assert herself. Moreover, her forced confinement to the home also is an additional factor for her lack of confidence.

Submissiveness of Uma never fetches her anything whereas her sister gets everything as she desires just because of her power to rebel. Aruna is in striking contrast to Uma as since the day of Arun's birth Aruna never hesitates in saying or demanding anything from her parents. In comparison to Uma who is meek, obedient and subdued, Aruna is strong both mentally and physically. Though both of them have been brought up in the same household there is a striking contrast in their characters. Moreover, the reason for Uma's humble acceptance of the things can be attributed to the way she has been brought up by her parents as they never allow her exposure of any kind, hence she lacks practical knowledge. Aruna here presents the concept of a strong woman, quite in opposition to the traditionally inactive and compliant image of Uma. Apart from Uma, the protagonist of this novel there is one more character Anamika, Uma's cousin who is also a victim of gender disparity. Anamika is a very intelligent in her studies and wins a scholarship to visit abroad. However, she is not allowed to pursue it further. According to her parents, her education is required to get her a suitable husband and even her certificate of scholarship is to be used only for this purpose. A victim of prejudice, she has been brought up in such a way as she does not even protest against the atrocities meted out to her in her in-laws house. Anamika is considered as an embodiment of feminine virtues just because she has endured everything without any objection. Despite her educational excellence, she remains a passive sufferer and finally dies also in misery. Aruna, on the other hand presents a striking contrast to the docile and restricted image of both Anamika

and Uma. Through her character the writer highlights a new woman who has got determination, power, authority and the courage to speak openly. Aruna is bold, courageous, ambitious and desirous of something new in life. Her character has been very well highlighted by the writer:

Aruna was pretty too, and in her case it was also evident quite early that her future would be bright, but there was a sharp edge to her prettiness, a harsh edge given to it by a kind of steely determination, a dogged ambitiousness, that seemed to be born of a desperation. In Anamika there was no such thing, she was simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal skinned, bumblebee eyed, pink lipped always on the verge of bubbling dove like laughter, loving smiles and a good nature like a radiance about her. Wherever she was there was peace, contentment and well being (67).

Aruna's domineering attitude surprises her mother when she tries to dominate her husband. The mother of Uma is a very subservient and obedient wife whose world revolves around her husband and she never has any choice of her own. However, her daughters are different from her. Aruna, for instance, does not abide by the set norms of shyness, meekness and never wants herself to be restricted to the home. She has a strong sense of individuality; consequently she never allows anyone to force anything on her. She has even the courage to oppose her mother when her mother says, "How can she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they think?" (71). Double standards of her mother make Aruna furious and she protests, "Who cares what they say? Who cares what they think?" (71).

All these objections by Aruna clearly highlight her courage to speak and argue which is absent in other women characters. Though she has been brought up in the same house as Uma and in the same society but she never allows anyone to suppress her or rule her in anyway. On the other hand, Uma's compliant attitude and her lack of intelligence make

her a weakling and she never gets importance in her life. A sense of fear and segregation makes her constantly consider herself a discarded one among her own family members. The responsibility of the son has been imposed on her and her desires are crushed badly. Forced to leave the school, she has to take care of the most important person in the household, i.e., the son. Feelings of misery imprison her mind as despite her wish she cannot study like other children. Notwithstanding her immature status, she is forced to do all the work starting from changing his nappies to giving him food. Her consciousness is torn between her deepest desire to go out and play and over the captivity imposed on her by her parents. Whenever she expresses her desire to study, her mother silences it, “I have to go and do my homework, she told her mother. I’ve got to get my sums done and then write the composition. Leave all that, Mama snapped at her”(18). All these fetters by her parents smother her self sans any respite, another idea prominent in this novel.

Uma endures all the pain and internal helplessness without complaining to anyone, though there are instances where she really blurts out her desire strongly but is always silenced either by her mother or father. Her psyche gets **suffocated** in the backdrop of the pressures imposed on her. The parents are not seriously interested in educating her; they always search for opportunities where she can be kept at home to take care of their son. Her failure in her exams prompts her mother to keep her in the home for always as her words clarify her state of mind:

You know you failed your exams again. You’re not being moved up. What’s the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother.’ ‘What’s the use of going back to school if you keep failing, Uma?’ ‘You will be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons now. You are a big girl now .We are trying to arrange a marriage for you (22).

Uma really finds herself imprisoned as all her quests and her frustrations are constrained to her thoughts without any outlet. Moreover, she hates taking care of the child because of her ineptness in managing these chores. Uma fails to get the things just because she lacks the power to assert herself strongly. Although there are instances where even she becomes impatient sometimes for small things and does not want to compromise. The desire to go out and study is so strong in her that one day she runs away secretly to meet Mother Agnes, her teacher to request her to persuade her father to send her to school, as she begs “But I will work very hard mother! She yelled, I will pass next time. Please tell him, Mother – I will pass next time!” (28).

Uma tries a lot to convince her parents to send her to school but they do not agree at any cost and as a result she really starts having a sense of isolation where she feels that her wishes and desires carry no meaning for anybody in the house. Therefore, one day in order to just disclose her own wishes she goes out and enjoys with Ramu, her cousin despite the fact that her parents are against it.

The disparate and irrelevant treatment she suffers in the hands of her parents goes a long way in tarnishing her future also. Uma’s parents search for a match for her but they do not take much interest in finding out the exact information about the groom and his family and consequently it leads to a failure. The fake engagement costs them a huge sum for which Uma is blamed ultimately. As she is not very beautiful and intelligent the grooms are more interested in her sister Aruna than in her. After repeated failures in getting a suitable match for her everybody in the home starts accusing her. All these instances of allegations cast a great impact on her and she starts feeling herself to be a

burden on the family. Even her sister starts speaking in a sarcastic way and everybody starts feeling sympathetic towards her. “When Aruna said to her, laughing ‘Uma, why don’t you cut your hair short? Like Lila Aunty? It will suit you, you know,’ she retorted ‘Tchh! What silly ideas you have,’ and was not only annoyed but hurt as well: she had caught the mockery in Aruna’s tone” (85).

She is not attractive but does not even want to put on make up to look so. Besides this, she has a little sense of grooming in comparison to her sister Aruna who is very skillful at dressing and in talking to people. Uma also does not know how to lie. Innocent as a child she defies her mother’s false display to lie to the grooms’ parents about the preparation of dishes. The family considers her a total fool as she does not know the ways of the world. Uma has got the heart of a child, even after being a grown up woman she is not very skillful in managing the sensitive issues. Her display of joy at the thought of Anamika being sent to her parents’ house forcefully by her parents-in-law brings to light her lack of understanding in such issues. The ridicule pricks her but she has no separate existence of her own and not even the strength to face people and do something in order to prove herself.

Since her childhood she has not been a confident child and despite all her efforts she fails to acquire it. However, continued indifference and lack of importance meted out to her by her own family members put a stop to all her efforts. She has to take permission of her father even for making a telephone call. Their apathetic and rude behavior has never allowed her to have inclination towards creating a separate existence of her own and whenever she has tried to do it they have tried their best to evade it.

The stage of repeated failures to marry her off proves to be very crucial and Uma's childlike persona is being taken over by maturity. "Uma's ears were already filled to saturation with mama's laments and Aruna's barbs. Had anyone looked they might have noticed that Uma's face was losing its childish openness of expression and taking on a look of continual care" (86).

After a long search, Uma gets married to a man who later turns out to be an already married man with children and a wife to support to. She comes to know a little about it when she has been taken back to her house by her father. Her marriage gets terminated in a divorce about which she has no idea. All the discussions related to her life have been kept as a secret and she has not been made a party in any single matter. Lack of consideration for her approval makes her feel a discarded member and she starts to have a feeling of displacement from the bonds of her own family. A victim of indifference in the hands of everybody without committing a single mistake, she has no space to call her own in that house. The parents decide about the marriage and it gets cancelled also without even informing her. After this incident, all the attempts to marry her off are put to an end and she acquires the place of a permanent problem in the family.

She tries a lot to control her shattered life. Her attempts to go out and work with people like Mrs. O' Henry never become successful. Depressed, broken, irritated, secluded, estranged and lonely, Uma finds neither herself in crisis; neither in the category of married nor unmarried. The novelist successfully interprets her predicament:

That she had not had their experiences, that hers was other: that of an outcaste from the world of marriage, the world which all the murmuring, and whispering and muttering implied, was all that mattered. Retreating to her own room, she sank down on the floor, against the wall, put her arms around her knees and what it would have been like to have the Lord Shiva for a husband, have Him put his arms around her (96-97).

Uma feels pangs of loneliness even in the so called close knit family, as there is no one with whom she can share her agonies and her self gets tattered between her duties as a daughter and as an individual. Anita Desai also feels the same way, “The tightly knit fabric of family that had seemed so stifling and confining now revealed holes and gaps that were frightening –perhaps the fabric would not hold, perhaps it would not protect after all.” (86).

She finds herself completely alone and feels suffocated in the confines of that household where everyone is just concerned about the son and his affairs. She also feels herself unwanted and segregated when her father spends a lot of money in the marriage of Aruna. Nevertheless, he does everything as dictated by her. She feels herself incomplete as a human being when no one values her more than merely as a custodian of the house. She understands everything but the life long suppression suffered in the hands of her parents never lets her open her mouth.

There is an utmost longing in Uma to cast out the forced life she has been leading and in order to assert herself she speaks through her silence. Her parents neither allow her to go out nor to spend sometime in her own room, these things suffocate her and in order to show her anger over this unending captivity, she shuts the door in front of her mother as a sign of protest. As Jasbir Jain says, “The joint control exercised by Mama Papa is equally destructive and life-denying. Rituals begin to seem meaningless after sometime, fears become obsessive and channels of communication are disrupted” (1999 : 191).

These types of incidents are not for once but many times. Her anger comes to the limelight when her mother forces her to leave everything else and bring the tea for her father. Furiously, she puts the tea with a clatter on the table, “Here, her eyes flash through her spectacles, this, this is what I know. And you, you don’t. He takes the cup from her, too startled to protest” (137).

Deprived of any freedom since her childhood she cherishes an **unfettered quest for freedom**. Initially, she does according to their wishes but there are occasions where she also expresses and advocates her intense need to enjoy. Her invitation to a coffee party by Mrs. O. Henry is quickly brushed aside by her parents:

Mrs O. Henry, she has invited me to a coffee party. Uma can hardly speak; she would like to keep this treasured invitation to herself alone, after all- and would have preferred not to divulge it. Of course that is out of the question.

Why? asks Papa.

‘Coffee? Why coffee?’ asks Mama.

Uma jerks her head back. ‘Why’? She snaps back at them. She is giving a party-a coffee party, not a tea party-and she has invited some ladies, and me (112).

Uma’s slightest wishes are not granted and she is always repressed by her parents. Her neighbours’ daughter Moyna starts working as she wants to be different; on hearing this there is an inmost urge in Uma to have a career of her own. Her secret conversation with Dr. Dutt is her effort to request her for a job to which she agrees and comes to her house to seek the permission of her parents. When she informs Uma’s parents about the requirement they have in the dispensary for nurses and suggests Uma’s name, they are awestruck. They do not like the idea at all and start making excuses:

Papa looked incredulous and Mama outraged. Dr. Dutt clasped Uma's arm. Don't look so frightened,' she urged.' I know how well you look after your parents. I know how much you helped Mrs. O'Henry with her work, I am confident you can do it'

But Uma was not confident.' I have no degree,' she faltered, or training.' This kind of work does not require training, Uma, Dr. Dutt assured her,' or degrees. Just leave that to me. I will deal with it if the authorities ask. You will agree, sir? She turned to Papa, smiling, as if she knew how much he adored being called sir. But Papa did not appear to have noticed the honour this time. He was locking his face up into a frown of great degree'' (142-143).

They do not like the idea and Uma's mother pretends in front of Dr. Dutt that due to her illness she needs Uma at home to take care of her. This fake reply ignites Uma's anger even more and she feels like shouting and telling Dr. Dutt that her mother is hale and hearty and she is lying as she has an aversion to her freedom. After this incident, Uma stops all her attempts to make herself independent and shuns her anger and frustration and compromises with the current situation.

Uma has been a victim of the traditional norms of the society as she does not get equal treatment, firstly, because she is a woman and secondly she lacks the power to assert herself. Though there are situations in which she has tried to explain her dislike against the treatment meted out to her but gradually the continued ignorance of her wishes in the hands of her parents let her conclude that she has to adapt with her present life. Thus, **adaptability** is another idea advocated through this work. Similar is the case with Anamika who, despite her excellent academic record marries a man, oblivious of her merit endures atrocities silently and ultimately dies. Her compromising attitude does not give her happiness and all her aspirations are sacrificed at the altar of marriage.

Uma's mother also is a woman who, despite having her separate identity in the house, compromises with the existing situation. Though she nurtures a desire to play cards does it in the absence of her husband and comes back home before his arrival which brings her balanced attitude towards tradition and modernity. Apart from Uma's mother, there is one more character Mira, a distant relative of Uma's mother who conciliates with her widowed status by following the path of religion. Her total involvement with the spiritual activities indicates her contentment and isolation from the worldly affairs as she no more considers herself to be a part of it. In addition to the above prominent themes, an important distinction surfaces between females with respect to the difference in cultures occidental and oriental. The differences in the society concerning the women and her preoccupations differ in both the cultures as in India emphasis is more on 'Fasting' which denotes both religion and moreover fasting of the females against their wishes which happens with Uma, Anamika and even Uma's mother. In United States the emphasis is more on feasting as everything is in abundance in that country. In India, the focus of the females is more towards prayers, sacrifices for others, redemption etc., whereas in United States, females are more concerned about their appearance and status. Arun fails to understand the similarity in the problems encountered by women in both the cultures, irrespective of the vast difference in educational standards, and the ways of bringing up the children. Though the characters vary in many aspects, one thing commonly observed is the enticing urge of the characters to survive. Anita Myles says, "Anita desai portrays Indian woman as fighter, a victim and as a heroine and ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise" (2006 : 36).

Psychological insight into the lives of female protagonists forms the hub of Anita Desai's fiction whereas Shashi Deshpande, another leading novelist of the feminist genre shows them as practical beings, possessing an urge to excel in their lives. Amidst the group of other writers, she stands out because of her adept handling of the intellectual aloofness experienced by the working woman during the course of her struggle to maintain her individuality. In her fiction, she has dealt with almost every issue raised by the women's movement in India regarding the subordination of women like rape, child abuse, son preference, denial of self expression, deep inequality, deep seated prejudice, violence both mental and physical, binds of domesticity, etc. In the words of Rani Dharker, "Deshpande, on the other hand, perhaps because she is writing from the periphery of India sounds more authentic, portraying as she does the middleclass Indian woman waging her ordinary life battles"(Quoted in Bharucha 1994 : 113)

Her work, The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) adroitly depicts the trauma of a married woman, Sarita. The prominent themes which highlight her predicament are gender discrimination, marital rape, and ultimate realization of self. Her husband mistreats her for being professionally superior to him. Inferiority gets embedded in his mind and he takes revenge on his wife by harassing her physically.

Sarita is a victim of **gender discrimination** and never gets equal treatment by her parents especially her mother. She ill treats her and never allows her any freedom. Sarita's psyche gets crushed under this differential treatment and it casts a negative impact on her personality, due to which her outlook towards life gets truncated.

Stereotypes prevalent in the society regarding the roles of females have been very well dealt with in this particular work. Beauty, meekness, etc., are considered a must in females. Sarita feels angry when her mother advises her:

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.
Who cares?
We have to care if you don't .We have to get you married.
I don't want to get married.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can't
And Dhruva?
He's different. He's a boy (45).

Her anger gets even more ignited when her mother does not give importance to her birthdays and other events related to her life. Her mother never treats her as an equal with her brother. On his birthdays they organize *pujas* but not on hers. Even after the death of her brother, the attitude of her mother remains the same. However, she observes fasting and performs rituals even after the death of her brother, Dhruva. She struggles throughout her life to openly express herself as her expression has always been crushed by her mother. Sense of being unwanted makes her insecure as Dhruva is important to her parents even after his death whereas she does not have any significance even when she is alive.

Her desire to go to a medical college is also set aside by her mother saying that it will cost a huge amount. Moreover, she argues that being a liability they have to arrange for her wedding also which will cost a lot. She feels trampled when she comes to know that she is merely considered a burden which would be over as soon as she gets married. The root cause of her ruined life also lies in the biased treatment she receives from her

mother. It's only to make her mother realize about her daughter's freedom to decide that she marries Manohar, a person of low caste.

Differential treatment creates a feeling of insecurity in her and she always thinks as if she is not wanted or needed by anyone. This becomes the cause of her being a failure in marriage as well. She is not good looking but when Manohar shows interest in her she feels excited and takes a decision to marry him due to a sense of rebellion against her parents. She married him only because her parents were against it. The more they opposed, the stronger her desire was to marry him. The rebellious spirit of Sarita shares a similarity with the heroine Usha in the film Bhumika who is also rebellious when her demands are not met. However there is a difference as Sarita's anger stems from her mother's excessive indifference whereas Usha's anger stems from her immaturity to take decisions. Usha's mother knows the real intentions of Keshav and hence she forbids her from meeting him whereas Sarita's mother does not care about her daughter as she thinks her to be responsible for her son's death.

Through this step, she asserts her freedom and her profound dislike for her mother. Her mother's biased attitude and indifference towards all her needs make her more firm to march towards a life of her own choice. Within herself, she is sure that her mother is terribly against intercaste marriage and the reputation of her family is also at stake, still her hatred is beyond any bounds. The intensity of her love for Manohar is not as extreme as her willingness to discard her parents for him. However, the deep-seated anger towards the unequal treatment meted out to her is acute. Hence, she wants her parents to feel hurt so that they can also feel it.

Furthermore, she has been held responsible for drowning her brother Dhruva which she has never done. The treatment of her mother was not fair to her before Dhruva's death and becomes worse after his death. After dhruva's death, her mother considers her responsible for his death, which creates a life-long guilt in her. Her mother continues to torture her:

You killed your brother. I don't. Truly I didn't, it was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn't. And I ran away, I admit that. But I don't kill him. How do you know you didn't kill him? How do you know? (132).

Her unexpressed guilt turns into a nightmare which keeps haunting her relentlessly. In the words of A. K. Awasthi, Shashi Deshpande in her novels, "catches on the subtle psychological complexity of the individual's mind" (Quoted in Sharma 2001 : 76).

This guilt captures her mind forever and more so as there is no one with whom she can share it. Nobody has tried to find out what actually happened on the day when Dhruva was with her. Sometimes she weeps in the night and is silenced and comforted by her husband.

Deprived of any outlet, it becomes a nightmare for her and troubles her throughout her life. Weakness becomes an intrinsic part of her life due to this biased behaviour of her parents and casts a deep impact on her married life as she never feels herself free to talk to her husband.

Her brother Dhruva has always been afraid of the dark and consequently whenever afraid, he always used to come to his sister for rescue. At that time, she advises him not to feel

afraid, as there is nothing to be afraid of. But one day, Dhruva dies after drowning in water, and the darkness engulfs her. The dark holds no terror is what she used to tell her frightened brother, who habitually sought refuge with her. However, he dies after drowning in water whereas she outwardly unafraid of the dark cannot face the gloom cast by his death and as a result becomes a psychological victim.

Victim of unconditional hatred and rejection, she seeks comfort and compassion in her husband. On the contrary, he also starts tormenting her due to her professional superiority. She suffers because of gender inequality not only by her parents but also her husband Manohar who also makes her feel unwanted just because of her professional superiority. This open injustice makes her feel suffocated despite being a successful doctor. Her professional success becomes a curse for her as she has to suffer the indifference of her husband. Her anger towards this gender discrimination prevalent in the society gets revealed when she gives a speech to her friend's students. At that moment, she blurts out this deep-seated indifference between a man and a woman in the society:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be B.A. If he is 5-4 tall, you shouldn't be more than 5-3 tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous-you can nag, complain, henpeck, whine, moan but you can never be strong. That's a wrong which will never be forgiven (137).

It shows that she is a person who has undergone all such turmoil and has not been able to free herself even after being an earning wife.

The ego of her husband and his manliness get hurt as a consequence of her professional success and he starts tormenting her in the night by raping her brutally. Thus, **marital rape** is another important idea highlighted in this novel. Her marriage with Manohar, a professional weakling, brings her happiness initially but later on it turns out to be an illusion. She supports the family financially and has an upper hand in maintaining its affairs. Moreover she is the person who helps her husband in getting the job of a teacher in a college. A turning point comes in her life when a journalist comes and asks him as how he feels when her wife is superior to him in every respect, at that moment he smiles along with his wife but deep inside, his male superiority gets hurt. Lacking professional lead, he starts dominating her through rape or through her exhaustion or powerlessness:

The beginning was abrupt... And I so frozen with terror that I could not move. Not even when his hands move slowly, like some macabre slow motion sequence, towards my throat .I tried to call out, to scream. Nothing issued out of me but silence. Panic and terror mounted in me as the hands, deliberately, with a kind of casual cruelty, gradually tightened around my throat...The dream, the nightmare whatever it was continued. Changing now, like some protean monster into a horror of rape (11).

She feels like shouting, growling and crying but the psychological weakness has made her so weak that even in the light of the day she cannot acquire the courage to speak to him. The theme of marital rape prominent in this novel also finds expression in the film Daman by Kalpana Lajmi. The heroine Durga gets brutally raped by her husband Sanjay but she cannot acquire the courage to raise her voice against this injustice.

Sarita's husband Manohar harasses her physically but behaves as a totally different person in the morning as if nothing has happened. Physical torture makes Sarita a weakling both physically as well as mentally. Sans any person to whom she can go and

discuss this thing, she feels herself broken. Astonished by the behaviour of her husband which is so normal in daytime, she starts doubting herself whether the incident that happens in the night is committed by the same person.

Silence entangles her and despite repeated efforts, she fails to open her heart in front of her husband. Deprived of courage, she struggles a lot to express herself. In addition to this, her parents stop taking interest in her. They behave as if her life has come to an end and there is nothing left for them to care about. Devoid of any support from anyone, she feels herself terribly alone and continuously broods over this change in her husband. Despite marrying a person of her own choice, she does not share intimacy and finds it difficult to communicate this thing to him. Unable to find the reason, she traces the reason to be her professional superiority.

The duality exercised by her husband makes her terribly bewildered and she feels like going somewhere so as to take a refuge from this torturous life. Hence, she comes to her parent's house thinking that it would offer her some respite. To her surprise, she feels even more dejected when she comes to know that there is no one to care for her. Her mother is dead and she has not cared for her well being even in her last moments. Her father is leading his life happily with Madhav and it occurs to her as if she is an outsider. The sense of being not wanted by someone imprisons her mind. Sarita wants her father to provide her comfort as she feels herself completely alone. Devoid of affection and consideration from anyone, she starts feeling insecure and hence makes an attempt to seek it outside. Fakeness surrounding life surprises her and she comes to term with the reality. Her open discussion with her father about her husband's brutality reveals the

hidden emptiness present in her supposedly successful professional and happy married life. Despite all these evident pleasantries in life, she is a complete failure as there is nothing authentic.

Her decision to visit her father is an attempt to give an outlet to her emotions. The writer has very beautifully juxtaposed the first person and the third person alternatively to show thorough development in the characters. Here also the novel opens in the present but goes in the flashback now and then to show a shift in the lives of the characters. This concurrence also reveals that past is the key to the women's ultimate **realization** of the self.

Initially, she does not have the courage to face her husband but later on when she receives a letter from her son regarding her husband's arrival to take her, at first she feels shattered at the thought of going to him but gradually she acquires courage and in the end regains strength and is ready to face him.

