

**Traces of First and Second Wave Feminist Thoughts in the Writings of
Adrienne Rich, Doris Lessing and Caryl Churchill**



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Traces of First and Second Wave Feminist Thoughts in the Writings of

Adrienne Rich, Doris Lessing and Caryl Churchill

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Abstract

The thesis aims to develop a dialogue between feminist theoretical traditions and literary texts by women writers from the mid-20th century western tradition. The thesis will focus on the first and second waves of Feminist Movement. It argues that across different time and context of the western world, women's theoretical and creative writing deal with certain topics that can be both universal and specific to women across borders. The topic includes: women's subjugated position in patriarchal society, their prejudiced representation in the male-tradition of literature, women's limited access to education and the absence of women's literary traditions. The authors are also concerned with how women across generations are bound to take part in domestic roles. This thesis explores how women writers have utilized different literary genres to give voice to women's 'common' concerns of living lives with limited opportunities. For the theoretical analysis, I will focus on the pioneers of western feminist tradition; namely- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) and Kate Millet's (1934) who are acknowledged worldwide as praiseworthy feminist influences. The paper will emphasize on the four worthy of mention books; viz. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *The Second Sex* (1949) and *Sexual Politics* (1970). The literary texts through which I will establish my analysis are "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" by Adrienne Rich in 1963, a short story "To Room Nineteen" by Doris Lessing in 1978 and the play *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill in 1982. Therefore, the thesis intends to analyze the key thoughts of the revolutionary legends of Feminist movement and analyze woman's life based on some exceptional literary genres of English Literature.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Feminism is a social-political movement that, by looking at the world from women's perspectives, aims at creating equality between women and men across societies. It is a political movement that revolts against oppression, exploitation, domestic violence, stereotypical sex roles and discrimination. Feminism acknowledges women as competent, intelligent and responsible human beings, capable of making independent decisions and contributing to social and national progress. It is a social struggle to make women's voice heard. Sheryl Bowen and Nancy Wyatt (1993) have suggested that feminism is concerned with women's lives; theories about humans; the nature of knowledge; the way in which knowledge is generated and legitimated; the "canon" of traditional knowledge (pp. 2–6). Feminism argues that women demand rights and responsibilities according to their capacities. It also intends to remove unreasonable biasness and prejudices about women from societies and human consciousness.

'Female' and 'feminine' are two different but inter-dependent categories. Male-female distinctions can be seen as biologically determined sexual difference. Feminine and masculine represent social constructs, sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms. Thus, 'femininity' is a cultural construct where specific behaviors and positions are associated with sweetness, modesty, submission, passivity, humility etc. "naturally" assigned to women. Social institutions are directly or indirectly related to patriarchy which is a traditionally hierarchical system, keeping men on the top and women at the bottom. In this patriarchal system, women fail to receive equal opportunities as men do to move forward, whether economically or socially. This hierarchal position of sexes determines women's subjugated position in any society.

Traditionally, the long term process of raising voice for women's rights has been divided into three 'waves' depending on the basis of time scale, commonly known as the wave of feminist movements. The first wave feminism refers to the late 19th and early 20th century (1848-mid-1920s) where women's rights are promoted as part of human rights. The first wave feminism deals majorly with women's suffrage, education, working condition, equal rights, legal reforms to improve women's condition in the advanced societies. Concerned with access to equal opportunities for women, the first wave continued to influence feminism in both Western and Eastern societies throughout the 20th century and beyond.

The second wave feminism refers to the mid and late 20th century (1960-1980s) which deals with the inequality of law, cultural inequality and rebel against the stereotype role of women in society and radical voices of women's empowerment. During the second wave issues such as women's health, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, women in the workplace, women in the military, women's reproductive rights and rape were recognized.