Her open discussion with her father removes the lifelong guilt in her which has got subsided due to the distance that has crept between them after her brother's death. Nonetheless, her soul finds relief when her father does not make her feel responsible for everything that happened between them. Fearlessly, she discloses all her deprived feelings she has undergone in their hands and in the hands of her husband. She questions her father's and her mother's neglected attitude towards her which has gone a long way in ruining her future. Without any support, she has got a feeling of insecurity but now her father's encouragement to face the things bravely makes her realize the futility of her nightmares. Suddenly she gains strength and comes out of the dark zone which she has

created around herself. She understands that reality has to be faced and one cannot runaway from circumstances. Hence, she sets aside all her fears and apprehensions and prepares herself to meet her husband with a freshly acquired maturity and understanding towards life, “Convulsions...? That could mean...? Her mind ranged over all the possibilities” (222).

Another trendsetter work in the world of feminist fiction is That Long Silence (1988) by the same author. This novel revolves around self-imposed silence, self-discovery and realisation about life’s eternal truth.

Jaya, the protagonist of this novel is a victim of oppression by her husband Mohan. He exploits her in a very subtle way as he never allows her to have a say in any matter. Her writing capacity is also suppressed by him just because he does not like the story written by her and he feels that it resembles their married life. Discouraged by her husband’s attitude, Jaya stops writing as her marital life is more important for her.

Jaya has been a very expressive child as her father has been very encouraging and considerate regarding her education. Even after marriage, she tries to express herself freely. But when she terms her mother-in-law as a person whose whole life has been spent in serving her husband and children, Mohan does not like it. He feels that the characteristic he considers as very strong in her mother has been undermined by Jaya. After this, Jaya decides to maintain a **self-imposed silence** as to preserve the sanctity of marriage.

Jaya here represents the inherent silence of women. She never speaks openly in front of her husband as she feels that being a female, it's her duty to abide by her husband's wishes. Jaya is a woman who does not ask questions, because she has learnt early in her life that when women ask questions like, why, why this injustice, they would simply be wasteful exercises causing others discomfort as well as anger. Consequently, she loses the ability to express herself and chooses to be silent. She neither speaks freely nor retaliates in front of her husband. She readily agrees to whatever he says. Her husband keeps on reminding her that for a woman silence is very important.

Silence has been used as an extended metaphor by the author to depict the inherent silence of women. It has been highlighted not only by Jaya but also by other characters. Mohan's mother is the embodiment of silence as she has undergone traumatic existence without uttering a single word in her life. Her whole life has been spent under the dictates of her husband who never feels satisfied with anything she does, for instance whenever he does not like the food, he throws the food violently which clearly brings to the fore the terrible life she has been leading without any complaint. Her helplessness gets reflected as, "Silently watched by the children, she picked up the plate, cleaned the floor and the wall of the spattered food, and wiped it. Twice the girl pleaded, Avva let me do it" (36).

Vimla, Mohan's sister also exercises silence to keep her marriage intact. Despite being ill, she does not have the courage to communicate the same either to her husband or to her in-laws. The protagonist Jaya finds resemblance between their lives as she says, 'Yet I can see something in common between them, something that links the destinies of the two...the silence in which they died' (39).

Initially she was not that much silent but later on she forces herself to be so because her husband never sees expression as a positive trait for a woman. Her husband's annoyance when she terms her mother as a good cook gives her a shock. Jaya comes to know the power of her words on her husband. He cannot digest his wife's frank expression and gets shattered. Disturbed by her words, her husband stops talking to her and thus she decides to keep mum. She does all this to preserve the marital sanctity though deep inside she is aware of the lack of compatibility and also the forced nature of their marriage. She blames here the social set up in which a woman is brought up to lead a life as dictated by the norms. She says that even her relatives have also been the sufferers for which they have been trained since their birth.

Moreover, Jaya is surprised at his narrow-minded thinking, that he sees strength in his mother's helplessness. Forced tolerance of her mother is highly appreciated by him. He says that a woman should not be angry, as anger makes a woman unwomanly. According to Jaya she has been a sufferer throughout her life as she has not only endured her worthless husband but also spent the crux of her life in drudgery, enduring unending pregnancies, "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender."(36).

Initially, she used to do as desired by her husband. Her main concerns in life concentrated only on cooking and taking care of Mohan and the home. Suddenly a problem arises in Mohan's life, which shakes Jaya. Mohan is under suspicion of having done something dishonest, so he decides to hide for a while in Jaya's uncles flat in Dadar. Jaya leaves with her husband their posh Churchgate home and enters the simple Dadar flat. This phase

proves to be a turning point for Jaya as due to this she suddenly wakes up to the kind of life she had been leading till then. Thus, she is propelled towards **self-discovery**.

Her unconscious step to ignore the extended hands of Mohan for the keys to the flat, and opening the door herself gives a severe blow to her relationship with Mohan. It is at that moment that Mohan's authority is shaken and Jaya starts reassuming control over her life. She starts analyzing her married life which according to her is a sham. Jaya's relationship with her husband is very superficial. He is a very indifferent person and does not give her much importance. Jaya's personhood can be best expressed in the words of Virginia Woolf in A Room Of One's Own, "There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind"(1967 : 76).

Her husband has named her Suhasini after marriage. There is always a conflict between her two-fold identities. Suhasini is the subdued submissive wife of Mohan who is not able to express herself. On the other hand, Jaya possesses an urge but gets subdued in the domestic binds. Her desires and emotions do not find an outlet in her married life. Profound reflection makes her brood over the bedtime story of the wise sparrow and the foolish crow, which she has heard as a kid. The story goes like this:

There was a foolish crow who built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow who built hers of wax.... And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow's house was washed away. And the poor crow, shivering and sodden, went to the sparrow's house and knocked on the door, calling, "Let me in, sister, let me in." And the sparrow called back, "Wait a minute, my baby has just woken up." After a while, the crow knocked again, pleading, "Let me in, sister, let me in." And the sparrow said, "Wait a minute, I'm feeding the baby." And so the story goes on, the foolish credulous crow standing out there in the rain, begging to be let in, while Sister Sparrow spins out her excuses...till finally she say, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapattis. "Warm yourself there," she says. And the silly crow hops on to it and is burnt to death"(16).

The writer uses this story to describe the life of a woman brilliantly which highlights the fact of a woman's life. Jaya broods over this story, "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe" (17). She has never enjoyed freedom in her married life, however, for all outsiders hers was a happy family. Her husband is in a top position and they have got two children and she is a good housewife and mother whose life centers around her family and her home.

Despite all these essential aspects of marital life, her married life is a farce, "A pair of bullocks yoked together" (8). It lacks expression, feelings and love. She has no role to play, her husband dictates her regarding everything. She feels strongly that the males enjoy all the privileges and the fate of woman is:

Waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws home. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant the lunch-carrier man... (30).

She examines her seventeen years of marriage and thinks about her long silence. It is during the silent waiting in the first couple of days that Jaya discovers her actual position in their married life. Completely free as Mohan does not go to his office she starts analyzing her life. In her moments of introspection, she remembers her aunt Vanitamami who used to advise her regarding the indispensability of a husband, "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree" (167). Vanitamami's husband never paid attention to her, still she lives with him as she feels that being a male he is entitled to do anything he likes whereas she cannot. The intensity of her helplessness is such that in order to amuse herself, she keeps pets and she suggests the same to Jaya. Reminiscent, Jaya concludes

that despite her dislike for such a suggestion, ironically she has done the same to keep her marriage intact. She discovers that in this process she has slowly given up her sense of being an individual and has moulded herself according to the needs and principles of Mohan. On the contrary, he has never attempted any sacrifice from his side. Simone De Beauvoir has said the same, “marriage subjugates and enslaves women, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose” (1974 : 500).

An ambitious person, in the pursuit of his dream of success, he had neither the time nor inclination to understand his wife as a person. For instance, Jaya’s creative talent is also curbed by him. He allows her to write stories of Sita, a weekly column but her action to write a story about a couple, a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body, upsets him. He cannot tolerate his wife’s exercise of freedom. Jaya wins a prize for her story but even in her ecstatic moments, she realizes quickly that Mohan is upset. Mohan frankly criticizes her for writing that story, as he feels that his reputation will be ruined. Convinced of her mistake, she stops writing. She comes to know that after marriage there is nothing left of her real self. She has to compromise at each and every step.

In her moments of insightful observation, Jaya remembers her sister Kusum also. Kusum, Jaya’s relative was mad who committed suicide. Jaya terms her suicide as a death caused by broken neck as there was no water in the well in which she has jumped. Jaya puts to scrutiny the injustices meted out to females just because of their gender. Kusum was not intelligent and hence she was not taken seriously neither by her parents nor her in-laws.

Excessively victimized under the pressures of society who condemns females without the shield of husbands, she commits suicide. Jaya compares her self with Kusum who despite being insane got rid of the shackles of confinement whereas she is silently undergoing all the traumas without any vent. Suffocated, she questions herself.

Security in marriage prompts her to endure everything. Thus, all through her seventeen years of marriage, she lives with her husband. However, the day Mohan leaves the flat and walks out, all her hopes get shattered. He does not return for days without any communication. Jaya waits feverishly for Mohan's return and in the search goes to the Church gate apartment but gets only disappointment. Her mental turmoil is so intense that she falls sick. Her neighbour Mukta, her daughter Nilima and the servant girl, Manda, nurture her back to health. During and after her illness, Jaya continuously thinks of her past deeds.

Through the process of thinking and writing down her thoughts, she traces her life back to her childhood. Through the disorderly, disordered sequence of events and nonevents that made up her life, she purges herself of her burdens. Her trust on her husband regarding providing her shelter turns out to be a mere illusion as her husband walks out without information. Hence, she continuously broods over her life and acquires the awareness. She attains **realization** that one should not be a dependent on others. This reflection marks a new beginning for her and she thinks of the words, “Yathechasi tatha kuru - Do as you desire”, (192) which Krishna tells Arjuna after giving him a sermon on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Jaya interprets Krishna's words as meaning, “I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire” (192).

Now she learns to break the long silence, which she has endured for so many years without a breach. Her husband has left, she is alone now. She receives a telegram from her husband that all is well and he will be returning soon:

All well' his telegram says. Does he mean that, now that Mohan has sorted out his problem, and no longer fears prosecution, joblessness and disgrace, we can go back to our original positions? Does it mean that he will come and give me a carefully edited version of what has happened -as he has done so often till now-and then ask me, what do you say Jaya? (192).

The arrival of the telegram at this moment does not matter to her as she has acquired independence as well as the courage to take the action. No more dependent on her husband, she learns to communicate and emerges as an independent writer. By the time Jaya has finished writing down her life, she is ready to face life anew with Mohan. Michael Rosenthal's statement in Virginia Woolf regarding Mrs. Ramsay and Lily can be extended to include Jaya and Bimla as well, "What unites... them, despite their vast personal differences, however, is their mutual reverence for life and their desire to make something ordered and whole out of the flux around them."(1979 : 113).

She decides to speak and to listen, to expunge the silence that was between her and Mohan, between them and the children. Jaya understands that life has to be made possible. That brings Shashi Deshpande closer to what Elaine Showalter calls the third stage in women's literary history:

First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (1977 : 13).

The difference in Shashi Deshpande and other writers is that the heroines of her novels do not leave their families. On the other hand, in their quest to affirm their newly acquired independence, they live with the same family but with new insights and fresh opinion about the world, not as ignorant individuals but informed intellectuals. Bhatnagar opines in the same vein, “Shashi Deshpande makes her heroines choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat, but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude” (1991 : 128).

Shashi Deshpande’s novel The Binding Vine (1993) is a document which forcefully emphasizes the awakening that has come in woman about herself and the female race as a whole. In the novel, the novelist converts the silent woman into a ‘talking’ woman which goes very well with what Elaine Showalter has to say about females fighting for a cause, “a revisionist questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual; structures”(Quoted in Bala 2001 : 119).

Undeniably, the work explores in-depth the different aspects associated with the lives of a female. The author has dealt with different ideas, the most prominent are marital rape, demonstration of a self-sufficient woman and a concern to fight for the injustice.

Urmila, the heroine of the novel is a strong lady as she manages everything alone. Her husband remains out as he works on a ship and so he is not with her most of the time. She gets interested in her mother-in-law’s story when she comes to know that she is a writer. The novel explores dexterously the idea of **marital rape** by highlighting the agonized and traumatized self of Mira, Urmila’s mother-in-law. Intensive search of her writings

makes Urmila realize the stark truth behind Mira's marital life. She feels inclined to know more when she sees Akka, her husband's aunt weeping for Mira. The fact that Urmila's husband's father has married Mira, his mother due to an excessive obsession for her, makes her find more about her. Urmila comes to know the hollowness surrounding her mother-in-law's married life as she has been a victim of marital rape in the hands of her own husband. Her anguish and dejected self come to limelight through her writings where she has dexterously expressed each and every feeling of herself.

Mira's soul gets haunted by her husband's presence as she hates him from the bottom of her heart and does not want to be with him. Still, as dictated by norms she has to subside her inner feelings and do as desired by her husband. The touch of her husband creates a sort of repulsion which she fails to suppress. Accustomed to silence, as even in her family she has seen her mother get ruled by her husband, she also considers silence to be the best way to repress her real self. Her bruised psyche craves for emotional fulfillment lacking in her married life.

Dearth of compatibility between herself and her husband makes her feel segregated. Detachment forms the core of her life and she chooses writing as the medium to blurt out her deep-seated frustration. She admits the feelings of dislike when her husband persuades her to talk to him:

Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something, why don't you speak to me? What shall I talk about, I ask him stupidly, what did you do today, where did you go, what have you been thinking about all evening?' and so he goes on, dragging my day, my whole self out of me. But I have my own defenses; I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I am doing and he gets angry with me. I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins (67).

Despite paying attention to his talk, she gets haunted by the coming night, wherein she has to bear his physical assaults.

In addition, there is no compassion in their married life which is clear from the one sided manic obsession of her husband. He just treats her as an object which he has excessively desired and ultimately got. Consequently feelings and understanding about the other partner has not been shown by her husband which makes her feel miserably alone.

Deprived of love, she feels unwanted. The bond shared by Mira with her husband is more on the physical lacking emotional attachment:

Love! How I hate the word. If this is love, it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, What is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone? (67).

Her poems provide significant hints about her husband's forced love, but not a single poem talks about love as an emotion. Mira's plight gets heightened with her revelation that even her children have been born out of forced love. Urmila deciphers this harsh truth when she goes through all the poems by Mira. Her writings cast a great impact on her. Deeply pained, she feels like communicating the same to everyone but remains silent after thinking about its consequences. She wants to get her voice known to everyone and hence she wants to get her poems published.

Projection of females has been varied as they have been shown as dependent as well as independent. In this novel, the affiliation felt by a female towards a female is a noteworthy idea. Urmi sincerely feels concerned and sad when she comes to know the

real plight of Mira. As far as she is concerned, she is an educated person working as a teacher. Her independent state of mind is clear due to her decision to marry a man of her own choice. Display of a **self-sufficient female** is another theme expressed through this work. Her boldness and smartness come to light by her dexterous way of handling home as well as her job. She is not a passive woman like Mira and Vanaa who can tolerate oppression without reaction. Her dislike towards this suppression present in the society is clear when she looks with scorn the way Vanaa, her sister-in-law serves as an obedient wife without an identity of her own.

Vanaa gets repressed and she never expresses her own wishes and decisions to her husband. Decisions ranging from what to cook in the house to other important matters are taken by her husband. Urmi hates all these things as she is an independent decision maker and never wants to be ruled by anyone. She says very strongly to Vanaa, “You let him bulldozer you, you crawl before him...” (81). Her reaction on the very first night of her marriage clearly brings to light her assertive spirit when she walks out from her husband house and comes to her parent’s home. She does whatever she feels is right.

Shakutai, another female is a victim of exploitation in the hands of her husband who leaves her for the sake of another woman. Thus, she has to strive for her existence alone without any assistance from the male. Sulu, her sister again brings to light an image of a submissive woman who has been a sufferer throughout her life. She does not like her husband’s obsession for her niece Kalpana but she has to tolerate it to keep her marriage intact. Although she yields passively to the demands of her husband when he rapes her

niece, she silently reacts to it. Depressed, she commits suicide to express her resentment over her husband's cruelty. Her silent retaliation brings to the fore her helplessness.

Another character, Kalpana is very extrovert and self-determined woman. Although she is a firm assertor of her wishes, she cannot escape the web of difficulties weaved against her. Unfortunately, she gets raped and ends up in a pathetic condition in the hospital. A victim of rape in the hands of her own uncle she has to suffer intense humiliation. Beautiful and bold, she has to pay the price for not marrying her own uncle. A girl of independent thoughts, she does not allow other people to suppress her and hence when her mother and her aunt force her to marry her own uncle who is fanatical towards her she vehemently denies it.

The viciousness exercised by her uncle comes to the fore with his heinous act of committing rape on Kalpana. This attitude of Kalpana's uncle highlights the mental make up of males wherein they consider a female as an object and any reaction by her against them poses a threat to their manliness. Being a free willed female, Kalpana segregates herself and decides to marry a man of her own choice on hearing this forced decision by her family members. She strongly asserts her independent frame of mind and her reaction against this domination.

Kalpana does not get solace from her family because even her mother wants her to marry her uncle as he is rich. This attitude of her mother also brings to the fore the importance of survival being paramount for a female. Being a victim in her husband's hands, she does not want her daughter to go through the same and hence she wants her to marry. Moreover, she feels insecure about Kalpana's future as she considers her beauty to be a

threat to her well-being. Consequently, she asks her not to pay so much attention to her appearance and dressing. Her beauty makes her mother regret as she feels that Kalpana has to bear the abuses of the boys living in their community. She even does not blame the wrong societal notions but the beauty of her daughter.

Gender disparity has also been brought to light by the author. The discriminatory attitude possessed by people regarding male child gets very well highlighted; for instance, Vanaa wants to have a son despite having two daughters. Shakuntala, does not feel satisfied with a girl child and considers herself unfortunate to have two daughters. Her abhorrence becomes clear, “Why does God give us daughters? (60).

Despite being exceptionally good at writing poems, Mira’s poetic talent has been sidelined by a male poet Venu. According to him, writing poetry is the business of males and not females. Cora Kaplan says in the same context, “To be a woman and a poet presents many women poets with such a profound split between their social, sexual identity (their human identity) and their artistic practice that the split becomes the insistent subject, sometimes overt, often hidden or displaced, of much woman’s poetry”(1986 : 70).

Progression in the females gets manifested through this novel where the woman comes out of her cocoon and fights for a greater cause. The **concern of one female for another female** to fight against the injustices meted out to them is another significant notion propounded by the writer in this novel. Urmi, the heroine of this novel is leading a satisfactory life but she stands against the injustices meted out to the female race as a whole. Maria Mies says emphatically that Shashi Deshpande’s career women “are not

satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between men and women but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives” (1980 : 32).

Urmila works sincerely so that Kalpana gets justice and the culprit gets punished in the hands of the law. She puts in enormous efforts to punish the culprit. Selflessly, she works for her, though she does not try to take advantage of her situation to get publicity, etc. Urmila is against such persons who want to cover up this issue for their own profit. For her, the only important thing is to get her justice. She tries hard to convince Shakuntala, Kalpana’s mother not to suppress this cruel act.

In addition to her help rendered to Kalpana, she also struggles to get justice for her mother-in-law by publishing her poems. Different from other females, whose life centers around their own families, she, on the other hand fights for the community of females. K. M. Pandey says:

Contrasted with all these is Urmi who is concerned with the redemption of her own caste. The effort of Urmi to publish Mira’s poems aims at discovering the strangled voice articulating woman’s silent discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. This may be taken to mean that Deshpande converts a muted woman into a talking woman and provides the cause, will strength and means to articulate the silence of women (2001 : 82).

Her success in all her endeavors to get justice highlights her perseverance and indomitable spirit to stand against all odds.

Small Remedies (2000), one of the latest novels by Deshpande is truly latest in the actual sense of the term as it encompasses in its canvas varied related ideas not only with the

life of females but the society as a whole. This work is different from her earlier works as the projection of women has attained multiple dimensions in this work. As Gayatri Spivak says, “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears ,not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third world woman caught between tradition and modernization” (Quoted in Nityanandam 2002 : 143).

The most prominent ideas are the depiction of an unconventional and daring woman, craving for identity and gender inequality. Madhu Saptarishi, the narrator in this novel wants to write a biography of Savitribai Indorekar, a doyen of classical music. Hence, she visits Bhavanipur the place where she lives.

Passion for music forms the essence of Savitribai’s life. Her desire is so intense that she discards everything for this passion. Her marriage to a respectable and conventional family has not been valued much by her as her desire surpasses everything. She used to listen to the musical gatherings by hiding herself near the window in her in-law’s house. Her father in-law senses this desire in her daughter-in-law and arranges for a teacher to provide her lessons in music. This step of her father-in-law is revolutionary as ‘singing’ has not been considered a respectable endeavour for women.

Despite this arrangement by her father-in-law, her thirst to learn music has not been quenched and she elopes with Ghulam Saab, a Muslim tabla player. Ghulam Saab, the tabla player, is the one who helps her attain new heights in singing. Gradually, she adopts it as a profession. Darting and courageous, she is least bothered about the reputation of

her family. Thus, projection of an **unconventional and daring** woman is an important idea.

Unaffected by the conventional standards, she starts her journey to achieve success in this field. In addition to this, she is so much preoccupied with music that she is not much concerned about her personal life. Indications of this indifferent and ruthless nature of hers come to the fore when she does not make a mention of her daughter to Madhu. She never ever reveals her relationship with Ghulam Saab which again brings to the fore her detachment. For her, the ambition to be successful is so much powerful that relationships seems a burden to her. Her acts to develop relationships with influential men who help her to establish contacts with the leading people in the singing arena bring to limelight her excessive fascination for music.

Munni, her daughter hates her due to her mother's illicit relationships. Madhu Saptarishi has been a friend to her daughter Munni; hence, she knows the plight of Munni. Despite having a mother, she craves for affection and searches it via other sources such as films. Watching films gives her pleasure as she hopes to fill the emptiness in her life by imagination. Her suppressed emotions find an exit after watching the films. But she never makes it public; for instance, once when she cries after watching a movie Madhu's presence makes her conscious and she quickly makes herself intact and stops crying. All these instances highlight her sense of displacement without anyone to shower love on her. Her mother's illicit relationships make her angry and she never wants to talk about her mother and her profession. Her hatred towards her mother is clear when she never feels herself proud to be the daughter of such a successful singer. There is a great difference

between Munni and her mother as hates traditions and wants to lead a free life whereas Munni loves to live a life of conventions.

Her regard for customs is clear when she tries to make her position respectable in front of her friends by concocting a story about her father who lives in Pune and is in a respectable job. She describes her father Ghulam Saab as the kidnapper and also holds her mother responsible for bringing her in Neemgaon. Initially, Madhu used to believe her but later on after knowing the reality, she feels sorry for her.

Moreover, through her character the author has manifested an offbeat character that is far away from the basic qualities expected in a woman. She has never been loyal to her family, her husband, her lover and even to her daughter. Ghulam Saab, the person who becomes her partner in all her successes and failures, does not carry much importance to her. Her neglected attitude towards him indicates that even in his presence, she tries to evade his presence. Even when Madhu asks her about her life, she does not make any mention of him. In her interviews with Madhu, she gives more significance to the dates and the rewards rather than to people.