Finally, the third wave feminism refers to late 20th century (1980-2000s) arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the criticism against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. The movement of third-wave feminism focuses less on laws and the political process and more on individual identity. The movement of third-wave feminism is said to have arisen out of the realization that women cannot be seen as a universal term.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a dialogue between feminist theoretical traditions and women writing about women from the mid-twentieth century. In "Toward a Feminist Poetics", Elaine Showalter, a second wave feminist argues that women writers have a writing history

which can be divided into three phrases on the basis of time period. Such as- firstly, 'feminine' during 1840-1880; she states that during this period the women writers imitated men. The women writers such as the Bronte sisters, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell belong to this phase, which covers the period of 1840 to 1880. The writers followed male's norms attributing the dominant male artistic standards. They identified themselves with the male culture as women were not allowed to write. Some of them even wrote in male pseudonyms. Their works dealt with social and domestic backgrounds. Their writing portrayed a sense of guilt. They accepted certain limitation in their writings. Secondly, 'feminist' during 1880-1920, she said that during this period women writers used to make political protests in parts of their writing. During this phase the women writers had protested against the male standards and values. It is the period of pro-independence. The writers started to reject almost every text that stereotyped women. They developed a personal sense of injustice and wrote about biasness of male. Finally, 'female' from 1920 to present, during this phase women writing have involved in self transformation. The writers such as Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield, and Dorothy Richardson come under this phase. The writers of this phase avoid both the imitation of the feminine writers and the protest of the feminist writers. They purely develop the idea of female writing and female experience. They differentiate female writing and male writing in terms of language. Their effort to identify and analyze the female experience leads them to this phase of self-discovery.

Showalter further suggests that feminist critique is divided into two distinct varieties, which is concerned firstly with woman as a reader. She states that it is the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes. She says that it is a historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. The feminist critique basically envisions

women as the readers of male produced texts. The feminists thus, try to trace out the images and stereotype of the women exposed by male through their texts. This is also called traditional feminist criticism where women are the consumers of the production of the literary writing. Secondly, feminist criticism is concerned with woman as writer- she says that it is when woman started producing literary works and genres. She has coined a new term 'gynocritics' for women as writers. Showalter says:

In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit woman between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. (Showalter p.382)

Gynocritics aims to understand the specificity of women's writing not as a product of sexism but as a fundamental aspect of female reality. Its prime concern is to see 'woman as producer of textual meaning, with the history themes, genres, and structures of literature by women'. It projects how 'feminine values penetrate and undermine the masculine systems that contain them'.

The feminist theorists and writers who are being selected for this thesis falls under the above discussed category based on feminist history. For example: Mary Wollstonecraft belongs to 'feminine; group. Being a part of 'feminine' group she in her book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* is observed to deal with issues faced by women during her time in a political way. Virginia Woolf belongs to the 'feminist' group. She in her book *A Room of One's Own* is observed to explore the discrimination that women used to face in every sector of life, such as education, employment and creative productions. Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Adrienne Rich, Doris Lessing and Caryl Churchill belong to 'female' group. They are observed to take

consciously women's life to produce literary work. Their literary texts express their freedom to choose any subject matter regarding women and expose the drawbacks.

In the next chapter, entitled 'Key Thoughts of Feminist Theorists', I will introduce and explain the key arguments of feminist theorists from early 19th and 20th centuries. The feminist theorists are Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett.

Chapter 2

Key Thoughts of Feminist Theorists

This chapter will explain the key thoughts of the feminists of the early 19th to the mid-20th centuries. Their key topics of concern will be compared. I will divide my analysis mainly in four parts in this chapter. Namely- Challenging Patriarchy, Questioning Femininity, Marriage and motherhood as conventional predetermined goals and lastly, Education as a Gender Equalizing Force.

2.1. Challenging Patriarchy

Women in England during the Eighteenth century had to maintain a very specific role in the society. Traditionally, women were characterized under two categories; firstly motherhood, secondly chastity and submissiveness. The first category was referred from the Bible an image of saintly and virtuous Virgin Mary since Christianity, then had a huge influence in England and over all Europe, who was the representative of honest pure wives and mothers. On the contrary, the second category portrayed the image of Eve, the representative of the original sin. The most practical explanation of temptation of Eve is that women are unintelligent, thoughtless, they can be easily tricked and they can trick men leading to destruction. Therefore, women cannot be trusted. They need to be controlled by men for their own good; otherwise they can be easily tempted by Satan.

The then patriarchal society judged women mainly based on their physical attribute. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her book does not challenge the fact that physically men are stronger than women and in general females are inferior to males. However, she argues that on the basis

of physical aspect women cannot be treated as inferior to men in all aspects. Their virtue and capability cannot be judged on the basis of physical appearance.

Although Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf have written hundreds of years apart, they both recognize the patriarchal system governing the societies and the balance in between the unequal standards set for men and women. Wollstonecraft and Woolf both have observed that discrimination in every sphere of the society due to patriarchy; they have argued that women face issue that education could not be the key to get rid of the conventional life for a woman. Besides, Woolf has taken the issue of women's deprived position in a male-dominated society to a farther height.

A Room of One's Own during the early twentieth century begins with the word 'but' which is an unconventional starting point. This emphasizes the non-conventional nature of the essay as it deals with women and writing. In chapter 1, she talks about the idea of inequality in British higher education for women. Woolf has to deliver a lecture on the topic of 'Women and Fiction' at Newnham College and Girton College, two women's colleges at Cambridge University in October 1928. In this lecture she comes up with a thesis statement- "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction;" (Woolf p.4). This essay is a reflection of her voyage that she has observed from her experiences and surroundings that brought her to claim the above statement for women. She observes discrimination in some of the major areas of women education; especially, in higher education. For example- her experience at the lawn of the campus, at the library, the condition of male college versus the condition of female college and even the comparison of two meals are exploring the differences between the two extremes.

Woolf's experiences and realization are explored below: In the campus of the University when she was walking through the lawn, she met a security guard; 'Beadle' who enforces her that- women are not allowed walking onto the grass. According to Woolf- "As I regained the path the arms of the Beadle sank, his face assumed its usual repose, and though turf is better walking than gravel, no very great harm was done." (Woolf p.6) This symbolizes that only the scholars, that means the men can walk through the path.

When she wants to enter the Library of the university she get to know that a woman has no access to the library if she is not accompanied by a scholar or men and if she does not have any approval letter from men. She states-

I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accomplished by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction. (Woolf p.7)

Although women's college is a part of men's campus, there has a huge difference in the facilities that both the genders are offered. Men's college is marked by wealth, facilities and opportunities. On the other hand, women's college lacks behind wealth, facilities and opportunities. One of the reasons behind this might be- men own private property and they can thus use them for the development of men's higher education and all sorts of facilities. As wealth or money plays a vital role behind everything. On the contrary, women generally do not own private property that they can serve for the development of higher educational sector for women.

Thus, Woolf emphasizes not only women and their relationship to fiction, but all people of genius who have not had an opportunity to use it because of their lack of money, opportunity and privacy.

In the mid-20th century, during the second wave of feminism the issue of patriarchy is the center of attention. The issue of femininity is challenged. In *The Second Sex*, one of her iconic books of modern feminism, Simone de Beauvoir argued that women were not fully human because femininity was defined by men, that they were the second sex or the 'other' in a world in which humanity was primarily defined in terms of the identity of man. It means *patriarchy has* forced women to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men. The patriarchal society fundamentally oppresses women by characterizing them as the 'other' on every level of life. This is the central theme of the book that is women have been forced to occupy a secondary position in the world in relation to men. Man occupies the role of the self, or subject; where woman is the object, the other. He is essential, absolute, and transcendent. On the other hand, she is inessential, incomplete, and mutilated. He extends out into the world to impose his will on it, whereas woman is predestined to obey him.

In *Sexual Politics* Kate Millett during the late Twentieth century, has introduced the theory of "patriarchy" which is defined as the fundamental part of gender problems and inequality particularly within societies dominated by male power. According to Millett, "the term "politics" shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." (Millett p.4) women are trapped in the "power-structure relationship" that places them in the inferior position to men. In her perspective, this unbalanced gender hierarchy emerges incongruent with the foundation of society. In other word, the essence of our civilization is patriarchy- a male dominated system designed to enforce women submission.