Motherhood, an indispensable and the most cherished desire of a female does not hold any charm for her as she never mentions her daughter Munni in her conversations with Madhu. Her successful career is what that matters to her and in her quest for that she has lost touch with everything. Her daughter leaves her. Discarding her identity as Meenakshi Indorekar ultimately her daughter dies as Shailaja Joshi, an identity she has acquired after her marriage. Ghulaam Saab, her lover, leaves her and returns to his home.

The desire in the female to be dependent on males gets inculcated in her right from the childhood of their lives. Conversely, the females in this novel are depicted as wholly independent not only in thoughts but also in actions. Savitribai Indorekar nurtures a passion for music and for that she leaves everything. Her irrepressible **craving for identity** and independence prompt her to get it against all odds. This fact brings to limelight her urge to do the things independently as the pressures of family life and motherhood seem a burden to her. So she discards them, works hard and becomes a successful singer in the area of classical music, a hitherto professionalism difficult to be attained by females.

Leela, another female in this novel, vividly portrays the irresistible craving for a woman to be independent. The immediate death of her husband Vasant does not make her weak. Rather than leaving everything and mourning on his loss, she readily takes on the responsibility of her mother-in-law and her brothers-in-law. Without being a dependent, she takes up a job:

Her father came to take her back home after Vasant's death. She could have gone home and lived a life of reasonable comfort as a widow was allowed he knew she would have to toe the line, to live within the limits set for her by her grandmother. Besides, there was Mai, there were her two brothers-in-law; they were her family now. She had to help them, to earn a living for all of them until the boys were educated (234).

Her desire to do something on her own prompts her to join politics. She joins communist party and works steadfast for its sake. She fosters the desire to be free. A staunch supporter of communism, her interest and commitment towards her profession is remarkable as she attends each and every gathering of her party. Her boldness and sense of judgement come to the fore when she silences the males in her party with her

reasoning ability and never allows them to overpower her. In addition to her dedication for her party, she is concerned for other people's sufferings as she takes care of the tuberculosis inflicted patients. This one idea widens the canvas of this novel where the female is not only concerned about the affairs of her own family but nurtures a desire to be of help to others as well.

She lives alone in a place and even after her operation for breast cancer she tries to do her work without seeking help from others. Even after repeated requests by her niece Madhu for help, she refuses straightaway by saying, "What difference does it make? As long as my limbs are fit and I can move about, I'll do my own work" (200). This attitude of hers highlights her desire to be on her own without the aid of others. Despite being a woman, she is strong both mentally and psychologically which is clear by her actions to get imprisoned several times. She loves Joe, her husband very much but never allows this love to overpower her as she has got a perfect control over herself.

Boldness defines her character as she marries a Christian despite being a Hindu. In comparison to Savitribai Indorekar despite being an unconventional in the sense of marrying a Christian and leading a successful life as a party leader, Leela has not got it at the cost of her family. She is more responsible and caring as far as her responsibilities are concerned as a step mother of Tony and Paula, as a wife, aunt, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law.

Apart from Leela, Savitribai Indorekar also manifests this idea that is strongly embedded in her and for which she leaves everything in her life. She hates the bindings in which a woman finds herself after marriage and never struggles to adjust in such an atmosphere.

Her strong sense of freedom and independence is clear when she does not succumb to the life imposed on her by her parents and later her parents-in-law. On the contrary, she comes out of it as soon as she gets the chance and after that lives her life independently though she takes the help of her lover Ghulam Saab in the course of her struggle to become a singer, which is momentary. As soon as she gets the desired position, she leaves him. Not only this, in order to be successful, she uses males as puppets and kicks them off after her work is over. She does not depend in any way on men and matures as a singer on her own. Her sense of independence is so strong that she never adds the name of her husband either with her own name or with her daughter. She names her daughter as Meenakshi Indorekar, the name she has inherited from her parents.

Independence also marks the life of Madhu Saptarishi who is an editor in a magazine and is solely responsible for its tremendous success. Madhu gets shattered completely as her son Aditya is dead and even her husband is also maintaining a resentful attitude towards her; hence, she takes up the task to write a biography on the life of Savitribai Indorekar, the famous singer of classical music. She has been a strong woman as she has spent her childhood without a mother, but with her father and Babu, the servant. After her father's demise, she has been brought up by her aunt Leela and her husband Joe but instead of it she nurtures a strong desire to be independent. She even curbs her wish to go abroad for higher studies as she does not want to trouble her aunt for financial support. In order to be independent, she joins a magazine and works earnestly for it even after being harassed by Dalvi, her male colleague. Her visit to Bhavanipur proves a defining moment of her life as her urge towards independence becomes stronger and she learns to control herself emotionally. The death of her young son has made her so weak and even her husband is

not there with her in this moment of crisis; still she gathers strength and carries on with her work.

Her independent frame of mind is clear when she does not plead in front of her husband when he stops talking to her after revelation of her rape in childhood. Despite getting smothered by this attitude of her husband, she tries to find comfort in her work and ultimately finds the solution.

Gender discrimination is deeply embedded in our society. All the leading characters in this novel are victims of this inequality. The tremendous success of Savitribai which she has got after such a ruthless struggle has not been that easy for her. She acknowledges this harsh fact, “Nowadays they become Ustads and Pundits even before they have proper moustaches”(224). Leela, on the same line admits the partial treatment she has to face just because of her sex. Throughout her lifetime, she has worked earnestly for the party; still, she lags behind the males. Kamala Das, a reputed poet nurtures similar opinion in her poem ‘An Introduction’ regarding gender discrimination, “Dress in Sarees, be a girl, Be wife, they said, Be embroiderer, be cook, Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh Belong, cried the categorizers” (Quoted in Pandey 2001 : 79-80).

Feelings of suffocation capture her mind at this open inequality. But, when a woman gets a promotion on the sympathetic grounds of her husband’s death, she blurts out her sarcasm. She says, “It seems you’ve got to become a widow for them to remember that you exist” (224). Leela feels strongly against this disparity but despite this one incident she never raises her voice as she knows that this evil is deeply rooted and woman has to struggle to reach the top. As Sushila Singh feels the same for this gender discrimination:

Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience, with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one-sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject either in her own right but merely as an entity that concerns man either in his real life or his fantasy life (1991 : 7).

Apart from her, the narrator of this novel Madhu Saptarishi is another woman who in the course of her vocation to write a biography on Savitribai finds herself struggling with her own self. Deprived of any support from her husband, she is leading her life alone in the village. A victim of rape in her childhood, she finds herself haunted by nightmares and one day in that fit of anxiety she reveals that incident to her husband Som. He reacts indifferently and cannot take in the idea of his wife being raped. Deeply pained at his cold behaviour, she broods over the apparent inequality where before marriage he allows himself to have relations with other women but cannot digest the idea of her wife not being a virgin. Though Madhu knows about her husband's relations with other women, she has to digest this harsh fact without raising a protest.

Discrimination not only in the professional level but also in personal life is nerve breaking as Madhu Saptarishi senses this fact when she is living in Neemgaon with her father. Her father is a drunkard and maintains illicit relationship with Savitribai but her father's act is ignored completely whereas Savitribai's acts are highlighted terming her as a lady of loose morals. People do not mind her father's peculiarities as he is a trusted doctor and more so a male:

And of course, being a man, he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without open censure or disapproval. it was not so with Munni's mother. As Savitribai Indorekar the singer woman, some oddities in her behaviour were permitted, possibly tolerated, but it did not take the aura of disapproval, or the curiosity, either (139).

Thus, Madhu, Leela and Savitribai all emerge strongly in their respective fields without being subdued.

Apart from Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur also is a celebrated writer. Uptill now, the focus of the writers has been on the projection of females who have been marginalized because of males and their assertion and declaration against their domination. With the change, the males have also got marginalized in the works of the present writers. Consequently, however, mild or ferocious the female has been projected with various facets as wife's, lovers, etc. The females are projected as human beings who commit mistakes, have affairs, and are weak and indecisive. The focus of the present writers has intensified with the projection of the females on a more humanitarian level.

Novelist of the recent times, Manju Kapur, has also added a new dimension to the plethora of women writings in English. Her works include Difficult Daughters (1998) and Married Woman (2002), both popular in dealing with the multifaceted aspects of a female's life. However, the works differ in the kind of depiction of females.

Difficult Daughters (1998) by Manju Kapur is a novel which significantly talks about the quest for freedom cherished strongly by the protagonist, Virmati. Prominent themes in this work are growth of a female through generation, weakness and indecisiveness and finally the realization of her worth.

The theme which is very prominent in this novel is the **growth** of a female through generations, i.e. expanding horizon. Difficult temperament of the daughters followed through generations. Kasturi, Virmati's mother has been difficult for her mother. Virmati

has been difficult for her mother Kasturi. In addition, Ida, Virmati's daughter has been for Virmati. Reena Kothari endorses the same, "Difficult daughters is the story of three generation of daughters, each one a difficult one for its generation. In their relationships, all the daughters either face difficulties from others or pose difficulties to others" (2002 : 105).

This nature of the daughters' follows with differences in their actions and reactions to the traditions and culture. Virmati belongs to an Arya Samaj family, a family that is very much concerned about their traditions and morals. An obedient child of her parents, initially she abides by her families wishes. However, a change comes in her attitude when she observes the freedom enjoyed by her cousin Shakuntala who is studying in Lahore. Thus, she also feels the same and expresses her desire to study more. Her grandfather is a staunch supporter of women education, so, he gives her the permission to study. In the meantime, the family decides for her marriage. As a result, she is engaged to Inderjit, a boy of a good family. Everything is settled but her life takes a dramatic turn after entering college when she falls in love with an already married professor. Since hesitation restrains her, she cannot acquire the courage to acknowledge this fact in front of her family. Utterly confused, she finds herself in a quagmire between the family responsibilities as an eldest daughter and her own love. Manju Kapur adds more to her confusion, "Days passed, and Virmati's confusion grew. She would sometimes wish that ...but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No Professor and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased" (50).

Virmati turns out to be a very difficult daughter for her mother as she defies all the norms of her family and does everything against the wishes of her parents. Her parents want her to get educated so that she can be married to a boy of a respectable family. Although in the initial stages she seems to be a very obedient and caring child as she takes care of her mother and her siblings, after the entry of the professor in her life her attitude changes completely. She falls in love with him even after knowing that he is already married. Her family after knowing this affair locks her and does not allow her to move outside, still, she continues her communication with the professor through letters. Her mother tries to persuade her to marry a person of their choice but she straightaway rejects her plea. Kasturi advises her to marry as without it a woman has no existence, “A woman without her own home and family is a woman without moorings” (111). Virmati denies her suggestions and she is stubborn; consequently, her mother slaps her on her face and shuts her inside.

Concerned, family members at last agree to her wishes and decide to send her to Lahore. Virmati at that moment is less concerned about education as she considers it to be a reason to get rid of her family. She loses the trust of her mother who does not allow her to go alone and thus keeps a watch on her activities. Still, she meets him and goes against her mother’s wishes.

Apart from Virmati there are other female characters which significantly project this image of females. For instance, Shakuntala, another female in this novel is also leading her life independently and does not want to confine herself to the knot of marriage. In spite of repeated pressures from her family, she does not give her consent to marry which

again brings to light the shirking of the new generation from the knot of marriage and proves to be very difficult for the parents to manage.

The difficult nature of the daughters has its varied dimensions as even after being an obedient child even Kasturi, Virmati's mother has also been problematic for her mother. This problem springs from her increasing interest in her studies which was not taken in a positive light at that time. Hence they decide to marry her off soon. Daughters in Indian society have been considered as very burdensome as their actions influence not only the immediate family but society as well.

Ida, Virmati's daughter represents the new generation who is quite advance than her mother and she does not like the idea of her mother to please her father. She reacts strongly when her mother asks her to behave in a way which pleases her father as she does not like this idea. Fiercely against this fake flattery, she condemns her mother for being so servile to her father throughout her life, "Why is it so important to please him? (257). She does not consider her mother's actions right and hence says, "The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother" (1).

Ida's decision to marry a person of her own choice and later her divorce bring to light her lack of fulfillment in her life. Nonetheless, she is not like her mother whose whole life has been spent in performing the actions dictated by the professor. Resolute and determined, she does not consider beauty of a woman as everything as for her a woman should be good in every sphere.

Ida does not like the kind of life her mother has led as she feels there is nothing good about it. Her dislike towards her mother is mainly due to her unwavering attitude wherein she fails to take her own decisions and always have to seek the guidance of the professor. Convolutioned nature of the daughters can be witnessed in all the three generations as even after being a part of a new generation Virmati tries to control her daughter so that she should also not go against the norms. Her daughter is very firm and bold whereas Virmati suffers a lot in her life due to her inability to see and understand life in reality.

Virmati's **indecisiveness** is another prominent theme. Virmati loves the professor but she never acknowledges this thing boldly in front of her family members. It seems as if she is not aware of the consequences of her own decisions.

Her quest to study more is also not as intense in her as the desire to meet the professor. She cherishes freedom and does not want to abide by her family's traditions. Hence, when she gets convinced that her family would not agree to her marriage with the professor, she decides to commit suicide which clearly brings her escapist spirit. She lacks boldness and the strength to face people and fails to assert her likings and her desires openly. Moreover, she does not possess the power to discriminate between right or wrong. She terms the love of the professor as very deep for her whereas throughout the novel no hint can be obtained which brings to the fore the professor's in-depth love for her. Everything is physical in his love for Virmati and it is only after repeated efforts by her that he decides to marry her.

Lack of knowledge about her actual purpose in life makes her suffer throughout her life. Her decision to go to Lahore gets the approval but even in Lahore she does not show the

inclination towards study rather she keeps on thinking about the professor and her intimate moments shared with him. Virmati's weak spirit is in striking contrast to Swarnalata, her roommate, who cherishes a purpose in her life and works steadfastly to achieve it. Completely in control of her life, she is very straightforward and direct in saying things. When Virmati asks her why her mother does not send her anything to eat, she says unswervingly, "She is annoyed with me" (107). Virmati gets surprised and ask her about her studies to which she replies emphatically:

Swarnalata: Then what? I love Lahore. All my friends are here, all my activities. I had to stay here, and so I decided do an M.A. I wrote and told my parents. There was not a moment to lose..."

Virmati: Didn't they try and stop you?

Swarnalata: They had no choice. (Swarna arched her brows, totally in control of her life). "I was very clear that I would do something besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support me for two years. I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer Satyagraha along with other congress workers against the British (107).

Swarnalata's fearless assertion of her thoughts surprises Virmati and she thinks about her own inability to do the same. Her uncontrolled self again comes to limelight when she confesses in front of Swarnalata that she cannot be like her as she is very simple and has never met anyone who has talked to her in this manner. She has been brought up in a traditional family and hence despite her fascination for the professor, she finds herself torn between tradition and her own desires. She analyses her own life when one day she visits one gathering organized in favour of the struggle for independence. In that congregation, she finds that everybody has gathered for a specific purpose but even there she constantly keeps on thinking about the professor. Helpless, she loses grip on her own thoughts and despite her efforts, she cannot stop her thoughts being directed towards the professor.

Her talks are in striking contrast to Swarnalata whose conversations are full of struggles, campaigns, party activities, etc. Swarnalata's purposeful life makes her morose and she finds herself nowhere, "What was she? A nationalist, Leftist or Communist? She had forgotten, though Swarnalata had enthused about Mohini Dutta more than once. Virmati sighed. They all seemed so remote from her" (131). All these women and their passion to do something for the country make her feel her own existence to be meaningless. Deprived of a resolute frame of mind, she finds herself wasting time in comparison to the women who are spending time for a cause. On one side, she thinks about the insignificance of her acts but on the other, again starts thinking about the professor. She lacks insistence; she has neither the sense of discrimination nor the vision to implement it in the right direction.

Endless waiting for the professor compels her to think about the insecure future of this relationship as it is without the legal stamp of marriage. Consequently, she discusses her predicament with Swarnalata who makes her see life in its entirety, "Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war, the satyagraha movement - because of these things women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream" (139). Drawn tempted towards the mental make up of Swarnalata Virmati feels that there should have been someone like her to talk to her this way in Amritsar and Delhi. She wants others to support her in deciphering the reality. As a consequence of her frequent meetings with the professor, she suffers a lot as she gets pregnant and has to abort the child in a hurry. In all these moments, she feels guilty and wants him to be around but has to undergo the whole exercise on her own. After

undergoing a long thought process, she decides not to meet him again but the moment he comes to her, she forgets everything which again indicates her lack of control on herself.

Deep inside she nurtures a desire to have a family and respect in the society but after acquiring the status of a co-wife, she regrets her decision. Despite being an indecisive and weak, she reaches a time in her life where she realizes her actual place. Hence, **realization of her worth** as an individual also strikes us as an important idea. She loves the professor greatly and hence, when she finds that her position in his home is similar to a tenant, she feels greatly degraded. She longs to do all the household work which seems to be the prerogative of Ganga, his first wife. Her requests to work in the kitchen and to befriend with the kids are politely set aside by Harish when he says that let her have the home and you can have me. She feels her own individuality is marginalized, “And what about her? What kind of wife was she going to be if everything was to be done by Ganga?” (216).

Moreover, all her hopes regarding her family members also get shattered when no one comes to meet her. However, her own visit turns out to be a failure, no one shows any desire to meet her and instead of receiving a welcome she gets assaults. Her mother orders her to get out from the house. Feelings of disrespect and being unwanted from the family and especially her siblings make her realize the aftermaths of her decision.

Although she has committed a mistake by going against the norms but she wants her daughter to follow them which clearly manifests her guilt on losing the sanctity of marriage. Ida feels suffocated in the restrictions Virmati tries to impose on her, “My

mother tightened her reins on me as I grew older, she said it was for my own good. As a result, I am constantly looking for escape routes” (258).

Virmati’s husband’s decision to make her study further helps her in escaping from the peripheral existence she has been leading and an understanding develops in her about her own needs. Her conversation with Harish when he talks about the independence of India inspires her to think about her own freedom which is at stake. She has no freedom and all her actions and decision are guided by the professor. She does not like the economic pressures put on her by Harish when he is cautioning her to be wise in spending the money. Everywhere she feels herself chained, so wants to be free. Thus, she questions Harish in a straightforward way when he asks her to come back home. She clearly communicates her sense of dislike against the secondary treatment meted out to her. The author aptly projects her recognized self, “I will relate to you with dignity or not at all. None of this hiding and whispering and keeping my voice down and struggle over who is going to wash your underwear and who is going to clean your shoes. None of this for me” (155-156).

Her efforts to break the shackles of the dummy life get clearer when she tries to be a part of the freedom struggle by helping the afflicted people. Despite Harish’s dislike, she gives them clothes and offers help in every possible manner. Her growth gets clearer when she wants her daughter to be particular in taking decisions.

Married Woman (2002) by Manju Kapur is an enticing novel which adroitly portrays the aspirations, ups and downs, turmoils, aloofness, segregation, desire for love of a female named Astha. The important themes in this work are marital discord, quest for

independence-financial, emotional and sexual and assertion of freedom through lesbianism, resilience of faith and gender difference.

The present novel by the author competently narrates the story of Astha, a middle class woman who has got married to Hemant, son of a reputed government official. Since the start of her youth Astha keeps on being battered about marriage, the supposed personification of wholeness for a woman. All her actions, reactions are scolded, praised, guided and being silenced in the name of marriage. Despite having an affair with two boys Bunty and Rohan, she succumbs to her parents wish and marries Hemant.

She feels extremely happy after her marriage with Hemant but the corrosion of love under the vortex of marriage becomes unbearable to her. Thus, **marital discord** is one of the important ideas. Astha attaches importance to the fact that her husband should give her attention. On the flipside, she fails to get it due to her husband's extremely busy schedule. She starts writing in order to keep herself busy but that too seems to her as being unnoticed by her husband as he does not pay much attention to her writings. Astha's father wants her to take up journalism but Hemant does not like the idea and advises her to take up teaching, as this is the ideal job for women. Thus, on the requests of her husband and even her in-laws, she takes up a teaching job in a reputed school. However, she finds herself struggling after the birth of her daughter, Anuradha and finds it difficult to manage both her house and her job.

The charismatic sexual life also gets rusted under the boredom of marriage which really pains her. Hemant who used to take interest in all her activities now becomes busy in his new business venture of making televisions; hence, he does not have much time to spend

with her. The increase in lack of communication between both of them creates a gulf and she starts feeling isolated. Repeated pressures from her familial responsibilities make her sick. She suffers from severe headaches and all her hopes to get some comfort from her husband go as a waste as he has no time for anything. Even when he sometimes shows interest, it seems a formality to her.

In her effort to keep herself busy Astha starts painting. Her painting gets selected for reviews and gets appreciation from people but Hemant despite being her husband is very cold in wishing her, “Congratulations, you must be really pleased, I am happy for you, as though they had met at a party, instead of sharing the same bed for years.” (159). Due to the absence of understanding, she finds herself completely neglected. Hemant’s attitude becomes businesslike where she never discusses anything with his wife but discusses all the matters with his father.

The lack of compatibility between herself and her husband creates discontent in her life. She finds herself alone without any support as she has to take care of everything. She comes to the conclusion that a place of a woman in a family is just that of an unpaid servant or a slave. The indifferent attitude of her husband makes her think about divorce but being a traditional woman she sees it as a threat to her social status as a married woman. Her in-depth contemplation over this issue makes her understand the security in it.

Overburdened with her job, family and children, Astha wants Hemant to help her but on the contrary, he asks her to leave the job as that is not of too much significance. In all their conversations, Astha feels sidelined as no one shows any interest in her wants. Her

economic dependence on her husband is also one of the reasons for her to feel herself trampled. She receives a setback when on a trip despite her repeated requests he does not buy her a jewellery box. This action of Hemant creates in her a **craving for freedom**. She gets severely hurt when all the demands of her parents-in-law and her children are met and hers are kept on the periphery. Consequently, Pipeelika's advice to have a car instead of a scooter makes her desire more firm. Accordingly, she asks her husband to get her a separate car as well. Gradually, she starts asserting herself.

Astha's inclination towards attending a drama workshop organized by the school under the guidance of Aizaz Akhtar Khan is her attempt to keep herself busy in something constructive. The desire to do something independently becomes strong in Astha and she completely involves herself in the drama workshop. The sense of fulfillment makes her feel happy as she finds herself and her children busy in something. Moreover, through her exposure to the activities of workshop, she comes to know so many facts about the Indian culture and finds it to be perverse to suit the needs of the time. Initially, she feels hesitant when Aizaz asks her to write the script for the drama as she has to really work very hard to get the facts but later on feels obliged towards Aizaz. Through her writing task, she comes to know the sanctity of religion and the wider truth associated with it as she acknowledges, "The Hindu Religion ...is wide, is deep, capable of endless interpretations. Anybody can get anything they want from it, ritual, and stories, thoughts that sustain" (85).

Astha's involvement in these activities makes her busy and hence she does not have much time to spend with Hemant. He does not like her being busy every time he comes

home. On the contrary, Astha finds it to be very satisfying for her as she does not have to wait for him. Besides, she finds that she has no role to play as she considers her position to be, “A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth” (231).

This incident of working with Aijaz in a drama workshop proves to be very significant for Astha. Her meetings with Aizaz and her independent working on the script develop in her a faith which goes a long way in her bold assertion of her likes. The news of Aizaz’s death gives a shock to her and in an attempt to give vent to her own feelings for Aizaz, she works with other women to protest against this killing. Not only this, her participation in the meetings gives her a chance to show her talent of painting which becomes a source of her self fulfillment, “Instead she hugged the vision of herself as a woman who had sold two paintings in one year; sum total thirty thousand rupees, of which ten thousand was hers. She felt rich and powerful, so what if this feeling only lasted a moment” (159). In addition to it, she gets the attention of everybody. Her children also come closer to her which boosts her confidence and fills her with sense of achievement. Slowly, she starts participating in the meetings of people organized against the communal biases in the country. All these activities give her a respite from her mundane life. She also finds a chance to assert her freedom as she does not suppress her desire to go to Lahore despite her husband’s refusal.