Millet has analyzed the concept of patriarchy from a radical feminist point of view in her classic piece *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1971. Here she identifies the family as the chief

institution of patriarchy and as the key means through which men's domination and hegemony are achieved. In her own words:

Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property? Yet in strict patriarchy, kinship is acknowledged only through association with the male line. Agnation excludes the descendants of the female line from property right and often even from recognition. (Millett p.13)

Kate Millett in the second chapter of the text points out that patriarchy is the strongest root of female oppression. According to the religious explanation of origin in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Millett believes "Patriarchy has God on its side" (Millett p.34). From the very beginning God was perceived as male since He created the first man Adam in His own image. Woman, on the other hand, was apparently an afterthought, created by God from one of Adam's ribs, so that Adam might have a "helper like himself" (*The Holy Bible Douay Version* pp. 2-20). Therefore, women are always kept in a subordinate position to men. Moreover, God has committed Eve (woman) to motherhood, under the authority of her husband. Thus again, women are depicted to be dependent on men for a prestigious life. Millett describes the story of 'the fall' as "the central myth of the Judeo-Christian imagination and therefore of our immediate cultural heritage", and she continues: "This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes" (Millett p.35). Woman, her sexuality and her reproductive function is controlled by man. This is to be achieved through the institution of marriage and through the trend of motherhood, which confines woman to their home, under the authority and protection of her husband (the male) defined by God as the worker and the bread earner.

2.2. Questioning Femininity

In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft has tried to be rational and practical while talking about women avoiding flattering their fascinating graces. She stated:

Man under the curtain of pretty feminine phrases basically enrolls woman's slavish dependence. She argues that God would not have created women with their capacity for virtuous conduct and spiritual salvation if it were not intended to be as important as male. Women are socialized to rely only upon their beauty, conduct and manners which are the most important aspect, however fades with age. (Wollstonecraft p.13)

In 'The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed' (Chapter 2), Wollstonecraft argues that both men and women are responsible for the lack of equal educational opportunity. Women, due to the pleasure of the attention of men, actually preferred being considered as objects rather than as rational beings. She stated-

Women are told from their infancy, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives. (Wollstonecraft p.28)

This means, women are taught that through the above mentioned qualities such as cunning, softness of temper and obedience they will marry men who will protect them. Moreover, if she is beautiful, her life will be easy "for at least, twenty years". The point is that beauty fades as will the protection of her husband if gained under these false ideas. Wollstonecraft believes this is an "imperfect cultivation". Thus, women are treated only as commodity of meeting sexual desires of men and her qualities such as beauty, softness and tender behavior can secure her life for at least twenty years during youth.

Beauvoir argues these matters in her text in Book one, entitled "Facts and Myths" Simone de Beauvoir argued that sex and gender are two different issues; however, under pressure of society, they seem to be similar. Sex refers to the idea of male or female, whereas

gender refers to masculine or feminine. It is not the creator but the society that changes the entire hypothesis. Society gives the infants the sense of masculinity and femininity. For Beauvoir, gender is “constructed.” She has boldly declared-“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir 14) Femininity does not arise from differences in biology, psychology, or intellect. Rather, femininity is a construction of civilization, a reflection not of “essential” differences in men and women but of differences in their situation. Situation determines the character. Woman is not born fully formed; she is gradually shaped by her upbringing. Biology does not determine what makes a woman a woman—a woman learns her role from man and others in society. Woman is not born passive, secondary, and nonessential, she is socialized to be passive. Every individual self, regardless of gender, is entitled to subjectivity; it is only outside forces that have conspired to rob woman of this right. Destiny is not an enormous force but a human choice, the result of culture and circumstance. Women’s inferior ‘destiny’ is taken for granted from the very beginning of society. Thus, the figure of female presented in the society is not determined by biological, psychological or economic fate. It is the civilization as a whole that creates this figure; intermediate between male and society, which is described as feminine. It is basically the demands that are placed upon boys by his family and society; lead them to evaluate themselves in a different way. They are told that they are men and they have nothing to do with women; thus, they should “leave those women”. The child is persuaded that more is demanded of boys because they are superior. This is done to give him courage for the difficult tasks he has to deal with. Pride in his manhood is thus implanted into him by the society. Thus, de Beauvoir says in Part I, Chapter 2 (The Psychoanalytic Point of View) - “It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life” (Beauvoir 69).

In Book Two, entitled “Women’s Life Today”, Beauvoir has traced female development through couple of formative stages; such as- Childhood, Youth and Sexual Initiation (Part IV). She shows how, at each stage of her upbringing, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetition, and inwardness. Every force in society fuels women’s subjugated position. Denied the possibility of independent work or creative accomplishment, the woman must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, childbearing, and sexual slavishness.