The dearth of being wanted by someone troubles her and hence when Pipeelika, Aizaz’s wife shows interest in her, she develops a relationship with her. **Assertion through lesbianism** is another powerful idea advocated in this novel. Her relationship with

Pipeelika is her step to assert her own wants and aspirations which has no value in her own house. The hollowness in her married life compels her to have a relationship with Pipeelika with whom she enjoys each and every moment of her life. Her excessive attachment with Pipeelika is also the declaration of her freedom as she no more waits for her husband for sexual gratification. Not only sexual, but even emotionally she develops a bond with Pipeelika. Thus, when her husband wants to talk to her, she does not show any interest. All these actions and reactions of Astha highlight her newly found freedom which she does not want to lose at any cost. As Seema Malik says Astha is Manju Kapur's new woman: "conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes." (Quoted in Kumar 2006 : 134).

Her efforts to meet her after telling lies again make her dependent on Pipeelika but the moment she comes to know that she has decided to go to America in order to finish her Ph.D, she gets a shock. Her confidence that even Pipeelika cannot live without her gets shattered and she starts feeling insecure. Her faith in the conventions of marriage has lost which has prompted her towards lesbianism but now her faith gets restored. **Resilience of faith** is another idea brought about in this novel. However, Astha comes to the realization that no one can be yours as ultimately a person has to live alone. The author has summed Astha's state of mind very clearly, "She placed their arms together, and thought it was an illusion, you could never be one with another, no matter how hard you tried" (240).

Close contact with the bitter truth makes her mature and she stops neglecting her children and her family. Her sense of judgement and clarity come to the fore when she sets aside

Pippee's offer to give divorce to her husband. Her understanding about the security granted by marriage and her love and concern for the children establish her clear perception.

In addition to this, the inherent difference between the sexes is perceptible when after the birth of her daughter, Astha comes to know about the strong urge of Hemant as well as family to have a son, the heir of the family. Hence, **gender difference** is also one of the themes presented through this novel. Her psyche gets smothered when she frankly questions her husband as to how he can be confident about the birth of a son as there can be chances of a daughter also. Hemant replies rather composedly that if that happens, she has to take the chance again.

Apart from this discrimination between genders, the author has highlighted the same more broadly when Astha has not been considered worthy by her husband to have a say in financial matters. After the death of her father, her mother gives all her money to Hemant and Astha, as she does not consider her so wise in financial matters. Astha feels hurt as she does not want to depend on Hemant for every thing but whenever she questions him he behaves as if she has asked something wrong. This brings to light Hemant indifferent and extremely egoistic attitude towards his wife. Explicit difference meted out to Astha creates a strong urge in her to be financially independent; another important theme highlighted in this novel. As a result Astha does not leave the school job which has been initiated only with a view to keep her busy. The job acquires importance for her and despite her husband's pressures she does not leave the job.

To conclude, all the writers have projected the females in different shades through the use of various themes. However, there is a difference in the focus and intensity of a particular theme. The characters of Anita Desai present a wider spectrum of life where the characters show a steady progression in their struggle for survival. In comparison to her earlier novels where the woman characters possess an escapist attitude and in their quest to survive resort to killing also, there is a remarkable growth in the attitude of the characters in the later phase. Where Shall We Go This Summer brings the dilemma of a female through various ideas. Indecisive and weak in the beginning, she leads quite a dry life. However, when she moves on to Manori, a magical island for respite, circumstances compel her to grow. Her realization about the realistic aspects of life compels her to return to her family as an awakened individual. In Fasting Feasting, the author highlights gender discrimination, urge for freedom and adaptability of the females. Preference allotted to sons pricks the consciousness of the daughters. The reaction of the females against this discrimination has been aptly projected Aruna retaliates whereas Anamika accepts it meekly. Uma endures it throughout her life. Through Uma the author highlights a strong urge to survive even when her life is in absolute crisis. Her marriage has been a failure with no freedom and no space of her own. She has not been allowed to work as she is a necessity for her parents. Hence, dire restrictions imposed on her mentally and physically. Adaptability is the key characteristic of not only Uma but also her mother and her aunt, Mira. Clear Light of Day, a revolutionary work in the fictional world of Anita Desai portrays a female's struggle for existence without any male by her side. She resolves her conflicts and dilemmas independently. Ultimately, she establishes herself as

an awakened individual unnerved by life's complexities. She comes to an understanding about the eternal truth of life and in that attempt attains awakening.

Shashi Deshpande's work, The Dark Holds No Terrors aptly brings to light the victimization of a female in the society through various themes, such as gender discrimination, marital rape and finally the ultimate realization. Initially subdued, due to the recurrent rapes of her husband, Sarita tries to control her married life which has become a cobweb of complexities due to her professional superiority. Inferior to her, her husband asserts his power through harassing her physically. Her visit to her father's house for temporary respite proves to be an enriching experience for her as she realizes her worth as an individual. She discards all her fears and prepares herself to face her husband afresh. That Long Silence marvelously traces the seventeen years long silence of Jaya, the protagonist through different themes such as self-imposed silence, self discovery and self-realization. Initially she remains silent due to marital pressures and continuous neglect. On introspection, she finds her whole self lost in her attempts to preserve the security in marriage, which is already on the verge of collapse. Realization dawns on her and she decides to expunge her silence and signals her independence by taking up writing for self expression. The Binding Vine by Shashi Deshpande projects a multidimensional image of Urmila who despite being contended nurtures concern for the female community and fights to get them justice. The writer has employed different themes, such as rape in marriage, inequality of gender and finally concern for the female community. In Small Remedies the author projects the experiences of a female through the use of themes such as emergence of an unconventional women, quest for identity and

gender inequality. All the females are victims of gender discrimination but despite being a victim everyone struggles in their own fields to become successful.

Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters hinges on the indecisiveness of a female, primary cause of her suffering. Indecisiveness, growth of female through generations and self-realization are some of the prominent ideas advocated through this work. The protagonist, despite being weak and indecisive, shows progression. With the passage of time, this weakling becomes quite mature in her perception after facing the realities of life. She regrets her decision to marry the professor and wants her daughter not to follow the same line. In her work Married Woman, Manju Kapur projects a new woman Astha who wants to break the shackles of the age old custom of marriage and finds herself captivated by the pressures of motherhood. Moreover, lack of support and indifferent attitude of the family towards her just because of her inferior sex makes her feel marginalized. In her quest to assert her freedom, she develops relationship with another woman. Furthermore, the dearth of emotional fulfillment also becomes one of the reasons for her to search it outside, though in the end, her motherhood is eulogized and she even drops her idea of leaving her husband. Astha exhibits her sense of control through her decision to live with her children and her husband. This changing status of females in the society has ignited the curiosity of the filmmakers also. A detailed analysis of the depiction of females in a powerful medium like cinema has been presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5
**REFLECTIONS ON POWERFUL PROGRESSION OF
FEMALES**

Cinema fulfills important social functions like providing recreation, information and education. A vast continent in itself, with its own culture as well as language, it reflects larger than life situations. Films are the most dominating and involving form of mass media; the dark theatre, the big screen, the enveloping sound and the response of the audience are combined into a powerful form of presentation. It justifies its pivotal role as one of the richest visual media. No wonder, the Roman classicist Horace in his Ars Poetica thinks on the same line, “mind is less actively stimulated by what it takes in through the trustworthy agency of the eyes-something the spectator can see for himself” (Quoted in Rathore 2002 : 242).

Films, a powerful medium of mass communication, encompass and exhibit diverse areas closely associated with our lives. Accused of exaggeration, unnecessary female exposure, grandeur and male domination, Hindi films are the most sought after communication medium. Hence, it has not only attracted brickbats but also bouquets. The films offer the audience a chance to witness things from a multi-angled viewpoint. It provides a room to get into the shoes of every character and live their life in an unbiased way not only metaphorically as in the case of novels but physically also. Bunny Reuben in his Hollywood Flashback introduces the stars of his silver screen as the beautiful people when he says:

Stars are and have always been the base, the foundation and the ultimate box office pull in the entire history of motion pictures all over the world. They are, in a very literal sense, the Beautiful people. They represent the Ideal. They look, behave, live, love and dress like dream people. They are responsible for packed cinema theatres (Quoted in Prabhu 2001 : 4).

Hence, Hindi films have created well-scripted characters close to the audience's heart and with which the audience can identify themselves. Among these characters, women also occupy a specific place. However, the most serious accusation with the Hindi films is that they project the females mostly in stereotype roles such as submissive and passive in accord with the trend prevalent in the society.

The irresistible impact of films on the society has been a driving force for the filmmakers, motivating them towards making films which safeguard the status quo. Shoma A. Chatterji supports the same:

Feminist analysis may also consider the construction of female characters in terms of stereotypes-the suffering, subservient wife (Sudha Chandran in *Pati Parmeshwar*-1988), the rejected but empathetic girlfriend (Bindu in *Abhimaan*-1973), the avenging widowed mother, (Rakhee in *Ram Lakhan*-1989 and *Karan Arjun*-1995), the 'wronged other woman' (Ranjeeta in *Pati Patni Aur Woh*-1978), the vampish 'other woman' (Salma Agha in *Pati Patni Aur Tawaif*-1990), etc. These stereotypes are often assessed according to the degree of their 'truthfulness', the extent to which they either reflect, or constitute, a smoothing over of contradictions and conflicts in the lives of 'real' (not celluloid) women. Another process through which analysis functions is by studying whether changes that have taken place in the portrayal of women in cinema over time are reflective of changes that have swept in the position and social status of women in the actual environment we live in (1998 : 7-8).

Hence, the filmmakers have not altered the stereotypes prevalent in the society. At the same time, they cannot forgo the target to make money. Consequently, the image of Indian women in the initial stages has been idealized as an ideal mother, wife, daughter-

in-law and sister. Laura Mulvey comments about the position of women in Indian cinema which according to her have been relegated to the passive position in film after film, as “bearer not the maker of meaning.” merely an appendage to the man, the wielder of power (1999: 834). However, the transformation in the society has heralded a new era and hence a shift has come in on-screen projection of women as well.

Portrayal of women and its related aspects has been an integral part of filmmaking since its inception. Woman has been defined variously; Black and Coward feel, “Women are precisely defined, never as general representatives of humanity, but as specifically feminine, and frequently sexual categories....Being a man is an entitlement not to masculine attributes but to non-gendered subjectivity” (Quoted in Chatterji 1998 : 262).

The area of portrayal of female is diversely rich as they are represented as submissive, oppressed, educated, resilient, open-minded, etc. However, there is a continuous change with respect to the stereotyped image and its depiction. Despite working hard and craving for a respectable place in the society, females still lack the liberty to assert their wishes. Manjiri Prabhu, an eminent critic and scholar seems to vouchsafe for the continuing dependency syndrome, “Regardless of the age group, the image of the Indian woman is predominantly that of an educated woman but submissive wife or daughter in a male-dominated society....” (2001 : 158).

Views regarding the projection of women in Indian Cinema have also been put forward by Bipinchandra Chaugule who has traced the image of women rather aptly:

A split between a daughter or wife, trying to maintain the traditional submissive/secondary role as a binding force in a family, in a male-dominated society. As an awakened human being, trying to overcome the physical and social limitations imposed with sex (gender) and attempting to create a separate space for herself, unattached to a man, irrespective of education, background and status (Quoted in Prabhu 2001 : 158).

Apart from other influential factors, society has also cast a great impact on the manner of projection of women. Aveen Maguire clearly brings to limelight the impact these screen images cast on the society when she says, “Ludicrous as these images are upon reflection, they are bombarded at us with such intensity that it requires a lot of energy to resist them.” (Quoted in Chatterji 1998 : 7).

Conforming to the same line, there are various films which project the sustainable and changed images associated with females. Films like Bhumika, Mirch Masala, Arth, Astitva, Daman and Satta are a few landmarks in the representation of the multifarious aspects related to their lives. All these films have been highly successful in portraying the trauma of females through different themes such as intense exploitation, quest for freedom: physical, mental, sexual and economic, powerful assertion of self, quest for meaning, urge for identity, marital rape, dependence syndrome, emergence of a new woman, etc.,.

Bhumika (1977) by Shyam Benegal is one of the remarkable films in the feminist genre, which projects the multifaceted aspects of woman’s life. Physical, mental and economic exploitation, search for self-fulfillment, realization, search for freedom, powerful assertion of freedom and sexual choice, etc., are some of the major themes reflected through this film. Sangeeta Datta says about the relevance of this film in the present

times, “Bhumika is not only a powerful exploration of a public woman’s psyche, but also a documentation of the changing times through the history of the Bombay films-the world of which Usha is a part. (2003 : 111).

However, the immediate attention of the audience gets to the mental, physical and economic **exploitation** of the females. Usha (Smita Patil), the heroine of the film has been married to Keshav Darvi (Amol Palekar), a shrewd real patriarch who exploits not only Usha but also her mother, Shanta Bai (Sulabha Deshpande). Usha belongs to the family of *Devdasis* in which there is no provision of marriage for the females. Thus, her grandmother is unmarried but her mother gets married to a person of Brahmin caste. Her father’s excessive addiction to alcohol does not allow her family tension free ambience of economic liberty. Keshav Darvi takes undue advantage of this economic deprivation and compels Usha’s mother to maintain illegal relationships with him for the survival of the family. As a result, a witness to the stage of helplessness and anguish experienced by Shanta bai, Usha nurtures rebel since her childhood.

Experiences of all these traumas in her infancy cast a great influence on Usha’s perceptions regarding marriage. In her formative years, ignorant of Keshav’s manipulation, she has seen him taking care of everyone in her family which prompts her to marry him. Although she marries him for protection, love and fulfillment, her decision to marry him results in her physical, mental and economic exploitation. Things take a different and unthought-of turn; despite being an earning member in her home, she craves for respect. Her economic self-sufficiency fetches her neither love nor affection. Apart from the bliss of love and affection, her longing for freedom is also left unattended.

Keshav takes the reins in his hand regarding her professional decisions. The following dialogue illustrates the supremacy exercised by Keshav who never permits any freedom to her:

Keshav: Why have you come late? Who has come to drop you?

Usha: Have you not seen it from upstairs?

Keshav: I have seen it, that's why I am asking. Do you want to repeat the incident similar to the Director's?

Usha: How many times I have to tell you that I don't like even the mention of it?

Keshav: Do not speak dialogues. At that time I brought you home but I will not do it again.

Usha: Why did not you allow me to die?

Incessant restraint at every step, in her profession as well as at home, makes her feel depressive. The rigid restrictions imposed on her make her feel like running away from her home. He tortures her intensely and unable to bear it she is left with no choice but to leave the home. Even her economic independence is curbed as she is not allowed to exercise her own will in spending money. In spite of earning in profusion, she gets mentally repressed and craves for freedom. Usha's wishes and her motherly instincts are also not attended to by her husband. Her desire to go out and enjoy with her daughter has been brushed aside by him. Contrary to that, he forces her to attend the party in which her new film is going to be announced. Crushed under the prowess of her husband, Usha becomes for the time being passive.

Decisions regarding all her professional matters are not hers. Her consent, whether she likes to work in a particular film or not, has never been given any value. On the contrary, her husband takes the decision and directs her to conform to them. After the marriage, her pregnancy ignites the desire in her to take care of herself as well as the forthcoming baby

and she decides not to work in films. However, her husband presses her to work. Her mother and grandmother and the money for his business becomes the reason for her to continue working. Trampled under the demands of her husband she gets to know that her husband wants her to earn money at any cost. She becomes an instrument of money making for him who even commands her to work with Rajan though he nurtures doubt and jealousy regarding her relationship with Rajan. This treatment makes her feel alienated and unwanted. The mistreatment is so intense that she considers escape from the responsibilities as the only respite. All her frustration is the outcome of her husband's indifferent and loutish treatment. The intrusion of disloyalty and suspicion in her married life makes her feel quite weak. She starts to lose her confidence as well as self-respect and to forget this indifference meted out to her, she considers drinking as a good option.

Usha undergoes not only mental exploitation but also experiences physical exploitation. She suffers physical assaults when her husband comes to know about her pregnancy. The dependence and helplessness turn her happiness into a fit of sadness. She has to undergo abortion despite her desire to have the baby. And when the stroke of luck bestows Usha with a daughter, her desire to spend some time with her daughter is set aside by her husband.

Her husband brushes aside her wishes and aspirations. She is not allowed to miss any single event related to her profession. Despite her wishes she is asked to attend the party and when she dances with Rajan (Anant Nag), he beats her mercilessly and forces her to take an oath in front of God not to repeat this thing in future. He just treats her as an object which should earn money without questioning him.

Exploitation of Usha is confined not only to physical level but it is also extended to economical level. Usha fails to get respect and love despite her professional excellence. In this aspect Usha resembles the heroine Sarita of the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors by Shashi Deshpande who also fails to get the required warmth and concern from her husband despite being a successful doctor. So both the females suffer miserably despite their professional superiority.

Usha's husband rules the house, though she is the sole earning person in the family. Despite earning copiously, she does not have any separate bank account. Her husband takes all her monetary decisions and keeps on squandering her money in the name of business. For example, when Usha's friend Basanti congratulates her, she blurts out her deep-seated annoyance on the double standards exercised by her husband Keshav who on one hand forbids her not to talk freely with Rajan but on the other hand signs the film with Rajan as the actor. Her sarcasm is clear from this dialogue:

Usha: You should congratulate him. Although he can ruin his own business, he never forgets to increase my price.

All these instances show Usha's shattered self which fails to find respite in her house and consequently searches it outside. Thus, search for fulfillment is another prominent theme reflected through this film.

Deprived of love and affection since her childhood, she nurtures a desire for being wanted and cared by someone. Marriage with Keshav is her step towards her search for **self fulfillment** but she fails miserably in that attempt. A witness to her mother's failed married life, she has always desired a happy and successful married life. As an average

Indian traditional woman, she wants a compassionate husband who can give her security, love and affection; since she gets neither the much expected protection nor the warmth, she feels shattered and hence starts searching it outside. Her depressed and broken state of mind has been skillfully illustrated through the disparity in her personal and professional life. On the sets, she acts as a satisfied loving woman whereas in reality she is completely dissatisfied with her completely hollow married life. She fulfills various roles in the films successfully of a devoted wife, the suffering mother and the virtuous married woman. In her own life Usha both desires and transgresses these ideal roles. Shyam Benegal feels the same:

That was my first film to be inspired from an existing literary source. There is a tendency towards literariness which I have tried to curb with an increasing use of montage. The book may be egocentric, but it fascinated me because it deals with a woman who is trying to find an individual place in the society of that time. (Quoted in Datta 2003 : 112).

The thought that her husband has married her to exploit her as an object to earn money torments her relentlessly.

All her efforts to bring harmony in their relationship receive a setback as her husband never shows any faith in her. Emotionally insecure, she goes to Rajan to fill the void in her life but to her dismay he advises her to go back home. After being unsuccessful in her relationship with Rajan (Anant Nag) who does not have the courage to accept her, she feels totally broken as he does not justify her attempt to leave the home. On the other hand, he seems to justify the stand of her husband in the name of constraints. Rajan's indifferent attitude upsets her extremely and she reveals her anguish:

Usha: He molested my mother, was that also a constraint?

Rajan: You just want to take revenge, Usha

Usha: You are escaping from responsibilities.

Psychological insecurity ignites her desire for companionship, but she fails to get it from Rajan.

Her love-parched-soul fails to adjust in all her relationships not because the males do not love her body but because her expectations sprawl beyond bodily needs. The failures weaken her spirit, already crumbled under the pressure of expectations. Complexity captures her mind and she cannot differentiate illusion from reality. A victim of imposed captivity and fake relationships she is in dire need of true love. Her shunting from one male to another symbolizes her desire not only to settle down but also continue to grow as a lady. After knowing Rajan's lackadaisical attitude, she decides to go to Sunil (Naseeruddin Shah), the film director. To put her woes to an end and to be in a state of perpetual bliss, she proposes suicide. Though he promises her to abide by the joint suicide pact which they have signed, he ditches her. Her delusion that if she fails to get happiness from her husband she can get it through external relationships proves her wrong.

A rising sense of insecurity engulfs her completely. Even after being duped by Rajan and Sunil, she goes with a feudal landlord Kale (Amrish Puri). Hence, despite her repeated failures, she blindly follows the sayings of her inner self which has lost control. The landlord, a very rich man, tells her frankly about his wife and son. Without any objection she goes with him. Though she fulfills all her duties with dedication and commitment, she has never imagined that in this house the norms for a woman are more rigid and

followed strictly. When the servant sets her order aside to take her out for a visit to the fare, she warns that she will expose him to his master. However, when she asks Kale to reprimand the servant, instead of rebuking, he favours him by terming him as reliable and well acquainted with the norms of the family. He strictly commands her to stay within the confines of the house. Usha gets enraged and defies the norms of his family by asserting her right to freedom:

“I am not a candle which can be liquefied in the light of the sun.”

Kale tells her that all the ladies of his family including his grandmother, mother as well as his wife have abided by these traditions. Usha argues that not being a part of his family, she cannot be forced to follow the norms of his family. Unable to tolerate this captivity, she secretly informs her husband who comes and takes her away. Here also, despite her efforts she does not succeed in getting satisfaction.

Deprivation of security, love and warmth makes her realize the futility behind her search. Deceived by all the males, Usha ultimately finds herself at the crossroads from where she has to tread on the path of isolation alone. The failure to get solace from all males makes her discover the uselessness of relationships. She realizes her mistake of wasting her precious years in the search of fulfillment outside but ultimately she realizes that only she herself can surrogate her segregation and loneliness. When she does not attend the phone call of Rajan, and even set aside the pleas of her daughter and her husband, she is ready to take the lead.

Her relationship with the landlord's wife is a turning point in her realization about the realities of life. She advises her to stop this meaningless search for a blissful and satisfied life with a male. She says that everything will remain the same even if she leaves the house of the landlord as 'men never change; only their masks can'. The landlord's wife's practical and mature suggestions bring to limelight her own experienced state of mind. Her adjustability and compromise with her present state reveal her in-depth understanding about the prevalent norms. As a passive observer to her husband's illicit relationships, the landlord's wife shows her meek acknowledgment of the inequality between the sexes deeply rooted in the society. Paralysis has handicapped her; still her knowledge about the worldly affairs is much more advanced and practical in comparison to Usha who sounds quite immature in front of her despite her wide exposure. Her advice to Usha to shift her gaze from the illusory to the real world makes her realize the irrelevance of her journey towards a fake goal. Usha gets motivated with her in-depth insight into the truth about relations and this proves to be a moment of her reawakening to the right choice in her life.

After this incident, her daughter's pregnancy jolts her as this reminds her of her own mistake but she feels relieved the moment she knows about her marriage and her husband. Her dilemma ends for her life starts afresh, her daughter has taken the right step; and the proper beginning promises a buoyant future, something she has always wished for herself but never got.

Emotionally unsafe, Usha feels secure and protected in the company of her grandmother, who gives her the desired affection and **freedom** to choose. However, her mother is

against the idea of giving her too much freedom and wants her to learn the household work so that she can marry a decent man and become a good housewife. Singing is inherent in her grandmother and hence she wants her to be a good singer. Though she sings well, all the efforts of her grandmother to teach her music never succeeded fully as she just hates consistent binding to it. Gender analyst Yashodhara Bagchi justifies the quest for freedom in Usha:

This society is not able to give Usha her due status, nor is her work in the film industry duly rewarded. Whether she donned modern or traditional roles each relationship has tied her with fresh bonds. Only the undulating branches of the tree outside the hotel window bring a hint of freedom in Usha's life (Quoted in Datta 2003 : 117).

In her childhood, she has been quite focused and has always tried to speak her mind fearlessly. For instance, her mother's decision to serve her pet hen as a food to her grandmother's teacher shakes her and hence she flees with the hen in order to show her dislike. Similarly, despite being victimized by her husband, she never fails to assert her ideas. The strong **assertion** of her aversion is a remarkable quality, deeply ingrained in her since her childhood. Her open expression of resentment is indicative of this.

Though her mother advises her not to meet Keshav and scolds her repeatedly, she continues to meet him. On being forced by her mother to take an oath in front of God not to meet Keshav again, she agrees to it only to ultimately marry him also against her wishes. After her marriage, when she finds herself in total control of her husband, she rebels and asserts her freedom by repeatedly running away from home.

To exercise her economic liberty, she opens a new account without informing her husband. After being questioned by her husband about her decision to open a new bank account she states it very forcefully. She even makes him feel as just a dependent on her money. When he says that he has committed a big mistake by bringing her back home, she questions him as to why he has not allowed her to die. Her announcement of freedom is very forceful. Usha even challenges the supremacy of her husband when she asks her daughter to thwart his order not to switch off the music of her grandmother. Her bold remarks and straightforward questioning give a jolt to her husband. Consistent binding enraptures her mind and with her outright responses to her husband, she breaks the shackles:

Keshav: I have committed a mistake

Usha: You need my money; hence you have brought me back.

Keshav: Is this true that you have opened a new bank account on your name and signed the new contract on your own?

Usha: So what? Haven't I to think about Sushma and mother?

Keshav: You have always thought that money is yours. I have helped you in becoming an actress and I have managed your career. I helped your family when they were starving.

Usha: Are you giving the money now also.

Her rebellion against her husband and deliberate action to do the things hated by him bring to display her undaunted declaration of freedom. When her husband says that he has said no to the film director Sunil on her behalf, she quickly agrees to work in his film. Her inner self nurtures a sense of revolt against her husband and her decisions blurt out her frustration over this excessive subjugation. She does all this to assert her independent state of mind.

Completely independent, she outrightly denies any sort of dependence on her husband and asserts her **sexual choice** openly, another significant idea which finds a unique place in this film. Aruna Vasudev points out the choice of the female character in this film:

In the films of Shyam Benegal, the women have key roles. His Bhumika is based on a real life character, a remarkable actress who dared to live life on her own terms. It led her into a series of affairs, with the shadow of her husband always beside her, but at least the affairs were of her own choosing, and she was never crushed by the defeats that were a part of her experience (1983 : 104).

Her sexual choice finds expression through her relationships maintained with many males in her life. All these acts reveal her ruined inner self. Indifference, despite all her hard work, makes her feel weak and hence she wants to prove herself. For that she exercises sexual liberty with many males in her life. Open declaration of her freedom shows her wish not to be restrained in the shackles of a family totally governed by the norms of a husband.

Inequality and the consequent differential treatment leading to realization and self fulfillment form the core of films discussed in which Mirch Masala also finds a unique place. Powerful projection of countless key ideas associated with the females place this film in the unique genre which highlights their journey from the periphery to the hub. The film has focused on the status of women through various ideas, though there are differences with respect to the extent in which a particular idea has been delineated. The most prominent themes in the film are intense exploitation of women, stage of dormancy, awareness of self, powerful assertion and the collective struggle of the females.

Extreme **exploitation** of woman forms the crux of this film. Servile treatment imparted to her makes her feel just like a slave as she is hit badly if she says or does anything against the wishes of her husband. Thus, the psyche of the female gets smothered both physically and mentally. This dominance is exercised by the patriarchy to confine the woman to the domesticity and thereby control them. Even Niccolo Machiavilli has justified the need for this subjugation of woman in his work, The Prince, when he says:

for fortune is a woman, and if you wish to master her, you must strike and beat her, and you will see that she allows herself to be more easily vanquished by the rash and the violent than by those who proceed more slowly and coldly. And therefore, as a woman, she ever favours youth more than age, for youth is less cautious and more energetic, and commands fortune with greater audacity (2007 : 118-119).

Physical oppression is one way to control the females. Radha (Supriya Pathak) who is in love with Mohan, (Mohan Gokhle) is mercilessly beaten by her father when he gets to know about her affair. Even the Head of the village starts beating his wife Saraswati (Deepti Naval), when she raises her voice in protest against the injustice meted out to Son Bai. The females not only undergo this torturous position but also have to bear the pangs of loneliness when their husbands go out at night and maintain illicit relationship with other womenfolk. Such a lopsided treatment has been thrust upon Saraswati also, wife of the Head of the village. Completely confined within the house, she is not allowed even to question the whereabouts of her husband. He retains relationship outside his marriage and never remains in his house at night. He comes to his house only to perform some ceremonial duties and does not give his wife even the right to be aware of it. Restraint in the household chores and the imposed confinement make Saraswati feel crushed. The idea that her husband goes to another woman despite her presence torments her. Her

deliberate attempts to hide her internal anguish over this neglect come to the forefront when she tells a story to her daughter so that she should not enquire about her father. Internally, her conscience pricks her about the unjustified restraint but outside she displays serenity and answers the queries of her daughter calmly.

A victim of excessive subjugation, she cannot even take her daughter to the school despite being urged by the schoolmaster. Though, she nurtures the desire to educate her daughter due to the well-rooted norms of patriarchal set up, she does not have the courage to do so. Quite sophisticated in comparison to other females in the village, she knows the value of education but utter restrictions and forced custody enfeeble her to inch towards this bold step.

Depiction of female as an object of glamour and her consequent exploitation as a result of her beauty, a vital subject of talk among the male folk is another noteworthy feature of this film. Disparaging remarks of the males also highlight the mental torture of the females. The verbal assaults of the villagers related to their body shape indicate the treatment of women as an object of desire. Apart from the reproachful comments of the Revenue Inspector, other males of the village also use loathsome remarks as the factory owner blames Son Bai's beauty to be responsible for her husband's failure to come to the job on time. She is merely depicted as a seductress as Laura Mulvey says in her seminal article, "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*," "in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact, so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness"(Quoted in Nair 2002 : 52).

Mesmerized by the beauty of Son Bai, the inspector harasses her mentally when he enters the village. The inspector forces her to do as he likes in the beginning and also afterwards. Her helplessness gets revealed when she debates with the women when they term her beauty to be responsible for their imprisoned state. Feeling of isolation engulfs her and gradually she detaches herself from other women. Her innocence in suffering exploitation without any valid reason makes her feel as if her life has upset the lives of others.

Her independence does not fetch her expected respect and belongingness. Her childlessness makes her endure the indifference of her husband as he loses interest in her and ditches her in search of his own happiness. As soon as he gets the letter, without showing any concern for her wellbeing, he leaves the village to fulfill his desire of working in a city.

Sans any ability to think, women are considered irrational beings. Consequently they are treated only as the chattels of the males having no individual tastes. This discriminatory attitude gets reflected in the works of fiction also for instance, the female Astha in the novel Married Woman by Manju Kapur is never consulted by her husband in important matters related to finance. Similarly even Uma in Fasting Feasting by Anita Desai is never asked in the matters related to her marriage as she is not considered worthy to take right decisions. Likewise, Saraswati in this film has never been asked about her own likes and dislikes; she is expected to abide by her husband's decisions. In addition, Son Bai has also not been allowed to put forward her own point, whether she wants to go to the revenue inspector or not; rather it is decided by the males and ultimately the verdict is

announced. The forced decision casts an enormous impact on her as her firmness gets crushed under these illegitimate demands. The idea that her own wishes carry no importance for anyone makes her feel insecure. She finds herself under excessive pressure as her own beauty has become a threat to her existence. All these instances throw light on the immense oppression of the females by the males. The womenfolk of the village have not been consulted while deciding about Son Bai. The haste exercised by the males in taking the decision brings to display their casual attitude towards females. The verdict regarding Son Bai has been announced without even giving a thought to her opinion; her view has been taken for granted as if she is a mere puppet.

The ultimate power of making decisions rests with the males of the village. Females are marginalized as they are not allowed to get education. The following conversation between the Head and his wife Saraswati clarifies his extreme dislike towards female's education:

Head: How dare you admit Munni into the school? The whole village is criticizing. Have you ever heard a girl child getting education in the school?

Saraswati: I want to educate her.

Head: Who are you to do that?

Apart from this, he also justifies his act of maintaining a paramour outside home and accuses her of not giving birth to a son, his heir.

The females undergo this unequal treatment without raising their voice as they have been accustomed to live under such pressures due to repeated exploitation. Moreover, they have accepted it as a part of their fate, the **stage of dependency**, another theme highlighted in the film. Apart from Saraswati there are other women in the village who

are not allowed the freedom to talk, do or say something of their own choice. They have no freedom even to question the injustices of the males. Further, there is no awareness about the value of freedom. They consider the males as their protectors and hence depend on them for everything.

The film meticulously brings to the fore the dependence syndrome exhibited by the females. The protagonist Son Bai exhibits immense strength and confidence in the beginning when all the women of the village fearfully run away she stands firmly in front of the Inspector. The reason for her confident and fearless behaviour is the presence of her husband. However, she feels herself curtailed because of her infertility but when her husband is with her, she feels secure. After her husband's departure, she becomes fearful and when the inspector tries to harass her sexually she slaps him on his face and runs away in order to save herself.

Instead of facing him bravely, she begs of him to allow her to go in contrast to her outright denial in the beginning for not giving him water unless he bends like others in front of her. This decrease in the confidence is due to the females' dependence on males for security; emotional as well as physical.

Though there are other women characters in the film for instance, there is one character (Ratna Pathak) who agrees readily to go to the inspector. Son Bai, on the other hand, feels awkward and does not want to be treated marginally just because of the inferiority of her gender. She considers it wrong and unjustified, for instance when she hides herself from the inspector's soldiers in the spice factory, initially all the women consider it to be a justified action. All these women have been the victims of the patriarchy in one form or

the other and hence they are against this oppression. Later on, sensing it to be a threat to their lives, they start accusing Son Bai thus exposing their lack of strength. Complete dependence of the females on the males gets reflected with their instant shift in the behaviour. They start segregating her and indirectly try to convince her to go to the inspector. However, they favor her initially but they are not able to remove the ingrained fear of the males from their minds.

Continued despotic practice brings them to a stage of restlessness and they start judging the things critically which in turn makes them aware of their true self as an individual. **Awareness** of the injustices meted out to them is also one of the most important ideas highlighted by the director. The Head's wife, Saraswati has everything in her life: in the words of her husband; a good home and a luxurious life; still she feels herself incomplete. She endures his brutal remarks and his neglected outlook but she does not fully comply with the treatment her husband gives to her. Despite her less educated status, she is not devoid of reason to sense the feeling of inequality. She sincerely thinks that she is deprived of her rights. She misses his physical presence in the house and feels angry when her husband goes out. Even Son Bai wants her husband's company; she requests him not to go but still he leaves her.

The awareness, that the males whom she has considered as protectors are mere puppets in the hands of the inspector, shakes Son bai and she starts thinking about her protection on her own. Hence, she inches towards awareness, the moment she learns to distinguish between right or wrong. She puts everything on scrutiny and finds her real self lost. The realization that her wish carries no significance and her existence is equivalent to a doll in

the hands of the males shakes her. She considers herself powerless, immobile, passive and ignorant leading a hollow life without any concrete reason to live as she has no importance. Mortgage of Son Bai by the males of the village to the Inspector merely as a commodity ignites an alertness in her about the false ideals of the males. All her premonitions that the males of the village might come forward to help her receive a setback when even they also start favouring the corrupt inspector and no one comes to her rescue. Son Bai finds her survival at stake with no one to even question the inspector.

Apart from Son Bai, Saraswati also analyses her present state which she finds meaningless. She has spent her life as has been dictated by her husband but the desire to educate her daughter awakens the real woman in her. Initially, she feels hesitant to send her child to school but suddenly realization dawns upon her that it is going to be beneficial for her daughter; consequently she takes her daughter to the school, unmindful of the reproachful remarks of the other ladies of the village.

Powerful **assertion** of their strength, irrespective of the reaction of the males, is another idea which is adroitly reflected through this film. The protagonist of the film, Son Bai asserts her independent mode of thinking when despite being forced by everybody to conform to the inspector's desires, she rejects it outrightly.

Saraswati, silent at the outset, now declares her dislike openly by articulating her anger. This deep-seated anger is clearly manifested through this conversation between Saraswati and her husband:

Head: Open the door

Saraswati: Do not beat the door. This is not an Inn where you can come and go according to your wish.

Head: Leave your non-sense talk and open the door.

Saraswati: Aunt, please tell him that if he needs this house only to take bath even that can be done outside, where he spends his nights.

Without any signs of panic, she asks him the reason for spending his nights outside. At this reaction, he justifies his stand by saying, 'What will the other males think of me if I cannot even keep a female outside home' to which she retorts, 'Am I not a woman'. Her forceful retaliation brings to light her anger when on being locked up by her husband she screams loudly as an indication of protest against the male dominance.

Son Bai's steadfastness in facing the males boldly imparts a new and unique position to her which indicates the rebirth of her self. At first, she fails to get the support from the other ladies who have held her beauty to be responsible for the present as well as the future consequences. Marginalized because of her gender, poverty and also alone due to the absence of her husband, Son bai lacks the resources to retain her beauty. Almost all the males of the village admire her beauty but no one comes to her rescue when the Inspector harasses her. Afraid of the inspector, they do not have the courage to blame him, thus start condemning her beauty.

Beauty, a positive trait for women acquires a negative connotation in the case of Son Bai, as it becomes the sole cause for her exploitation. The females who support her initially turn against her when they find their own lives in danger. Son Bai gets a great shock when they do not find any fault with the inspector but rather blames her beauty for the dire consequences. Crushed by the indifferent attitude, she retorts and questions them

outrightly because of the indifference shown by the ladies just because of her beauty, “Why not in his looks”?. She expresses her anger over the double standards followed with respect to a female which displays her ability to question the norms of the patriarchy. Commenting on the questioning attitude of women Edward R Lee observes, “The woman hero uncovers fractures in the surface or reality, contradictions in its structure, gaps in its social ideology. In so far as she resembles the male hero, she questions the conventional association of gender and behaviour” (1984 : 4-5).

Excessively subdued due to the absence of her husband, Son Bai gradually gathers courage. She exhibits her enduring and tolerant nature, which acquires rebellious overtones and ultimately retaliates. She does not allow anybody to dominate her and till the end, she does not get convinced to go to the Inspector. Her newly acquired strength gets reflected through her spirit with which she faces the soldiers. She discards the garb of fear, helplessness and affirms her stance strongly. Her courage comes to the fore with her instant action to hold the sickle in her hands to fight when the inspector enters the spice factory along with his soldiers. The transformation can be clearly seen in the character of Son Bai who sheds all her hesitation, weakness and reliance on males whom she has considered the protectors. Her resoluteness in front of the villagers despite being alone shows her intensified consciousness deep within herself.

Another prominent characteristic displayed by the women is the immense power they possess as a collective force and their ability to exercise it also. The **collective struggle** which imparts the whole female community an irrefutable quality of being powerful is another important idea. Shoma A.Chatterji says:

Among films illustrative of this collective strength in women sans masquerade of any kind, mention must be made of Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* and Prakash Jha's *Mrityudand*. One is a period film and other is a contemporary film though both have a rural setting as the backdrop. Yet, the women in them did not need to renounce their position or gender-identity as women to try and set the power equation right. (1998 : 257).

Son Bai, the protagonist of the novel becomes aware of her strength and joins hands with the other women to display the outstanding collective strength against the males of the village. In another occurrence, Radha's instant action along with a little girl to throw the chilli powder in the eyes of the inspector is a definite indication of the power wielded by women and also the awareness to demonstrate it against the powerful. Till then, they have no idea about their strength but the moment they are aware of it, they implement it on the males thereby defeating them. Commenting on the power equations Foucault has rightly said, "Power is not an institution; it is not a structure, it is not a certain power with which certain people are endowed, it is the name one gives to a complex strategic situation in a given society." (Quoted in Rathore 2002 : 244).

The females' strength has been highlighted prominently in comparison to that of males when the Head's brother's beloved is inside the factory, but does not possess the strength to save her; even Radha's father lacks the courage to question the Inspector. Protection, associated with the male community falls apart and the women emerge as a collective strength. Saraswati unites with the other females of the village and all of them demonstrate their objection by beating the plates when the males enter the village. Saraswati is hit badly by her husband; the other womenfolk also receive the same treatment from their husbands. Unmindful of the repercussions, she does not put an end to her protests against the wrong done to an innocent female. Despite knowing that her

husband is in favour of the inspector, she goes to the factory to give food to the women. Thus, open articulation of anger is again an important idea which shows their ability to act against the wrong.

Shedding off their inhibitions the females not only remonstrate but also prepare themselves to face the tyranny of the inspector with courage. Their anger over the brutalities has been reflected collectively when they fight him with spices as their weapon. Thus, the females emerge as a force due to the mistreatment imposed upon them thereby making the film a success as it consciously links the internal weakness associated with every woman to the rebellious undertones arising out of this imposed weakness. Rajani Majumdar also speaks out on the same lines in her 1991 October 26 issue of *The Economic and Political Weekly* published from Bombay every October entitled “Dialectics of Public and Private-Representation of Women in *Bhoomika* and *Mirch Masala*” where she has stated, “while *Bhoomika* is unable to transcend the phenomenal reality of its object, *Mirch Masala* consciously engages the audience in the construction of a new reality” because while *Bhoomika*’s *reality* alienates the audience, *Mirch Masala* involves the audience.” (Quoted in Chatterji 1998 : 26).

Diverse images of women have been highlighted by filmmakers through their films though there is a difference with reference to the intensity in which a single image has been portrayed. *Arth* (1982) also depicts various ideas revolving around the life of females. The film belongs to the period of 80’s when radical changes have started coming in the society with respect to the status of women. Shoma A Chatterji forthrightly admits:

Arth is looked upon as an offbeat film, even as a turning point film that defines a modern, but ordinary housewife's reaction to adultery committed by her husband. Such films do not necessarily end in a court –scene or in divorce. But ego-fights, complexes, cold wars are common in both mainstream and in what once was parallel cinema (1998 : 80-81).

A feministic film in the true sense, it depicts multifarious ideas strongly associated with the lives of females in the society. Miscellaneous images of women find placement but the most intensive themes dealt with are – dependency syndrome, realization of self, assertion of her individuality, and search for meaning. All these images accurately reflect the Indian culture in which the woman has been destined to be so. As it is rightly said about the depiction of women:

The image of woman refers not to the referent woman, existing in the real world outside of representation, but to a meaning produced by and for men. Patriarchy controls the image of woman, assigning it a function and value determined by and for men and in the service of the construction of definitions of the male and especially of masculine desire. Patriarchy and the interests of men becomes a unified field which is able to determine meanings outside of the process of signification (Cowie 1997 : 19).

Inherently bestowed deprivation makes Pooja (Shabana Azmi), the protagonist a complete dependent on her husband, Inder (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) in terms of emotional, physical and economic needs. Without any close relative, her excessive reliance on her husband makes her a weakling who fails to imagine life without him. An orphan, Pooja nurtures a yearning for belongingness. Her marriage with Inder is her step towards self-fulfillment as all her aspirations center around him. Consequently, Inder's affair with Kavita (Smita Patil), an actress by profession, creates a furore in her mind. Jolted by this sudden revelation, she finds it hard to control herself. The thought of losing her husband, an inevitable part of her life to Kavita, shakes her.

Dependency syndrome, one of the prominent ideas reflected through this film, has been highlighted through not only Pooja but also Kavita. Her excessive obsession for a male makes her lean on Inder. The film skillfully depicts the degree of dependence of both the females on the same male in their lives. Despite being economically independent, she banks on Inder for emotional as well as physical needs.

Insecurity centers around Pooja's life since her birth. The aforementioned idea has been manifested persistently due to her husband's consistent habit of changing jobs. Her feelings of insecurity related to house bring to limelight her obsession about their own home. Her husband's casual attitude towards his job makes her agitated. Her dependency syndrome does not end with her husband. Whenever there is a problem, she banks on others. For instance, when she finds her husband too negligent, she goes to her childhood friend Parna (Geeta Siddhartha). Pooja's quickness in going to Parna to seek her suggestions even for minor issues shows not only her faith but also her dependence on her. Unable to take her own decisions, she feels insecure and tense whenever Inder gets suspended from the job. Even though Inder takes it very lightly but for her the problem is not that petty. Her anxiety at the thought of leaving the house directs towards her mental as well as emotional weakness.

The very idea of deprivation upsets her; she expresses her anger over her husband's relaxed attitude towards his job after he has been expelled. Although she asks her to take the suspension letter seriously, he avoids her by terming it as insignificant:

Inder: Yes, I have lost the job. What is there to worry?

Pooja: We have to vacate the flat just after three months, isn't it a matter to worry about?

Inder: So what?

Pooja: Since our marriage one fear has always haunted where we will be now? Even after so many years, we do not have a house of our own.

Inder's casual attitude makes her tense and she goes to her friend Parna. Parna also suggests her to take things lightly if the things are not serious but Pooja rebukes her for not taking the matter sincerely. Her dialogues with Parna indicate her traumatized self:

Parna: Whenever there is a matter related to home you react as if the world has come to an end, relax Pooja.

Pooja: Do not talk like Inder. You are my friend since childhood; you know a home carries a great significance for me. I have not been brought up in luxury; I am an orphan and had lived in an orphanage.

Excessive faith nurtured by Pooja on her husband restricts her individuality. She cannot think beyond possessing a house and losing it. Her insecure soul finds solace only in the company of her husband. The disclosure by her husband of his affair with Kavita, gives her the shock of her life. She feels absolutely shattered when her husband expresses his love for Kavita:

Inder: Pooja, I love Kavita Sanyal. Please try to understand. In the beginning we were just very good friends but then suddenly I do not know what happened, how it happened and everything seemed out of control.

Thunderstruck and speechless, Pooja just leaves him and goes away, however, she still waits and wishes for him to return. After this incident, she cannot decide her action and discloses everything to her friend Parna and her husband Anil (Siddharth Kak). Her friend Parna advises her to leave the house immediately but Anil advises her not to do it as it may bring their relationship to an end. Her faith seems to waver and she feels herself totally alone in the world. Her already shaken confidence is clear from her unconvinced mindset:

Pooja: Will he come back?

Anil: Pooja the bond is not so weak; it cannot be broken so easily. Yours is a relationship of seven long years. Have courage.

Pooja tries a lot to save her marriage and in an attempt to make it a success, she meets her husband and pleads in front of him:

Where did I go wrong, Inder? What is my fault? I never thought that you will stop loving me'. Suddenly, I have got a feeling that I am in the orphanage. I am really afraid Inder.

Inder, her husband takes it casually and asks not to worry as she has a house and money in the bank. She begs but he is adamant on living with Kavita. Helpless and alone, Pooja finds it difficult to survive without Inder. Her imploring in front of her husband shows her inability to face the challenges of the world all alone. Her intensified feelings of insecurity and fear of living alone make her plead in front of Kavita also:

Pooja: Do not tell Inder that I called you. You are a lady and you can understand my situation easily. I am all alone; I do not have anybody except Inder. What shall I do without him? Where shall I go? Kavita, I beg of you, please leave him. I am alone without him.'

Her repeated requests to both Kavita and her husband indicate her unwillingness to break free from the shackles of dependency. She forgets her own identity in the custody of her husband and considers everything meaningless without him.