Kate Millett has defined sexual politics as the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. In chapter 2 of *Sexual Politics* entitled Theory of Sexual Politics, Millett declares that family-society-state is interrelated; otherwise, they would fall apart. She believes that the principles of patriarchy appear to be two fold, such as- male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger. This is how; a woman stands at third position in her family. This symbolizes that it does not matter how much effort a woman gives to manage her family, she will always be at the third position in terms of importance.

2.3. Marriage and Motherhood as Conventional Predetermined Goals

Mary Wollstonecraft has emphasized on both marriage and motherhood in her book. She envisions an ideal marriage as relationship based on harmony of friendship, mutual respect, generosity, and compromise from both sides. A husband and wife should be companions and partners; only then they can be better parents to their children. Thus, education is essential for the wives as it may enable her to stand parallel beside their husbands and also be better mothers to their children.

Her position was contrasted to a renowned philosopher Dr. Gregory of her time, According to him, unhappy marriages are often very advantageous to a family, and the neglected

wife is, in general, the best mother; Wollstonecraft urges against such ideas and claims this kind of thinking discourages women to fight for their fundamental rights. Women were inspired to stay busy at home with house hold chores, maintaining husbands and brought up children by such harsh projection of life stated by Dr. Gregory. This is one of the ways to control women.

Simone de Beauvoir has highlighted the most important phase of life for women— Marriage, Motherhood and also From Maturity to Old Age in Part (V). According to de Beauvoir, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (Beauvoir p.445). By this she means, women are always forced to get married from the very beginning of her life and she is forced not only by her parents or family but society. She believes, “In marrying, woman gets same share in the world as her own; legal guarantees protects her against capricious action by man; but she becomes his vassal” (p.449). De Beauvoir has compared women to men’s necessity for a satisfied life. She said, “in agricultural societies a woman co-worker is essential to the peasant; and for most men it is of advantage to unload certain drudgery upon a mate; the individual wants a regular sexual life and prosperity, and the State requires him to contribute to its perpetuation” (p.446). Thus, men need women to satisfy their sexual demands, to take care of them (men), to make their life easier and up bring their children. However, they will never share equality with women. Thus she said, “The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them;” (p.446). De Beauvoir cites the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle’s argument that “we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness”, alongside the view of the thirteenth century Christian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas that woman is an “imperfect man” and “an incidental being” (p.16). Woman is thus defined by male authority and male in general as

subordinate. Even the creation of Eve was secondary to and dependent upon the creation of Adam.

Women's economic solvency is an important pathway for women to come out from the reliance on marriage. Thus, marriage is seen as an uneven partnership between men and women with women taking the lower position. Marriage is also like a financial treaty. Married women have a tendency to become dependent on their husbands and they basically identify their own survival with the prosperity of those who feed them. According to Simone de Beauvoir, marriage offers the following scopes to a woman.

In marrying, woman gets some share in the world as her own; legal guarantees protect her against capricious action by man; but she becomes his vassal. He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name, she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half'... she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required (Beauvoir p.449).

Thus de Beauvoir says that a woman remains "a parasite in her father's home or take some menial position in the home of a stranger" (p.450). Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in *Women and Economic* (1898), insisted that women would not be liberated until they were freed from the 'domestic mythology' of home and family that kept them dependent on men. Gilman's idea dictates the Victorian society; unfortunately things have not changed much as most contemporary societies are patriarchal where the father occupies the superior position. As a result, women remain subordinate, and their limited opportunities for employment put them in a worse situation. Even if a working woman has financial independence, there is no assurance of her psychological, emotional and physical freedom. Hence she remains a subordinate to her husband. Division of labor plays a large part in patriarchal marriage, which is determined by the superior economic position of the male and the inferior economic position of the female. Sexual politics prevails at work, as well as at the family level. The unpaid labor of a woman in the

household is never considered as equal to the labor of a working class man. Married women have to work from sun rise to sun set and as compensation they get a roof over their heads. If a woman seeks her own freedom and independence by educating herself therefore remains unmarried, society would still raise a lot of questions. It is almost like a dilemma from a woman's part when she cannot go beyond the conventional norms and regulations in a marriage, also cannot suppress her inner feelings. Basically, no changes in social relationships take place automatically; it is the women who have to change their condition.

“Theory of Sexual Politics” by Kate Millett states that there are many different spheres of society which collectively illustrate men's material interest in the domination or subjugation of women. Marriage is a mere power play on the man's part. Superiority and inferiority are often displayed in marriage. Women were often educated to become better candidates for suitors. This was the major agenda underlying women's education for a long time. After marriage many women are seen becoming economically dependent on their husbands. As a result the dependency proceeds from one sphere to another and ultimately women become ‘parasites’ on their husbands. Therefore education is important for women's freedom and independence so that they can occupy a separate ground and for that women must be given equal opportunities through the same kind of education men receive.

According to Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, men have been in charge of the whole family for centuries. They were in charge of the family's fortune. Power was transmitted from father to son. Mothers and daughters only have to take care of the house and children. Marriages were a contract between men and women. There is an “exchange of servitude for protection”. When a woman gets married, she has to do domestic service in exchange for financial support given by a man. Men and women's conditions are different because men have power and women

are submitted to them. Women are part of a “minority group,” they are treated like slaves because they do not have a lot of rights and they are not equal to men. Traditionally, women cannot be in charge of the economics of the family. They are treated as “non-persons without legal status.” Millett has realized that the constructs of “female” and “male” are shaped by varying cultural interpretations. “Woman”, “female”, “man” and “male” are always artificial and socially determined.

2.4. Education as a Gender Equalizing Force

Wollstonecraft at the introduction of her book raised a provocative question that either the partial differences between man and women has been created by nature or by civilization. She wrote- “...that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial.”(Wollstonecraft p.11) The major reason for such partial behavior created by civilization according to her observation was due to lack of education. Therefore, in her book she urges for more opportunities for women’s education based on the idea that it would enhance both the morality and integrity of women, men and society in the eighteenth century. According to Wollstonecraft one of the reasons of accepting conventional roles of women from the very early age, might also be the writings of specific men writers, who usual regarded women to be artificial, weak characters and consequently more useless members of the society. The only way to avoid being corrupted by the society, men and politics is to become educated.

Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualist are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only wants slaves and the latter a play-thing. The sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their

lovers, as princes by their ministers, whilst dreaming that they reigned over them (Wollstonecraft pp. 34-35).

Only *education* can produce an individual who can choose to lead a virtuous life governed by reason. She criticizes that the ‘neglected education’ of woman is the major reason for such discrimination. She compared women with flower, who were planted for some purpose-rich a soil, to provide please to its fastidious (owners) eyes and fade with the flow of time. The hidden reason for this kind of approach is the ‘false system of education’ which was basically gathered from the books written by men regarding women considered as ‘subjects’ and ‘subordinate beings’ she mentioned.

Wollstonecraft in *The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered* (Chapter 1) recommends for equal educational opportunities of both men and women based on the fact of their creation and right as human beings. She wrote-

Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow is equally undeniable, if mankind be viewed collectively (Wollstonecraft p.19).

This means both men and women have the possibility of various degrees of reason, knowledge, and virtue. God would not have created women with their capacity for virtuous conduct and spiritual salvation if it were not intended to be as important as male. Therefore, they should both have equal opportunities.

Kate Millett has mentioned that the educational institutions of patriarchy maintain the division between “masculine” and “feminine” by assigning the humanities and certain social sciences to the female and science- technology, business, engineering and so on to the male. Divisions of learning reflect the imbalance causing women’s dependency on man, which patriarchy encourages.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft addresses a male audience. She has clarified men the benefits of education in women's life. Wollstonecraft examines women's role as wife and mother, she accepts her to be culturally appointed to gender roles, but hopes to reform the ideals. An uneducated and fearful person displays negative, unwanted characteristics more often due to their inequality. However, an educated person has the decision-making ability to form opinions from knowledge they have acquired. On the other hand, In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf speaks to a female audience addressing women's status based on opinions in literature, fiction, women's status in the economic sphere and the psychology of anger. Woolf offers women the advice to obtain wealth and a room for themselves to attaining creative freedom. Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf both advocate for balanced standards for men and women and their arguments remain relevant.

Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room of One's Own* has focused on the theory of the relation between gender and writing or woman and fiction. In chapter 3, Woolf introduces a fictional character named Judith Shakespeare, whom she envisioned as William Shakespeare's younger sister. The irony is Shakespeare had a daughter named Judith. Woolf argued what if Shakespeare had a younger sister gifted with equal talented mind to him? However, no Judith Shakespeare had come forward. The reason for this might be that she could not have access to education and ability to explore other writers and also the world. Such Judith were not encouraged nor they were published; her voice in the rapid flow of reality has lost somewhere. According to Woolf, human society has suffered a measurable loss because all of these female voices were silenced as society did not offer them to have that form of expression. The society did not offered them opportunities in order to make better choices for themselves. Woolf had claimed that a woman needs place, freedom of time and financial aid to be able to write fiction.

In this chapter, I have tried to associate a connection among the pioneering feminist theorists Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett. My intention is to portray the key thoughts and arguments of these theorists in broader perspective based on some 'common' universal themes.

Chapter 3

Women's Writing and Feminist Tradition

This chapter will focus on three key issues that the literary texts I have chosen deals with. I have categorized the themes as: firstly- Married Women and Their Positions in Family and Society, secondly An Image of 'Modern Women' and finally Women in History and Present. I will analyze the themes in the light of Adrienne Rich, Doris Lessing and Caryl Churchill. In this chapter, I will further relate the theories discussed in chapter 2 with the literary texts.

3.1. Married Women and Their Positions in Family and Society

Both in contemporary and historical times 'marriage' has been considered as one the most important social institutions for women across many cultures. The benefits of marriage are undeniable, yet in most of the cases the restrictions and bindings imposed on married women are also inevitable. To many feminists as discussed in Simone de Beauvoir, marriage offers female subordination which binds women to household labor, responsibility and obligation. It is one of the most essential topics of concern in women's life as well as in literature. The authors I have chosen through different literary genres have dealt with the issue of women's life after marriage. Adrienne Rich's poem uses the persona of a 'daughter-in-law' to represent the life of a daughter-in-law after marriage. The title 'snapshot' suggests carelessly taken photographs of family members at unguarded moments. Daughter-in-law is a remarkable term. Rich chooses a daughter-in-law as the focus of the poem rather than sister, daughter or any of numerous other female roles because the opposition between a young women and her mother-in-law presents an effective vehicle for comparing the status of women in their respective generations. In representing generational disparity with a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship,

however Rich establishes the connection between her women through their relations with men; namely, the son and husband.

Rich has written poetry that deals with sufferings, liberation and struggle of women for survival. Focusing on her famous poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" in 1963, her realization about the long practiced stereotypical roles of females can be observed. It expresses her interest in resisting and rebelling both as a woman and a poet. She writes of women whose creativity and intellectual gifts have been buried and aborted and whose very being have been dissatisfied and silenced. The speaker in the poem sees herself as a daughter-in-law without a personal identity of dignity. This sense of frustration, guilt and suppressed anger is the major theme of the poem. It also discusses how men have long suppressed women by denying the possibility that they might possess any exceptional talent or passion for anything other than housewives. In this poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" (1963) the drawback of marriage, domesticity and motherhood are projected from Rich's lens.

In this poem she has portrayed a rapid change that takes place in the life of daughter-in-law. She projects her mother-in-law for making her life miserable and also meaningless. Here, Rich has tried to portray the domestic conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, she identifies the generation gap as the reason behind this. The focus of Rich can be related to the theories of Simone De Beauvoir. According to Beauvoir in introduction of *The Second Sex*, the main reason for the existence of patriarchal society is the lack of unity among the women. A woman never supports another woman to prosper in life (Beauvoir xxv).

The poem demonstrates the difference between a woman's life before and after marriage. The daughter-in-law used to be lovely and fresh when she was young, but now her marriage and motherhood have befallen her. She is portrayed as an educated woman but is seen making coffee

or ‘dusting everything and what not every day of life’. Rich uses a simile, “a moldering like wedding cake” here. The woman, who had once a beautiful charming person, finds that a mind is now crumbling and rotting like wedding cake. The simile points out that the women’s mind and the cake are equally fragile and equally vulnerable to decay. The words ‘heavy’ and ‘rich’ carry on the simile. A wedding cake is rich and heavy on the stomach; similarly, the women’s mind is heavy with the responsibility of marriage.