Deserted and displaced, she cannot even imagine living in the house without him. The dependency syndrome exhibited by the protagonist Pooja in this film is quite similar to the dependent attitude of Jaya, the heroine of the novel That Long Silence. Even Jaya feels herself dependent on her husband. Consequently when he leaves her, she finds herself totally alone and insecure though there is a difference in the circumstances. Pooja's dependence on her husband is clear when she sends a letter to him in which she admits that she does not know how to live without him. On seeing her depressed and

lonely, her friend Parna and her husband Anil request her to go to a party for a change. In the party, after seeing Inder and Kavita together, she becomes aggressive and abuses her husband's illicit relationship with Kavita. This sight sets fire to her deep-seated grief thereby prompting her to express it bluntly. The loss of her husband to another lady becomes excruciating for her; hence, she makes Kavita realize her actual position and humiliates her in front of everybody. After this incident, due to Pooja's withering abuses, Kavita tries to commit suicide; Inder scolds Pooja and alleges her to be responsible for Kavita's terrible state. On being requested by Pooja not to speak about the other woman in her house, Inder discloses the fact that the house she considers hers as well as the money spent on the decoration of the house belongs to Kavita. Pooja feels insulted and decides to leave the house. Despite her dependence on Inder, she instantly leaves the house as soon as she comes to know that everything belongs to Kavita. This incident reflects Pooja's strong sense of individualism comes to the fore and now she is not willing to take it anymore.

Completely against the males' extramarital affairs, she expresses her strong dislike when the maid reveals her husband's affair with another lady. She becomes angry and advises her to leave him:

Pooja: If I had been at your place I would have left my husband.

Maid-servant: Leaving my husband has never struck my mind. This is a sacred relationship and cannot be broken so easily.

Ironically, Pooja despite her utter hatred does not leave her husband but tries a lot to save her marriage. The dependence syndrome experienced by the females has been highlighted not only through Pooja and Kavita but the ladies of all stratum. However, the maid

endures the physical and economic exploitation even after being the sole earning member in her family. She silently undergoes the torture of her husband who not only maintains an illicit relationship but also squanders away her money. Tolerance of the maid shows her understanding about the cultural norms which dictate her to be so.

A patient of depression, Kavita is a very timid and insecure lady and thus wants Inder to be with her all the time. In her childhood, she has been dependent on her father and now also she wants a male to protect her. Desirous of a male passion, she gives money to Inder and makes him a partner in her profession of film-making so that he can leave his wife and be with her. Her dependent and shattered self comes to the fore with her insane behaviour when Inder rebukes her for being overtly possessive. There are moments in the film when Kavita reacts in a rather bizarre way when even she does not find Inder around herself. Feelings of insecurity engulf her when he is out for work and the idea that he is with his wife haunts her persistently. In her fits of anxiety, she asks Inder to marry her. Hence, the dependence pattern is one of the most striking ideas explored in the film. Both the females are shown as weaklings, totally dependent on the males in their lives.

Extreme faith of Pooja receives a set back and she comes to terms with the reality that ultimately she has to struggle on her own to find her true self. Despite her efforts, her husband does not return to her. Completely alone in the world, she tries to live life on her own as an independent individual and consequently applies for a job. The failure to get a job because of her married status makes her struggle as the company does not appoint married ladies for the post of receptionist but she does not approach anyone for support. In addition, she also hands over the money and the keys of the flat to her husband. The

realization that she herself has to struggle to survive teaches her to be bold. She even strives to get a certificate required to be in the hostel. Her roommate wants to help her in this regard; hence, she goes out with her thinking that with her help she can get the certificate. However, when the man wants to harass her sexually, she manages to escape from his clutches. Pooja becomes furious and scolds the roommate for this undignified act. On being rebuked by Pooja for misguiding her, she silences her with her practical though harsh words:

Roommate: Who has given you the right to term me bad? You have not done any favour by going out with me. I have gone out of the way because you were in need; if you cannot take care of yourself then this is not my fault. What has happened to you? In this world you cannot get anything for free, whether it is love or need, if you want to get something then you have to give something in and women have nothing to give except this body.

She expresses her ideas without reserve and even terms the relationship of marriage as a relationship based on the business of barter:

Even in this sacred relationship of marriage, there is nothing but this give and take. When the husband gets fed up with this body, he stops giving, and goes in search of a new body. Who knows this thing better than you Mrs. Pooja Malhotra?

Expose of this stark reality by her roommate makes Pooja realize the brutal truth about her relationship. All her premonitions about her married life have been brought to test by this girl who makes her see the hollowness behind her so called revered relationship. She realizes the futility surrounding her marriage but still she has some hope about her husband's return. Conversely, the day he comes with the divorce papers, she concludes it

to be a sham devoid of any sacrosanct bonding. Her blunt reply to her husband reveals her maturity:

Inder: Pooja, please sign the papers. It's just a formality for the sake of Kavita's happiness.

Pooja: Poor Kavita, she expects sacred relationship of marriage from you which can be easily broken with a single signature.

Pooja finds herself at a juncture where she comes face to face with the pointlessness on which her marriage has rested. Utterly alone, she comes to terms with the harsh realities of life and understands the hardships a woman has to experience in this male dominated world.

Besides Pooja, Kavita also realizes her actual place in the life of Inder. Feelings of guilt imprison her mind and she understands that forced relationship offers no guarantee for a secure married life. She tries a lot to be happy with Inder but her subconscious does not allow her to continue with this relationship. Pooja's disparaging words in the party haunt her persistently and she finds herself in a predicament as she belongs neither to the category of married nor unmarried. The awareness that without marriage she has no dignified status compels her to force Inder to take divorce from Pooja but even this move of Inder fails to provide her contentment.

Her consciousness that she has committed a terrible mistake by maintaining an illicit relationship with Inder pricks her repeatedly. The guilt in her is so strong that she even calls Pooja and acknowledges her fault. She admits that she has not done anything deliberately. Her move to reject Inder's offer of marriage brings to light her growth as an individual. She learns to discriminate between right and wrong, rejects his offer of

marriage and asks Inder to get out of her life. Her acute sense of realization comes to the fore when she harps on his infidelity and says that if he can leave Pooja for her, then for some other lady he can leave her also. Kavita's mature decision making communicates her understanding which widens as soon as she thinks about the validity of her action.

Pooja and Kavita try their best to have a male in their lives, so does the maid. Ultimately both the ladies throw him out of their lives. However, the maid goes one step ahead and takes the extreme step of murdering her husband when she finds him responsible for barring the academic independence of her daughter.

Though Pooja is alone and has suffered because of her husband's exploitation, she has her own notions of self respect; consequently, she tries to find her individuality. She does not allow anybody to rule her unnecessarily just because she is alone and without the label of a husband.

The open **assertion** of her choice and independence, another prominent idea comes to the fore when she finds a job without sacrificing her values. Her decision to set aside the economic help of her male counterparts and explicit rejection even of her husbands' financial offer asserts her strong will power and she marches ahead daringly without the support of others. She tells the same thing to her maid servant, a victim of exploitation in the hands of her husband who is a drunkard and has got an affair with another lady. Nevertheless, despite being an uneducated woman, the maid wants to educate her child to make her independent. Mistreatment by her husband has not marred her spirits and she works hard to make her daughter's life a success. The director has shown a bold and practical woman not only through the character of maid but also Pooja's roommate, who

has no qualms in doing anything for her self fulfillment. She goes outside, meets people and does everything required to lead a happy life.

Pooja's emergence as an independent woman shows her capacity to face the challenges of this world alone. The maturity and the independent frame of mind make her confident also. When her husband comes to her and requests her to return back to him, she refuses it with equanimity:

Inder: Pooja, I want to start life afresh with you.

Pooja: If I had done what you have, would you take me back

Inder: No, I would not.

With perfect control, she asks him to leave. Shoma A. Chatterji validates the radical beginning of a new era in filmmaking with the film Arth when she says:

Inder, the husband in Mahesh Bhatt's film Arth (1982), openly commits adultery. In the end, ditched by the second woman, an actress, he comes back to the wife he abandoned asking to be forgiven. When Pooja, his estranged wife, asks him in response whether he would be able to forgive her had she done to him what he had done to her, he simply says 'no'. The screenplay does not punish Inder in any other way but the purely ethical one: both the women in his life leave him, alone, alienated and emotionally broken. This was a radical departure from the usual treatment given to male adultery by Hindi film-makers. (1998 : 116).

Her frank questioning and mature way of talking to her husband reveals her growth as an individual. Gracefully, she rejects any space for him now in her life.

Divorce from Inder is again an important turning point in her life as it compels her to grope for and trace her identity. Pooja discovers that her real identity has got lost in her association with the surname Malhotra. Urge to find the **meaning of her own existence** becomes strong in her and she decides to move on that path. Her growth as a mature

individual comes to light when she smoothly rejects the offer of her friend Raj to marry her. Her skillful handling of the situation on being proposed by Raj (Raj Kiran) underlines her mature state of mind which has cast out all doubts and fears. Her desire to live only for herself validates her confident state of mind. She acknowledges that since then she has been leading an aimless life, but now the purpose to educate the maid's daughter has assigned meaning to her life. She does not want anybody's companionship on her chosen path to identity but wants to move ahead daringly on her own. Her grown up stature emerges again in her meeting with Kavita when she maintains a friendly attitude towards her without any signs of grievance on her face. Manjiri Prabhu endorses the above mentioned analysis, "'Arth' in a way is a vehicle of woman strength as a result of the patriarchal structure of society. In a way, it is a path-breaking film, which depicts a woman's capacity to survive without men." (2001 : 130).

The female's desire to march towards liberty gains prominence in many films. Astitva (2000), by Mahesh Manjrekar, a landmark film keeps this theme as a focus of interest. Though there are various themes in the film, the most persistently present are-oppression of females, realization of self, strong assertion of self, and search for identity.

Restricted and confined to the domesticity, Aditi (Tabu), the protagonist gets married Srikant Pandit (Sachin Khedkar). He believes in the notion that has been propounded by Simone De Beauvoir in her The Second Sex, 'He is the subject, He is the absolute, She is the other.' (1997 : 16).

Though she is not demanding, her husband demands absolute surrender and her wishes are vehemently brushed aside by him, thus **oppression** is an important idea highlighted

through this film. His absence due to his continuous business trips makes Aditi feel lonely in the house. His excessive obsession with his work does not allow him to take proper care of his wife. Aditi's desire to become a mother is also set aside by him on the condition that their child will be born in their own home and not in this rented home. Srikant's total disregard of her desire for procreativity underscores the fact that procreativity is a sign of manliness and the decision regarding this is a male's privilege.

His business-minded attitude does not allow him to think of having the baby without proper preparation for it. Aditi feels astounded at his attitude and expresses her resentment over his indifference. Her expression of loneliness reveals her increasing feelings of isolation on being left alone at home for months. She questions him when he gives more attention to his business and remains self indulgent. Helpless and alone, she requests him to allow her to do a job so that she can also keep herself busy:

Aditi: Shall I do a job, please?

Srikant: In our family there is no such practice, no woman is allowed to do a job. I do not want my wife's money. I can run my home on my own money.

Infuriated reaction of Srikant puts a restrain on her thoughts and she decides to remain silent. When Aditi realizes that he is sidelining her desires and happiness for his professional success, she feels depressed and instead of expressing, she starts suppressing her desires. Although in the initial days of her marriage whenever she gets a chance, she blurts out her annoyance frankly but due to repeated avoidance, she prefers remaining silent.

He does not wish her to do a job but allows her to continue her lessons in music only to keep her busy so that she should not interfere in his service matters. Lynda Nead suggests in the same vein, “‘woman’ is offered as a unified and coherent category through the fulfillment of her domestic duties and mission.” (Quoted in Ussher 1997 : 107).

His extreme dislike for females joining profession comes to the fore when he cannot digest the idea when the teacher Malhar Kamat (Mohnish Behl) equates his wife’s singing capability with a professional singer. His attitude towards earning is quite traditional, hence he cannot imagine his wife working to earn money:

Malhar: Your wife sings very well. With continued practice, she can become a professional singer.

Srikant: She should learn music as it is her hobby, not for earning money, earning money is my domain. For that there is no need for my wife to work.

Aditi loves singing and she even cherishes a desire to excel in this field but she curbs her innermost desire not to disturb her husband. The desire to keep her husband happy makes Aditi a passive sufferer for entire life. Since she does not find herself capable of questioning him, all her aspirations get crushed under the impositions; therefore, tolerance becomes an intrinsic part of her life. Restricted to domesticity, she starts living a life of self-enforced silence, another prominent idea employed in the film. Silence as a statement of the oppressed has been employed in other films also. For instance, Shoma A. Chatterji has something similar to say, “Silence in Indian Cinema therefore can be defined as a political statement on the oppressed, the marginalized, the poor, and the outcaste, which includes women”. (2002 : 157).

Similar to Mahesh Manjrekar, various other directors have also exploited the theme of silence to depict the marginalized status of women. Aparna Sen, a very renowned feminist filmmaker of the parallel streak has also used it in her film Sati. However, silence is different in this film as it coincides with other marginalities. The protagonist's position of being an orphan and also a woman adds to her subaltern position within the total framework of family, caste, village and the society in which she lives.

Aditi's silence indicates her inert acceptance of her miserable state. Her unquestioning disposition comes to limelight when she stops reacting even in the presence of others. The self-imposed silence adopted by Aditi is in consonance with the silence of Jaya in That Long Silence. Both the females want to preserve the sanctity of marriage and hence they take up silence as a means to achieve it.

In this film, there are instances where Aditi does not react even to the indecent acts of her husband. Srikant's act of snatching Aditi's letter from the servant surprises Srikant's friend Ravi Bapat (Ravindra Mankani) and his wife Meghna (Smita Jaykar) also. Meghna even asks Aditi to take the letter as it belongs to her but Aditi overlooks it without saying anything. Completely subdued and quiet, she follows the orders of her husband. Despite her husband's addiction to alcohol, she never disapproves of his habit verbally. However, when he himself admits that he should leave drinking as this is not a good habit, she utters rather a cowed reply in the affirmative.

Sexual oppression is another theme which discusses her predicament to restrict her desires to herself. Because of this plight, she neither gets the chance nor acquires the courage to articulate them openly. Repeated disregard of her desires makes her yearn for

her husband's presence, who is absent most of the time due to his business trips. This sexual subjugation becomes a major block in her life as she never expresses it overtly in front of her husband in consonance with the established values of Indian society. In one scene of the film, it has been clearly shown that Srikant deliberately goes to sleep before his wife's arrival and when she starts making love to him, he expresses his unwillingness because of exhaustion. He never tries to understand that she lives alone in the house for months. Her hidden sexual desire comes to the forefront when she views the intimate relationship of her sister Sudha (Resham Seth) and her husband Amar (Sandeep Mehta) as a passive observer. Although she never makes this earnest desire obvious, her sister's contented life creates in her a yearning which she has concealed as a consequence of her husband's indifference.

Deliberate attitude of neglect has led Aditi to a juncture where she finds her married life at stake. She has nurtured her marital life with faith, love and compassion but to her dismay it stands nowhere. Suddenly, she finds herself at the crossroads having nothing to call her own. She comes to **realization** of her self, another recurring theme in the film. This happens when one day a letter comes in which her music teacher, Malhar Kamat has made her son, his heir. On reading the letter, though initially Aditi's husband, Srikant laughs and pretends to be happy but the letter creates a doubt in his mind and he starts enquiring about the matter.

Srikant's habit of writing a diary makes him aware of the actual date of his son, Aniket's (Sunil Barve) birth and hence he finds that there is a mismatch. He immediately comes and asks Aditi the reason for this difference. Revelation of the fact that Aniket is the son

of Malhar Kamat and not his makes him feel cheated. He rebukes her for her infidelity and does not want to listen to her. After knowing the reality, he decides to punish his wife for the sin she has committed and calls his friend Ravi Bapat and his wife Meghna.

Aditi is taken aback when he torments her in front of everybody. She requests him not to disclose this fact in front of everyone. Aditi's helplessness gets clearer with this conversation:

Aditi: Shree, Why are you doing this in front of everybody, this is our personal matter and should be decided among ourselves.

Srikant: Ravi is a reliable friend of mine. He is like a family member. His presence is important and most importantly everyone should know the reality. I do not want people to term me wrong.

He commands her to confess everything in front of everybody including her son. Purely a male chauvinist, he considers that his wife has committed an unpardonable offense of being engaged in adultery. Hence, he starts ignoring her completely. Indifferent attitude of her husband further accentuates the feelings of alienation in Aditi. Her faithfulness and dedication to her husband does not fetch her anything. She has been a completely devoted and committed wife who has fulfilled all her roles skillfully; still, there is no acknowledgement by her husband. He laughs at her when she discloses the truth about Aniket's birth. Her oppressive story does not ignite his sympathy for her. Her pleadings for forgiveness make him more adamant; hence, he ignores Aditi completely and starts talking to his friend, Ravi Bapat. His friend's advice to forgive her for her truthfulness and to stand by her makes him angry. His friend, Ravi equates even his own case with Srikant's and tells him that he has accepted Meghna with two daughters. Meghna; his wife also supports him in this case. On the other hand, Srikant remains resolute in his

decision to punish Aditi. Unwavering attitude of Srikant ignites Ravi Bapat's irritation and he discloses the secret of Srikant's affairs with other ladies and questions his loyalty to his wife. Srikant ignores it by saying that he is a man and hence he does not owe any explanation to anybody. Moreover, he does not have any children from those affairs. Aditi is aghast, but remains silent and requests her husband to discard her.

Jolted by her husband's hypocrisy, she is utterly shocked by her husband's treatment. She has devoted the prime of her life for her husband and her son, but she neither gets their support nor any consolation in her moments of distress. She finds herself broken when her son uses abusive language while talking to her and blames her for his failed engagement. Aditi breaks to tears and requests her husband to allow her to stay in the house for a few more days. She is in utter misery on hearing his reply:

Aditi: Please allow me to stay for a few more days in this house.

Srikant: I have tolerated you for twenty seven years; let it be few more days.

Deep reevaluation of her life makes Aditi realize that the life she has been leading is an absolute sham, having no feeling of belongingness. She understands that amidst the myriad spheres associated with home, husband and family, she has completely lost herself. On further introspection, she finds that the husband for whom she has discarded all the pleasantries of life and completely devoted herself has no respect for her. The thought, that despite spending the crux of her life in that house it does not belong to her, depresses her. Overwhelmed by the feelings of insecurity, she concludes that the marital bond she has been nurturing throughout her married life is nothing but an ephemeral dream. Her persistent trustworthiness to her husband comes to the fore when she

acknowledges that even in the moments of her sexual encounter with her music teacher; she has pictured her husband in Malhar's place. Her communication with Malhar after this incident also indicates her truthfulness to her husband in which she warns him not to come to her home again.

On the contrary, despite all her honesty and innocence she gets abuse, indifference and hatred in return. Though, she has made adjustments throughout her life and never complained, her husband is not ready to forgive even her single mistake. She finds herself nowhere; the discrimination present in the marital relationship where the rules are different for males and females torments her. She has never questioned the difference in the norms made for men and women and has been leading her life with satisfaction. Nevertheless, she is forced to dwell seriously over this issue of discrimination when her husband justifies his own illicit relationships and considers her single fault as an unpardonable sin. Her consciousness pricks her and she is made to think. She has never found her life in the home as incomplete without something of her own as is clear through her own words:

Meghna: What do you do?

Aditi: I am a housewife.

Meghna: Do not say that you do not do any other work apart from this.

Aditi: There is so much to do at home that there is no time left for other things.

Meghna is surprised and advises her to do something of her own. Meghna's suggestions never ignite the desire within her to do something separately as her relationship carries immense significance for her, but on getting such a differential treatment she realizes that she has lost her individuality.

Abusive language and disparaging remarks used by her own son torture her and she thinks about her own self in relation to them but she finds it missing. Her husband alleges her to be responsible not only for his misfortune but also for his loss of reputation in the society. Engulfed by nothingness, Aditi is completely shattered and broods over the question of her own space in the house.

Another significant theme present in the film is the powerful **assertion** by Aditi of her own self. She speaks openly about the strengths of a female and the weaknesses of a male. She uncovers her understanding about the futility of her marital relationship with her husband when she says:

Aditi: The bond that has been formed over these twenty seven years with this home will be broken today, Just as a child is separated forcefully from his mother, I will also be separated.

Her husband shows disinterest in whatever she says but despite his inattentive attitude, she forces him to listen to her, which indicates her newly acquired understanding. Her emergence as a bold individual comes to light when she ensures her husband sarcastically:

Aditi: Do not be afraid Shree, I do not want to say anything that will force you to stop me from going but only certain things that I have never been able to speak

Aditi points out the inequality and discrimination present in the society. She questions her husband about the disparity that exists in between males and females:

Aditi: A husband can keep so many illicit relationships but he expects total truthfulness and loyalty from his wife. Are the desires of a female less than a male? Is the sexual desire of a female anyway less than a male? What does a man do in such circumstances he never waits for the female's positive reply instead he fulfills his wishes against the wish of a female and he never begs in front of a female.

She even alleges her husband for raping her so many times and points out his weaknesses boldly. She asserts her dislike against this inequality by bombarding him with various questions and makes him speechless. Open declaration of her sexual desire is another important idea that has been reflected powerfully through this film. Her profound grief over the difference assumed to be acquired by the female to patiently tolerate this oppression since birth makes her question this one-sided despotism. In Indian society chastity is a trademark for a women involved in all the relationships: mother, daughter, sister, mother-in-law, friend and wife. Any step taken by her beyond this norm is unforgivable. The moment a married woman is discovered having a physical relationship with another man, she is considered as a whore. Shoma A. Chatterji throws ample light on the same issue by citing example from the film Parama, a turning point film in terms of the sexual autonomy of females:

Aparna Sen's film Parama is an example of how modernity is a surface hypocritical mask that veils the double standards of an urban, progressive family, a fragile surface that cracks under the expose of the middle-aged daughter-in-law's brief, but torrid affair with a friend of a nephew who is years younger (1998 : 113).

Aditi affirms her rights as a female and openly expresses the inequality entrenched in the society. Her anger over the male dominance prevalent in the society comes to the front when she says:

Aditi: You also had lost control and you also had affairs. But you have forgiven yourself and have forgotten the affairs conveniently because you thought that being a male it is your right to have affairs. Who has given you this right?

She blames her husband for his hollow male chauvinism. She also blames Malhar Kamat for his male ego due to which he has given everything to her just because she is the mother of his son.

Her futile marital bonding comes to light when she questions her husband's double standards. She criticizes him for his shifting loyalties. When he did not know about Aniket's biological father, he used to appreciate his son's smartness whereas after the disclosure of the reality everything has changed for him; even with reference to the son. The duplicity and deceptiveness exercised by her husband has been put to scrutiny by her and she makes him speechless in front of everybody.

Another motivating aspect encountered in her character is her emergence as a determined individual with a fresh outlook on life and its intricacies. A complete change can be observed in her when she underscores the strengths of a female in comparison to a male and makes him stand as a weakling. She points out the impotency of her husband in front of everyone and says that a woman is powerful in the sense that only she can tell the name of her child's father:

Aditi: You know that Aniket is my son only because I have told you that. Apart from this, there is no other evidence which can prove that he is not your son.

Her forceful retaliation shows her as a strong woman who has total control over her expressions. She asks her husband so many questions without expecting him to answer as she has acquired an understanding about the reality behind the relationships and the worthlessness around which the institution of marriage rests. Her self-reliant attitude

without any dependence on her husband makes her a completely new woman. She does not term her sexual encounter with Malhar Kamat as an act of adultery but characterizes it as one moment of her weakness where in her own words, 'the body ruled the mind'.

Apart from Aditi, other females also highlight this core idea emphatically, for instance Aniket's fiancé Revati (Namrata Shirodkar) is shown as an independent and career-minded woman confident of herself. Outrightly against the notion of complete guidance by males' norms, she openly comes to her rescue the moment she becomes aware of her real state. In contrast to Aditi who crushes her desires to satisfy her husband's false pride, she on the other hand openly states her desire to work and sets aside the pleas of her father-in-law to leave the job. After knowing that Aditi has been mistreated by Aniket and his father, she openly speaks in favour of Aditi and justifies her action. She advises Aniket to forgive his mother to whom he does not agree; hence, she breaks her engagement with him. Aniket's prejudiced opinions not only about his mother but the female community as a whole compel her to take this decision. She comes to the aid of Aditi when Aditi is being held responsible for this break-off in her relationship with Aniket. She boldly exposes the reason for her decision:

Revati: I broke my engagement, because the males of your family have not tried to understand her. I do not want a narrow minded husband. I belong to a new generation; broadminded and without any prejudices. I have thought that you are also the same. I do not think that I am anyway inferior to a male. Whatever is right for a male should be right for a female and vice versa.

She openly questions the discrimination and objects to it. Her clear and straightforward thinking regarding her future husband and the male community as a whole displays her balanced attitude towards life. Bold enough, she challenges the rigidity of the males

wherein they treat the females as inferior. Simone De Beauvoir supports this inequality: “The conventional view of woman as a dual creature (as mother and whore, as Life and Death) is not essential quality of her being but rather, a mark of man’s own ambivalence toward her. Similarly, the Freudian notion of female sexuality is hopelessly polarized between the incompatible domains of masculinity and femininity” (Quoted in Chatterji 2002 : 224).

Parallel to Revati, Meghna is also a frank and open minded woman, totally against the prejudices against women. After knowing the deceitfulness of her previous husband, she leaves him and marries Ravi Bapat. Undaunted and confident, she believes in the equality of husband and wife in marriage; hence, working even after her marriage. Her forthright attitude is clear when she openly admits her previously failed marriage and the children from that marriage in front of everyone present. Meghna helps Aditi by bringing to light the power a woman possesses and the ability to exercise it by raising her voice against the hypocritical attitude of males.

Aditi fails to compromise with her neglected and accused self. Thus, she decides to **search her own identity**, another powerful theme present in this film. Aditi’s encounter with the various upheavals in her life makes her find her true self which has been lost in the mundane chores of life. Her courage to utter the deep-seated prejudices completely dominated and governed by males against the females is noteworthy. She questions all these things and despite begging in front of her husband for shelter she candidly expresses her desire to go out in the world and find her true self. Her desire to search her own identity comes to the forefront:

Aditi: In the name Mrs. Aditi Srikant Pandit, the name Aditi has got lost. Today new opportunities are waiting for me. I am desperate to find my own identity. I feel discomfort but not fear.

She grows into a mature individual having ability to rationalize and take her own decisions. The dependence of her husband on her has been highlighted when she underscores her indispensability by asking him to take care of himself on his own. Through this statement, she accentuates her importance in the family which she has never done before. She moves forward to seek her true self and give a new start to her life. Without the support of anyone, she validates her urge to stand against the hypocritical standards that have been developed and sustained by the patriarchy.

Conventions force a woman to undergo exploitation without protest as norms dictate that this training to tolerate restraint should be imparted to her since birth. Daman (2001) by Kalpana Lajmi also underlines in the same vein the real state of woman wherein she suffers excessive oppression in her struggle for existence through the skillful use of a diverse range of themes. The film employs various ideas to depict with aplomb not only the victimization of woman but also her fierce retaliation against the monocracy. The most intensively present are: physical and psychological exploitation of women, marital rape, discrimination, realization of self, emergence of a new woman, etc.

Inferiority and weakness which are generally considered as an integral part of the female race have been effectively emphasized in this film. The protagonist Durga (Raveena Tandon) is a victim of her husband's physical as well as psychological **exploitation**. She has been treated brutally by her husband Sanjay Saikia (Saiyaji Shinde). A true representative of patriarchy, he opines that the males have an innate right to suppress the

females and if a woman does not abide by this, she should be punished severely. He also says that all Indian women have been trained to tolerate this restraint.

Durga's marriage with Sanjay is forced, an attempt by his mother to correct his eccentricity. Hence, Durga gets harassed all the time and never gets the status of a wife. Even after marriage, her husband continues his illicit relationship with another woman which makes her endure his total absence. She suffers torture by her husband on the very first night of her marriage when in an effort to persuade him to come to her, she gets merciless beating. Her efforts to make him happy fail miserably as he never gives any importance to her. Her invitation to her husband to come home on the occasion of their first wedding anniversary receives a set back due to his violent reaction when he hits her hard and orders her to take out his shoes. He scolds her for disturbing him and warns her not to repeat such a thing in future.

Crestfallen at this behaviour of her husband, Durga finds herself helpless. His hostile action shakes her and unable to understand the reason for such behaviour, she continues to act according to his wishes. Absence of any close friend makes her still more depressed as there is no one to whom she can go and share her torturous state openly. Her bother-in-law, Sunil (Sanjay Suri) is her only saviour who not only provides her emotional security but also comes to her rescue when her husband abuses her.

Imprisoned in that house, she has been leading her life without freedom of any kind. Adhering to the conventional norms meant for a woman, her husband never allows her to go outside the house without his knowledge and exercises total control even over her talks with friends. Her captive state is apparent when he enquires about her conversation

with her friend. Durga's meek submission to her husband's questions and the rather cowed replies bring to the light the horror got entrenched within her. After further enquiry, she admits that her friend has talked about the liberal attitude of her husband as he believes in the equal rights of man and woman in marriage. She also says that her friend's husband has allowed her to complete her education even after marriage. The open disclosure of freedom by Durga makes him furious and he warns her to disclose her discussion with her friend to him. Durga starts shivering on being questioned again and again. Incessant inquiring ignites her deeply ingrained aspiration to get education:

Sanjay: Tell me, what did you say?

Durga: I said that even I want to complete my education but you have not allowed me to pursue it further. But now, no one will come in the way of my daughter. She will have freedom not only to complete her education but also to select her husband. She will not be like me.

Declaration of her revolutionary ideas regarding her daughter's education makes Sanjay furious as he is a strong opponent of giving freedom to women. As a result, he starts beating her and warns her that he will not allow his daughter, Deepa (Raima Sen) to continue her education. He announces to marry her off immediately as he does not want her mind to get corrupted by such radical ideas. He abuses innocent Durga in front of his family members who stare at this mistreatment meted out to her as silent observers. Durga pleads in front of her parents-in-law to stop Sanjay from doing this act of injustice but they do not take any action. The only person who supports Durga is Sunil, her brother in law, (Sanjay Suri) who argues not only with his brother but also with his parents against this torture.

Total disregard in the hands of her husband torments Durga. Her consequent craving for physical love makes her share this desire with her husband totally oblivious of her violent reaction and rapes her brutally. **Marital rape** is another important theme highlighted through this film. He decorates her and makes fun of her when she asks him the reasons for such behaviour. The following dialogue brings to the fore the underlined desires of Durga that has been buried deep inside her due to the fear of her husband:

*Durga: Why do you behave like this? Why do you want to degrade me?
Where did I go wrong? I obey you and do as you say.
Sanjay: What do you want from me?
Durga: You have never given me any respect in front of your family and
servants. After marriage you have not even touched me, what is it that
lacks in me which is fulfilled by other women?*

Her helpless and miserable condition is clear when even after knowing the reality, her parents-in-law favour their son instead of her. Considering her as an object, they have married her to their domineering son only to fulfill their selfish need to bring about a change in his life. They maintain an apathetic attitude towards her in spite of knowing that their son has raped her brutally. Instead of accusing their son, they blame her as a lady of loose character. Sanjay's father Vishnu Prasad Saikia (Ishaan Barua) criticizes his wife for her decision to marry their son Sanjay to Durga, a girl of lower status:

*Vishnu Prasad Saikia: Mukut, I have told you always that Sanjay has
been married to a girl of very low status. You thought that due to this
favour she will become a very good daughter in law and Sanjay will be
happily married. We have committed a big mistake as she has maintained
an illicit relationship. Sanjay is right; she has not given us even a
grandson.*

Intense exploitation not only in the hands of her husband but also her parents-in-law makes her life completely unsafe in that house. After being raped by her husband, she is

disturbed mentally and the impact of this heinous act is so great that she even loses her mental balance. Frenzied and helpless, she runs away from her home to save herself and her daughter. Her psychology has got deeply affected due to this horrible act and fear becomes an integral part of her life. Accidentally after this incident, she meets the Superintendent of police, Shailen Mahanta (Ranjan Koshal) who after witnessing her dreadful condition requests her to name the person responsible for her rape. Utterly fearful and wounded, in a state of unconsciousness she blames her husband; however, after regaining consciousness she conceals the name of the person guilty for her terrible state.

Afraid of her husband, she does not acquire the courage to even share this atrocity meted out to her with anyone. Greatly disturbed and scared, she never discloses her real identity to anyone. Despite leading a protected life as Laxmi Goswami's daughter she tries to avoid going out and meeting people. Her deliberate attempts to hide her identity even from Laxmi Goswami whom she considers equal to her mother highlight the extent she fears her husband. On being asked by her about her husband, she avoids the situation by terming herself a widow. Besides, she even hides her authenticity from the superintendent of police who knows her real plight by denying vehemently the revelation of her identity to him.

Durga gets exploited as a woman but her action of delivering a girl child also adds a spark to her already insecure state. **Discrimination** of the sexes is yet another idea highlighted in the film. The family celebrates this occasion and everyone waits for Sanjay so that he names the girl child but he refuses to name the child and condemns Durga on

giving birth to a daughter and not a son. Despite giving birth to a child, Durga does not get a sense of completeness as even her motherhood fails to enrich her bonding with her husband. Sudhir Kakar too feels the same about the value of motherhood for a woman:

Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or region, whether she is a fresh young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infancies already, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant borne and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and redemption (1981:56).

Conversely Durga gets only humiliation in front of everyone:

*Sanjay's mother: Sanjay you have become a father of a daughter.
Sanjay: Have you given birth to a daughter. This is not possible. I will only name a son.*

Durga feels disheartened when Sanjay refuses to name the child. She has to bear the repercussions of delivering a girl child also as Sanjay's attitude becomes more cruel after this. Innocent Durga tries to lead her life under her tyrannous husband just for the sake of her daughter.

The idea of prejudice gets manifested through the relationship between Sunil and Durga also. Sanjay maintains loads of illicit relationships but expects complete loyalty from Durga as she is a woman. Sunil and Durga share a bond of love but just because of this powerfully ingrained trend present in the society it never takes any proper shape.

After a lot of contemplation, when she realizes the insecurity surrounding her marriage, she just puts an end to it by removing the vermilion, a sacred mark of her marital status. The thought of her daughter's security and murder of Sunil compel her to run away from

her home. Moreover, her husband's warning to marry her daughter forcefully to a drunkard influences her to take this bold step. The revelation of the mystery behind Sunil's death makes her feel insecure in that house totally governed by her husband. Even after subjugated and silenced by her husband not to talk freely, she asserts the rights of a woman powerfully. Apart from this, she openly declares her desire to never force her daughter into a marriage against her wishes. Durga also insists that she will give her daughter complete freedom to select her life partner, a fact not at all considered apposite by her family.

Her insight into her past led her towards the conclusion that she has wasted the precious years of her life in the house which has given her neither the security nor shelter in the real sense. Despite everything she had no sense of belongingness. Moreover, the hollowness of her sacred marital relationship has given her nothing except misery makes her think. The despair which she has undergone is clear when she admits in front of Laxmi Goswami:

Laxmi Goswami: Your wounds are getting healed.

Durga: My internal wounds will never be healed. Never, never.

Durga's life has been spoilt as a result of her husband's brutal treatment but she does not want the same thing to happen to her daughter and consequently she wants her to complete her education so that she can become courageous and acquire the knowledge to take her own decisions. Although there is no one to whom she can go for support as her husband has murdered her brother in law, the irresistible desire to attain freedom compels her to run away from the shackles of her cruel husband.

After leading a life of seclusion and insecurity, she realizes that education helps a woman in the hour of need. She recognizes the futility of a forced relationship and hence never wants her daughter to be imprisoned in such a sordid relationship. She refutes the cultural bindings due to which her life has become a quagmire. Laxmi Kannan has something similar to say about her position, “Women are trapped in cultural ‘values’ that offer no scope for individualizing the self.” (2000 : 12). Consequently she gives full freedom to her daughter Deepa and allows her to move freely with her friends. The encouraging talk with the superintendent of police, in which he motivates her to continue her education, brings to light her development as an individual. She answers him with maturity that it is no more possible for her as she is old now and no school will offer admission to such people.

Durga’s husband, Sanjay tries to search her as his father has bequeathed all his property to Deepa. However, being a very selfish and materialistic person, he is not at all concerned about his wife and his daughter. On the contrary, his greed for money forces him to come to her. After seeing Sanjay, Durga is taken aback but she keeps her control and prepares herself to face him. Sanjay’s threats to Durga regarding the property do not trouble her. She shows no interest in the property and tells him in a straightforward way that she does not want anything from his family. Consequently, she asks Deepa to sign the document. Despite being very compliant and downcast, Deepa reacts powerfully and tears away the papers. Her furious reaction surprises Durga who has never expected her to act so boldly. The deeply entrenched dislike for her father’s autocracies makes her react so.

Emergence of a completely new woman, i.e. a woman of substance is another significant idea highlighted through this film. After being subdued and meek, Durga emerges as a woman of strength when her husband tries to murder her daughter Deepa. The transformation can be seen not only in Durga who used to shiver with fear on seeing her husband but also in her daughter Deepa. This is clear when Deepa acknowledges this fact in front of her friend Kaushik (Shaan), that she has faced her father fearlessly:

Deepa: Kaushik, Today my father came and he tried to harass my mother. On witnessing this sight, I acquired strength and faced him boldly. I did not compromise with his warnings.

Scared and silent, Deepa never dares to utter a single word in front of her father, but on that day, the mere sight of her father makes her angry and she reacts aggressively. Hence, this change in her character from a mere suppliant to a daring individual is also one of the prominent ideas that the viewers come across after watching the film.

Feelings of relief dance on Durga's face on the eve of Durga Pooja. She enjoys with her daughter and other family members but the sight of her husband with a gun, makes her doubt her husband's intentions. Terrified for the life of her daughter, she has never thought that her husband can go to the extent of murdering his own daughter just for the sake of property. She is forced to take a severe step against her oppressive and cruel husband and kills him viciously in front of everyone present. She discards the garb of fear and passivity she has been wearing all through her life and acts with courage by putting an end to her husband who has been responsible for utter misery and intense exploitation.

Projection of woman as a strong personality has found its way through films. Satta (2002), another path breaking film, treads on the path of showcasing woman as an embodiment of power. The prominently present ideas are assertion of power and independence, victimization of women, discrimination, and search for identity.

Weakness associated with a female makes her a victim irrespective of her independent status. Anuradha's (Raveena Tandon) marriage to Vivek Chauhan (Sameer Dharmadhikari), son of a well established politician Mahendra Chauhan (Vallabh Vyas) led her towards **victimization**. Conservative in their thinking, her parents-in-law are against the idea of providing equal rights to females; thus, open discussions regarding family business or any serious matter are predominantly a male affair. This difference comes to the fore when Vivek's father starts the discussion of the gradual deterioration in their hotel business. Anuradha intervenes and suggests them the same strategy that her firm has employed to resolve the problem. She is aghast when asked by her father-in-law not to interfere. Strictly against this open discrimination, she gets angry and shares her annoyance with her husband:

Anuradha: Can't I become a part of your family business.

Vivek: Father does not like women to speak about politics and business.

Both of them are old fashioned people, they will change with the passage of time.

Anuradha: You should have given me a rule book before marriage, so that I should have learnt what to do or what not to do.

He justifies his father by saying that due to his conservative outlook, he does not like the freedom allotted to females and hence advises her to cope with the situation.

Anuradha hates the idea of total dependence on males as she has always been given the liberty to exercise her freedom. She has spent her childhood with her mother Devika (Anju Mahendru), a working and independent woman. As a result, she is quite mature in her understanding of relations as she has seen life's upheavals and her mother's struggle for her identity without the support of her father. Moreover, her life in a broken home with divorced parents inculcates in her the quality of frank assertion of her likes and dislikes.

Her husband pacifies her by suggesting her to go out and enjoy herself by meeting friends and seeing films. Conversely, when she does the same things even that is considered wrong by her parents-in-law. The quality of compliance forcefully linked with women has been detested as well as put to scrutiny by Anuradha. Her husband and her father-in-law expect her to yield passively to their demands without any resistance.

Discrimination, ingrained in the society, makes Anuradha suffer immensely. She gets oppressed at various levels not only in her home but also in politics, her profession. Consciousness of Anuradha pricks her deeply when she gets differential treatment just because of her sex. Despite marrying Vivek Chauhan according to her own wishes, she never allows him to suppress her in anyway. The moment she comes to know the prejudiced thinking of Chauhans regarding suppressing and confining women within the household, she feels rather uneasy and reacts against this injustice. Her love for her husband makes her adjust but the rather hypocritical attitude of her husband torments her and she retaliates. She hates the double standards of her husband who on the one hand says that she can go outside but when she does the same, he does not like it. The duality

exercised by her parents-in-law is even more severe as they openly favour their son's illicit relationships and never question his whereabouts. As Linda Alcoff has aptly said, "The victimization syndrome often formulates an irrevocable component of the women figures' life history, while the normative 'gaze' of the male protagonist almost always curbs her subjectivity and sexuality into the stance of being a mere "object, a conglomerate of attributes to be predicated and controlled" (Quoted in Celly 2002 : 215).

On the contrary, when she comes late, her mother-in-law shows her displeasure. Greatly shocked at this inequality, in which the male is free to do anything whereas the female has to think twice before initiating anything new, she voices her protest. The aforementioned discrimination has been clearly brought to light by Anuradha:

Mother-in-law: Is this the time to return?

Anuradha: Has Vivek come?

Mother-in-law: He is a boy

Her hatred is against the discrepancy exercised by her parents-in-laws who neither show any grievance nor take any action to correct the mistakes of their son. Vivek has so many illicit relationships but his mother never opposes this fact. On the other hand, she gives him total freedom that he can do anything of his choice except marriage as that would be decided by them. This unrepressed freedom allotted to him just because of being a male disturbs her acutely. Alternatively, when she develops a relationship with Yashwant (Atul Kulkarni) and comes late they strongly oppose this act. Anuradha feels rather strange at the dual standards maintained by her parents-in-law as only they have asked her to learn politics from him. Anuradha comes in contact with Yashwant because her father-in-law

wants her to learn political techniques from him. On the contrary, her personal bonding with him makes them suspicious about her intentions. After witnessing their change in their mindset, she strongly questions their duplicity:

Anuradha: You are right that I have bowed in front of Yashwant. You have no regrets when I did this for your selfish needs, but when I have done the same for my own happiness; it has created difference in your self-esteem. Your son is the same even after marriage.

After being termed as a person of drooping morals, she strikes back fiercely. She humiliates them by saying that their reputation has got lowered not because of her but due to her father-in-law's illicit relationship outside home. Bhargavi Davar supports the stance advanced by Anuradha:

It would be pertinent to point out that in India, the burden of morality (chastity, virtue, purity, the pativrata ideal, izzat, self-sacrifice, motherhood, etc.) is vested in the women of the family, specially the wife within the nuclear family and the daughter-in-law in the extended family. There are no clear-cut lines between morality, immorality and madness, between 'mad' and 'bad' for women in distress. Women are seen as guardians of morality in the family. Any deviance from long established feudal and patriarchal norms, is not tolerated. (1999 : 215).

Her straightforward questioning brings to light her utter abhorrence towards this deeply entrenched hypocrisy. Anuradha questions her mother-in-law about the unfairness prevalent in this society, in which the male is the bearer of all the privileges:

Anuradha: This is indeed a good definition of a married woman. A man can do infinite crimes but he is not punished, but if a woman takes even a single step for her happiness, then she is labeled as 'Kulta, Kulacchini.

Anuradha, is a very bold and courageous woman as she has been working and leading her life alone before her marriage. She is not a meek and passive kind of a woman easily

silenced by others as is clear with her conversation firstly with her friends and then at Vivek's house. On being asked by her parents-in-law as who will do all the ceremonies in the absence of her father, she replies rather boldly that her mother will do it, an answer least expected from traditional Indian girls.

Assertion of her views is another important idea highlighted through this film. When she is silenced by her in-laws not to interrupt in family business she argues with her husband Vivek. Uneasiness inside her against this prejudiced behaviour torments her and she asserts it very firmly. Despite her efforts to keep herself busy in the household chores she is interrupted by her mother in law:

Mother-in-law: The place of Chauhan's bride is not in the kitchen.

Anuradha: I think the place of Chauhan's bride is neither the drawing room nor the kitchen but only in the bedroom of their husbands.

She is very firm against the dual standards of her in-laws. She states her ideas not only in front of her in-laws but also her husband. She fails to restrain herself on seeing her husband with other woman and rebukes him. Her profound grief regarding her husband's illicit associations even after marriage hits her badly and without hiding it she openly expresses her dislike. Her irrepressible protest comes as a surprise to her husband who wants her to change completely and adjust according to his likings. On the contrary, she refuses to accept his dictatorship by flatly denying acclimatizing herself according to the standards of his family and makes her stand very clear to her husband:

Vivek: Why do not you change yourself, damn it?

Anuradha: I do not want to change because I hate your parent's double standards. After marriage they have no objection against the type of life you are leading but if I do anything of my choice then the reputation of your family gets lowered. If you wanted all such things, you should have married such a girl who despite knowing all your faults would still have shown affection just like your mother.

Her husband's beating does not succeed in suppressing her deep resentment over these unequal norms and she strikes back by hitting him hard. Further she warns her husband that she does not belong to the streak of females who cry in the kitchen after their husbands beat them.

Anuradha is against this social practice where the males are the holders of all the privileges. In this film, the reaction of the female against the male is a noteworthy theme. Anuradha, the protagonist is not an inert and timid observer of things, she asserts herself powerfully whenever the males in her life attempt to suppress her, which comes to the forefront when she is requested to contest the elections. She does not allow anybody to rule her in anyway. Her independent decision making and the open declaration of it highlight her internal strength which cannot be subdued by others. Joining politics is her own decision where she does not allow anybody to overpower her. Though she seeks the advice from her friend and her mother but only after undergoing a long process of thought, she takes the decision to contest the elections. Disclosure of this fact in front of everyone clearly reveals her independent decision making.

Although Anuradha's family members want to use her as a puppet but she has a strong sense of individuality which is clear when she denies doing anything according to them. She not only asserts her dominant ideas against discrimination but also she is a staunch supporter of truth and is against criminal activities. The heinous act of her husband to murder a woman becomes quite unbearable to her and she does not say even a single word of consolation to him. Her strong repugnance to criminal activities brings to light

her truthfulness and her ability not to tolerate the wrong. She even terms her husband characterless when she sees no trace of regret on his face.

Moreover, her strength to assert her own ideas is so remarkable that even Yashwant, her political teacher fails to overpower her. He takes her for granted and hence he wants her to support him to prove his majority for the post of chief minister. Quite opposite to his expectations, she expresses her own point of view without any hitch. Yashwant laughs at her when she questions his candidature:

Anuradha: In our party there can be other candidates deserved to be a chief minister.

Yashwant: Who is that person apart from me?

Anuradha: Anna Sahib Joshi.

Yashwant: Have you gone mad? He has completely failed in his life despite his honest attitude. To become a chief minister honesty is not the only criteria, How can you think like this?

She criticizes him openly for being a part of the same streak of corrupt politicians. Anuradha gets an even greater shock when he terms the whole female community as irrational beings. He openly terms them as emotional fools without any mind of their own. Vinay Lal has something similar to say about the control exercised on females, “Sexism enters into a nexus with dynamics of class, wealth, family, marriage, morality and convention to perpetuate the hold of patriarchal ideals, as the woman figure is embedded within certain “mythic structures which have defined the Indian civilization” (1998 : 232).

She is shocked on learning that even responsible people think on the same line and consider women as inferior. She asserts her profound dislike on such a disparate statement and accuses the whole male community.

Anuradha asserts her sexual freedom also by maintaining sexual relationships with Yashwant. Anuradha's commanding affirmation also comes to the fore when her husband abuses her illicit relationship with Yashwant. On being abused by her husband, she rebukes him and displays her authority:

Anuradha: Do not commit a mistake to hit me. You had asked me my identity; today I will tell you that. I am a sitting MLA. My single phone call in the police station can make your bail cancelled. It would be good if you leave this place.

She displays her authority not only to her husband but also to her political colleagues when she joins politics. The instant she comes to know that the male colleagues of her party are abusing the females; she silences them vehemently by pointing out their own faults thereby warning them not to repeat such a mistake in future.

Anuradha has been an independent woman but after her marriage with Vivek the rigorous confinement in the four walls of the home makes her feel quite captivating. Due to the incessant pressure of her family in conjunction with the open discrimination meted out to the females in her home, she feels isolated and alone. Hence, she finds herself in a dilemma regarding her marriage with Vivek. Thus, she goes outside and tells her perplexed state of mind to her friend Neelu and discovers that in maintaining the chords of her marriage she has lost her identity:

Anuradha: You are right Neelu. The things which shine from far loose their shine on coming near. First you marry a person by believing in your destiny and then by following his home's rules and regulations, lead a new life and even if that is not enough, you should neglect your husband's shortcomings. And then one day you realize that you have lost your identity.

Her decision to join politics is her step towards the fulfillment of her quest to **identity**; however, on witnessing the hypocrisy behind this game of power she fails to adjust.

Realization dawns upon her when the inspector Uddhav Pawar (Manoj Joshi) reveals the reality behind her husband's murder. Her conversation with the inspector is her moment of reawakening where she understands the sharp line existent between right or wrong. She realizes that in the arena of politics relationships carry no significance; truth is completely absent and the ultimate destination of politicians is to acquire power at any cost. Anuradha even goes to Anna Sahib Joshi (Hemendra Bhatia), an experienced politician to understand the real meaning of Satta which is completely different than the ones assigned to it by the people due to their selfish interests.

After joining politics, she seeks fulfillment in the work allotted to her. Even though she is a part of politics which is considered a filthy affair, she does not lose her honesty. She learns the actual meaning of power and wants to do something for the society. Hence, she uses her power as a means to establish her real self. Males in her life have tried to use her as a puppet but realization of the truth and her potential propel her and she beats them in their own way as a powerful and diplomatic politician despite getting corrupted. Her action to defeat the corrupt politicians like Liyakat Ali Baig (Govind Namdeo) and Yashwant with the dishonest strategies, she has learnt from them brings to light her sense to exercise power. Her blind faith on Yashwant makes her rely on him for everything but the moment she comes to know the duplicity maintained by Yashwant she strikes back diplomatically by using the same tactics of politics.

Skillful display of power by Anuradha another theme employed in this film reveals not only her trustworthiness but also her zeal to work for the betterment of the society. Anuradha represents the female community which is considered irrational by the male community. This idea has been proved wrong when she silences everybody through her tactful and diplomatic use of power and represents the resurgence of a new woman who cannot be overshadowed by the powerful males despite their immense control.

To bring the preceding discussion to a close, all the images of a woman vary in the degree of exploitation and subjugation she undergoes in the hands of the male in her life. Regardless of this, she emerges as a strong personality. The films present different prominent ideas such as oppression, discrimination, complete dependence on males, the resilience of a woman, powerful assertion of her self, search for identity, etc. However, a universal and prominent change reflected is the retaliation and the inner urge to fight audaciously and stand unwaveringly against the norms set by the patriarchy.

Intense exploitation is one of the themes prominent in almost all the films though the degree varies as the films move up the ladder. The films of the initial phase project this theme to an intense degree where the females are beaten up also whereas in the films of the later stages with the advent of awareness and education, the degree of exploitation has reduced and the quest for identity gains prominence.

Excessive exploitation just because of her sex makes the protagonist in the film Mirch Masala rebellious. Hence, despite her illiterate status, she recognizes her collective strength and instead of becoming a victim, unites and fights against the powerful forces. Thus, collective strength of the females verses males emerge as the most powerful idea in

the film Mirch Masala. Dependency syndrome is one of the major highlights of the film Arth. Her conditioned dependency on her husband weakens her and hence, she finds it difficult to come out of her homely carapace. Despite knowing about his extramarital affair, she begs of him not to leave her. However, due to his adamant attitude to continue with his treachery, she leaves him in search of her own identity. The quest to search the meaning for her own existence gains prominence for her which has been lost in the fake association with her husband's name. In the course of her struggle, she comes to a juncture where she finds that she has been leading a meaningless existence till then and hence in a quest to give her life meaning, she takes up the challenge of educating her maid's daughter.

The film, Bhumika presents altogether a different picture of a woman who considers her home and her husband as the essence of her life. However, extreme exploitation and utter neglect by her husband force her to discard it leading to a consequent search for fulfillment outside. The unstinting quest in her for autonomy makes her shift her gaze from one male to another. So, this shunting becomes her way to assert her freedom and sexual choice. She hates domination and hence due to her husband's excessive oppressive attitude she asserts her freedom by running away from the home. The illusory world of the protagonist Usha in Bhumika collapses the moment she converses with the landlord's wife. Her fake beliefs regarding the males in her life come to a halt leading to her realization of the reality that at last only she has to cope up with her loneliness and isolation.

Strong argument of a woman against the longstanding prejudices and stereotypes present in the society makes the male realize the strengths of a female. Her outright questioning,

about the well formulated differential norms for a man and a woman, displays her agony over this inequality. The differential notion that everything is forgivable for a man whereas for a woman a small mistake can be disastrous gets demonstrated in the film Astitva. A single act of infidelity by the heroine Aditi puts an end to her marriage, the supposed quintessence of her life. Hence, she not only argues against this discrimination but also discards the deceptively binding relationships in search of her own identity. In the film Satta, an influential picture of the female emerges which questions the bias and domination of the patriarchal conventions. Despite being a part of politics, she shuns corruption, fights boldly against the injustice, and emerges as a winner. Fierce retaliation makes a woman independent in all the spheres wherein she challenges the forced domination of males.

The film, Daman presents rather a gloomy picture of a woman who is intensely exploited by her male counterpart physically as well as psychologically. On sensing the fact that even her daughter's future will be in the hands of the same manipulative conventions, Durga, the protagonist, realizes the forthcoming consequences and escapes from the shackles of her tyrannous husband. Her stringent action to kill her husband, a threat to her daughter's life highlights her concern for her daughter. Durga symbolizes the realization and her consequent protest against the standards forced by males on the females thereby suppressing them and expecting them to endure it without any qualms.

Traumatized under the extermination of their roots, all the females portrayed in these films move from suppressed sufferers to victorious redeemers and give a tough fight to their counterparts in every sphere. Working hard to retain the relationships, they do try to

do their job with sincerity and do not wish to crush the males. Women exhume their roots by making men realize their value. Quite aware of their unique space, they not only assert but also exercise their freedom to move beyond the restricted boundaries. As the preceding discussion shows, all the females in these works show a steady progression from passive sufferers to active explorers. The films have successfully projected the aspects related to the lives of females encompassing all variations that have crept in their journey of life as awakened individuals. In this study, the intensive themes in both the art forms have been traced. Based on the analysis done, certain conclusions have been drawn which are presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The portrayal of females in Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema has brought to light several significant aspects of the lives of women in society. It is interesting to note that the position of females has kept fluctuating throughout the ages with intense focus on their roles in the family as well as in the society. Though an intrinsic part of humanity, she has been relegated to an unwanted stream, a step taken to overshadow her inherent and essential qualities. Her position in the society and treatment given to her by others though precariously unstable has always been a debatable issue. She might have been praised, criticized, blamed, accepted or rejected but she has always been talked about. Among the prominent media that showcase the different images of females, Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema occupy a significant position in the society.

The movement which has helped females gain an equal footing in the social, political and literary arena has entered both the art forms, which have projected it with intense focus and clarity. After getting a strong foothold in other areas, feminism has undoubtedly paved way for the open and undaunted expression in the literary field as well. Eminent writers like Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, Ellen Moers, etc., across the globe, have examined the position of women in literary works. They have laid a firm foundation for the posterity to explore the existing status of females in their own ways. With a quest to portray experiences of women, the Indian female writers have successfully depicted the present status of females. However, there is a steady progression from the earlier writers

like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande to the present writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai with respect to the kind of depiction of women.

In the novels of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, women have been projected as more docile and enduring. Women have undergone tumultuous upheavals in their lives. Moreover, with the advent of awakening in females about their own selves as individuals, the themes of the later writers gained more intensity. Consequently, the portrayal of females has also acquired a broader vision as the writers have projected them not only as passive housewives but also as rational beings. The fiction of writers like Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai falls in this particular era. The projection of females by the earlier female writers was restricted in the domain of male counterparts. In the later phase, the male dominance was challenged and the females became mature enough to face the multiple challenges something erstwhile was meant only for males. Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai project the same. Reflecting the changing times, fiction of Shobha De showcases women of the elite section. Consequently, the depiction and treatment of problems also differ.

Portrayal of females in its myriad forms has fascinated not only the fiction writers but also the filmmakers. With the passage of time, it has grown in richness and complexity in both the art forms. Cinema in India plays a prominent role in influencing the perceptions of people in the society. Position of women in the society has always been in a state of perpetual subjugation and the same has been mirrored through the medium of cinema. Indian Cinema has an extensive and rich history in presenting the problems of the women

in the society and still in the present withholds the same tradition. The position of women has undergone various shifts in the society and has never been without controversy in Hindi commercial films. The success of the films depends to a large extent on the projection of females. Oriented towards profit, commercial cinema makers have utilized her as a value brand. Consequently, despite a few films which have created history in their meticulous and real delineation, females in commercial cinema have mostly acquired the place of ornamental objects without much concrete relevance. However, the realistic mode of filmmaking has successfully projected their true conditions. Initially, conforming to the vested beliefs in the society most of the films have made an attempt to encash the females as embodiments of Sita and Savitri, epitome of wifely qualities. On the other hand, with the passage of time, a change has come in the society and the same has got manifested in films as well. Parallel Cinema, known to be more concerned with the realistic projection of females has portrayed their problems in more stark terms.

Initiated by Satyajit Ray, the movement of Parallel Cinema has been taken further by Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak. Apart from making films on contemporary subjects, they have also been concerned about the status of smothered females under stereotyped male domination. Parallel Cinema has been established in the domain of Hindi cinema by Shyam Benegal who has significantly changed the outlook of the people towards cinema. Primarily concerned with the predicament of females, the main focus of his films has been the projection of female in different shades - housewife, working-woman, prostitute, village woman, etc. Almost all his films narrate the struggles of a female in the course of her peregrination from a mere innocent to a mature individual. In addition, other important directors like Ketan Mehta, Jabbar Patel, Muzaffar Ali, Saeed Mirza, Mahesh

Bhatt, etc. have also been instrumental in providing a solid support to the voices of females in their films. Along with these male directors, female directors like Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Sai Paranjpe, Deepa Mehta, Meera Nair, etc., have also been very active in giving a new dimension to cinema of meaning, wherein the females find a specific place. All the films known to be the milestones regarding females have set the tone for women oriented films. Although with the passage of time, Parallel Cinema has receded due to the popularity of commercial cinema, its aesthetics has become absorbed into the latter. Still, some directors like Mahesh Manjrekar, Madhur Bhandarkar, Shahla Raza, Hirdesh Kamble and Meghna Gulzaar, etc, are active in the cinematizing of female oriented subjects.

An analysis of the Indian English Feminist Fiction also reveals that the authors have projected the females in different shades. However, there is a difference in the focus and intensity. The characters of Anita Desai present a wider spectrum of life where the characters show a steady progression in their struggle for survival. In comparison to her earlier novels where the woman characters possess an escapist attitude and in their quest to survive resort to killing also, there is a remarkable growth in the attitude of the characters in the later phase. Where Shall We Go This Summer brings the dilemma of a female through various themes. Indecisive and weak in the beginning, she leads quite a dreary life. However, when she moves on to Manori, a magical island for respite, circumstances compel her to grow. Her encounter with reality makes her realize the actual state of affairs and compel her to return to her family as an awakened individual.

In Fasting Feasting, the author highlights gender discrimination, urge for freedom and adaptability of the females. Preference allotted to sons pricks the consciousness of the daughters. Aruna retaliates whereas Anamika accepts it meekly. Uma endures it throughout her life. Through Uma, the author highlights a strong urge to survive even when her life is in absolute crisis. Her marriage has been a failure with no freedom and no 'me' space. She has not been allowed to work as she is a necessity for her parents. Hence, dire restrictions are imposed on her mentally and physically. Adaptability is the key characteristic of not only Uma but also her mother and her aunt, Mira. Clear Light of Day, a revolutionary work in the fictional world of Anita Desai, portrays a female's struggle for existence without any male by her side. She resolves her conflicts and dilemmas independently. Ultimately, she establishes herself as an awakened individual unnerved by life's complexities. She comes to an understanding about the eternal truth of life and in that attempt attains awakening.

Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors aptly brings to light the victimization of a female in the society through various themes, such as gender discrimination, marital rape and finally the realization. Traumatized by the recurrent rapes of her husband, she tries to control her married life, a cobweb of complexities woven by her professional superiority. Inferior to her, her husband asserts his power sexually. Her visit to her father's house for temporary respite proves to be an enriching experience for her as she gets a chance to realize her worth as an individual. She discards all her fears and prepares herself to face her husband afresh.

That Long Silence marvelously traces Jaya's, seventeen long years of silence through different themes such as self-imposed silence, self discovery and self-realization. Initially, she remains silent due to marital pressures and continuous neglect. On introspection, she finds her whole self lost in her attempts to preserve the security in marriage, which is already on the verge of collapse. Realization dawns on her and she decides to expunge her silence and signals her independence by taking up writing as a means of self-expression.

The Binding Vine by Shashi Deshpande projects a multidimensional image of Urmila who, despite being contended, nurtures concern for the female community and fights to get them justice. The writer has employed different themes, such as rape in marriage, inequality of gender and finally concern for the female community. In Small Remedies, the author projects the experiences of a female through the use of themes, such as, emergence of an unconventional women, quest for identity and gender inequality. All the females are victims of gender discrimination but despite being a victim everyone struggles in their own fields to become successful.

Manju Kapur's Difficult Daughters hinges on the indecisiveness of a female, primary cause of her suffering. Indecisiveness, growth of female through generations and self-realization are some of the prominent ideas advocated through this work. The protagonist, despite being weak and indecisive, shows progression. With the passage of time, this weakling becomes quite mature in her perception after facing the realities of life. She regrets her decision to marry the professor and wants her daughter not to follow the same line.

Manju Kapur projects a new woman Astha through her work Married Woman who wants to break the shackles of the age-old custom of marriage and finds herself captivated by the pressures of motherhood. Moreover, lack of support and indifferent attitude of the family towards her just because of her inferior sex make her feel marginalized. In her quest to assert her freedom, she develops affinity with another woman. Furthermore, the dearth of emotional fulfillment also becomes one of the reasons for her to search it outside, though in the end, her motherhood is eulogized and she even drops the idea of leaving her husband. Astha exhibits her sense of control through her decision to live with her children and her husband.

All the females in these works show a steady progression from passive sufferers to active explorers. Their journey of life as awakened individuals encompassing all variations successfully projected the aspects related to the lives of females.

In consonance with Indian English Feminist Fiction, the image of a woman varies in the degree of exploitation and subjugation in Hindi Parallel Cinema as well. However, in the end she emerges as a strong personality. The films present different prominent ideas such as oppression, discrimination, complete dependence on males, the resilience power of a woman, powerful assertion of her self, search for identity, etc. However, a universal and prominent change that reflects the real woman is her sense of retaliation and the inner urge to fight audaciously and stand unwaveringly against the norms set by the patriarchy.

Intense exploitation is one of the themes prominent in almost all the films though the degree varies. The films of the initial phase project this theme intensely as in these films, females are even beaten up whereas in the films of the later stages with the advent of

awareness and education, the degree of exploitation gets reduced and the quest for identity gains prominence. In the film Mirch Masala excessive exploitation just because of her gender makes the protagonist rebellious. Hence, despite her illiterate status, she recognizes her collective strength and instead of becoming a victim, unites with other females and fights against the powerful males. Thus, collective strength of the females to confront males emerges as the most powerful idea advanced in this film.

Dependency syndrome is one of the major highlights in another film Arth. The protagonist's assumed dependency on her husband weakens her and hence, she finds it difficult to come out of her homely carapace. Despite knowing about his extramarital affair, she begs of him not to leave her. However, due to his adamant attitude he continues with his treachery, therefore she leaves him to search her own identity. The quest to search the meaning of her own existence which has been lost in her marriage gains prominence for her. In the course of her struggle, she gets an inkling that she has been leading a meaningless existence till then; hence, in a quest to give her life meaningful direction, she takes up the challenge of educating her maid's daughter.

Bhumika presents an altogether different picture of a woman who considers her home and her husband the essence of her life. However, extreme exploitation and utter neglect by her husband force her to discard it leading to a consequent search for fulfillment outside. The unstinting quest for autonomy makes her shift her gaze from one male to another. So, this shunting becomes her way to assert her freedom and sexual choice. She hates domination and hence due to her husband's excessive oppressive attitude, she asserts her freedom by running away from the home. The illusory world of the

protagonist Usha in Bhumika collapses the moment she converses with the landlord's wife. Her fake beliefs regarding the males in her life come to a halt and she inches towards the realization of her reality that at last only she has to cope with her loneliness and isolation.

The strong argument of a woman against the longstanding prejudices and stereotypes present in the society makes the male realize her strength. Her outright questioning about the well-formulated differential norms for a man and a woman displays her agony over this inequality. The differential notion that everything is forgivable for a man whereas a small mistake can be disastrous for a woman gets demonstrated in the film Astitva. A single act of infidelity by the heroine puts an end to her marriage, the supposed quintessence of her life. Hence, she not only argues against this discrimination but also discards the deceptive binding relationships in search of her own identity.

In Satta, an influential picture of the female emerges who questions the bias and domination of the patriarchal conventions. Despite being a part of politics, she shuns corruption, fights boldly against the injustice, and emerges as a winner. Fierce retaliation makes a woman independent in all the spheres wherein she challenges the forced domination of males.

Daman presents rather a gloomy picture of a woman who is intensely exploited by her male counterpart physically as well as psychologically. On sensing the fact that even her daughter's future will be in the hands of the same manipulative conventions, Durga, the protagonist, realizes the forthcoming consequences and escapes from the shackles of her tyrannous husband. Her stringent action to kill her husband, a threat to her daughter's life

highlights her concern for her daughter. Durga symbolizes the realization and her consequent protest against the standards forced by males on the females thereby suppressing them and expecting them to endure it without any qualms. Her forceful retaliation brings out the real quality associated with the meaning of her name.

Traumatized under the extermination of their roots, all the females portrayed in these art forms start as suppressed sufferers but emerge as victorious redeemers. Working hard to retain the relationships, they do try to carry out their responsibilities with sincerity without challenging the males. The analysis brings to the fore various similarities as well as dissimilarities with respect to the delineation of females. There are various themes which are common in them such as the exploitation, quest for identity, gender discrimination, assertion for self and self-realization. On the other hand, there are certain dissimilar themes such as dependency syndrome, collective struggle, sexual choice, skillful display of power and emergence of a new woman. However, there are differences with respect to the treatment of each theme also because cinema being an audio-visual medium projects the female as more daring and action-oriented whereas fiction showcases the assertion of the female on a more subtle level.

Reflecting the real society, both the forms of art have highlighted the gradual change in the position of females. Women exhume their roots by making men realize their value. Quite aware of their unique space, they not only assert but also exercise their freedom to move beyond the restricted boundaries.

The study clearly indicates how the progression of females from submissiveness to assertiveness over several years has been depicted by the veteran directors and eminent

female writers in their art forms, namely, Indian English Feminist Fiction and Hindi Parallel Cinema respectively. It has successfully attempted to enhance the understanding of the viewers as well as the readers about the actual place of females in the society by pointing out the similar as well as dissimilar themes in both the mediums. A significant impact of both these forms of media can go a long way in shaping the perception of the society on the power of females. The study undoubtedly offers immense scope for research in each of these media. In Indian English Feminist Fiction themes such as human relationships, man-woman relationships, social and philosophical aspects and stylistic devices can be explored. Hindi Parallel Cinema, owing to its advantage over fiction as an audio-visual medium, offers a lot of room to study the technicalities and intricacies involved in making films such as script writing, dialogue delivery, etc. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the Indian English Feminist writers and the films made by female directors can also be considered for future research. Such research endeavors ultimately would open new vistas in understanding in a better perspective the various stages females have gone through in their lives as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. In order to bring about a change in society such an understanding is vital and this is possible through powerful mediums like cinema and fiction.

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Rathore, Sushila and Meenakshi Raman. "Shifting Images of Woman in Anita Desai's Cry the Peacock." Studies in Women Writers in English. Ed. Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2008. 144-155.

Paper accepted for publication

Rathore, Sushila and Meenakshi Raman. "Inner Progression of a Repressed Psyche in Anita Desai's Fasting Feasting." New Urges in Post-Colonial Literature. Ed. Sunita Sinha. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2008.

Brief Biography of the Candidate

Sushila Rathore is presently working as a lecturer in Languages Group at BITS, Pilani for the last seven years. She did her M.Phil from BITS, Pilani, M.A. (English) from M.K. Saboo College, Pilani and B.A. from Kanoria College, Jaipur. She has secured first position in her M.A. examination. She has published several research papers in international and national journals. Her areas of interest are feminism, cinema studies, business communication and effective public speaking.

Brief Biography of the Supervisor

Dr. Meenakshi Raman is an Associate Professor of English and is the Chief, Publications and Media Relations Unit at BITS, Pilani. She has authored six books and edited three volumes on English and Communication published by the leading publishers of India. Under her supervision, two faculty members have completed their Ph.D. degrees and currently two more faculty members are pursuing their Ph.D. She has served as an examiner for Ph.D. theses and M.Phil. Dissertations and she is in the editorial board of national and international journals.

Besides teaching several courses in communication to the students of First Degree and Higher Degree Programs of BITS, Pilani, Dr. Raman also teaches these courses to professionals such as hospital administrators, corporate executives, etc., who are registered in the off-campus programs of the Institute. She coordinates professional training programs involving managerial and communication skills conducted at BITS and also the GRE and TOEFL preparation courses.

Dr. Raman has delivered lectures on communication, conducted workshops on Interviewing Skills, Presentation Skills, GD Skills and English Proficiency at various forums and published several papers in this area. She has published popular articles in newspapers as well in the area of communication. Member of many professional organizations including, IATEFL (U.K.), TESOL Inc., Virginia, USA., and AIMS (Association of Indian Management Scholars), Dr.Raman has participated and presented papers at various national and international conferences including the ones in Texas, USA; Dubai, UAE; Aberdeen, UK; and Durban, South Africa.