Through the limited life experiences of the daughter-in-law, Rich has criticized the lack of opportunities for women in a patriarchal society. I have mentioned in chapter (2) that Kate Millett has talked about “power-structure relationship” in her book *Sexual Politics*. She has claimed that the unbalanced gender hierarchy has designed the civilization in such a manner that women are positioned at a subordinate rank with lack of opportunities for them to establish themselves.

Rich in the poem suggests that women are outside the center of things as a creature only to love and serve where as men are nature’s ‘superior’ creations like many feminists theorists such as Beauvoir. She states that patriarchal tradition has always seen women in a subordinate position to men. Rich says-

To prise the secrets of the vault? Has Nature shown
Her household books to you, daughter-in-law,
That her sons never saw? (Rich ll. 67-69)

Thus, the core idea of Simone de Beauvoir and Adrienne Rich can be considered similar in the sense that- men by ‘nature’ consider themselves as self or subject and women as object, other or subordinate. While explaining nature, men’s perspective and women’s situation in society, Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* has stated-

No man would consent to be a woman, but every man wants women to exist. 'Thank god for having created woman.' 'Nature is good since she has given women to men.' In such expressions man once more asserts with naive arrogance that his presence in this world is an ineluctable fact and a right, that of woman a mere accident- but a very happy accident (Beauvoir p.173).

Each of Rich's "Snapshots" portrays the power of men to suppress women, whether physically, intellectually or emotionally and offers listeners a snapshot of each woman's story. Hence the poem portrays a very common feature of a daughter-in-law's life after marriage with minimum opportunities and maximum obligations.

Doris Lessing is a prominent female author who has received The Nobel Prize in literature in 2007. In one of her short stories named "To Room Nineteen" Lessing has portrayed Susan in 'To Room Nineteen' who is an intelligent woman; Susan is lost in the chaos of her housework and tries to search for an authentic self that leads to her madness and ultimate suicide. Susan is a middle-aged English woman, whose world revolves around her husband, her four children and her home. Susan and Matthew Rawlings are married in their late twenties and raised four children. Matthew is a subeditor on a large London newspaper and Susan used to work in an advertising firm. For people of their social circle, they are a perfect match who had made all the right choices in life. Susan quits her job for motherhood. Eventually, she starts to feel isolated. Her time was taken up in waiting for the children to come home, consulting with the maid or preparing for dinner. In Lessing words-

Their life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail. Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house, and garden—which caravanserai needed a well-paid job to maintain it. And Susan's practical intelligence for the sake of Mathew, the children, the house and the garden— which unit would have collapsed in a week without her. (Lessing p. 985)

However, she becomes anxious and isolated as her husband began to have an affair. She even forgives her husband's unfaithfulness in marriage. "They put the thing behind them, and

consciously, knowing what they were doing, moved forward into a different phase of their marriage, giving thanks for past good fortune as they did so.” (Lessing p.987) She begins to think about herself and her fortune that marriage has brought to her. She discovers that it is house -works, children and husband that made her lose her self-identity. She realizes to be dependent on others and could not rely on herself any longer.

While discussing Susan’s realization of life, we can look back to Kate Millett’s perception regarding marriage in her “Theory of Sexual Politics” (Millett p. 22). Millett argues that male superiority and female inferiority are often displayed in marriage. She included that after marriage many women are seen to be economically dependent on their husbands and this results in to hierarchy in relationship. These women ultimately can be considered as ‘parasites’ on their husbands according to Millett. In case of Susan, it can be regarded that Susan’s resign from her job has pulled her to a state of losing self-identity. Life in Susan’s case would have been better if she could hold on her career and maintain her family life together.

Susan’s mental pressure of indirectly losing everything has derived her to depression and she wanted to escape. She thought if she could find a shelter in another place, she could be an independent person, so she finally found a room—room nineteen—in Fred’s Hotel. There she found herself again. She found freedom and space in that hotel room. The description of the room by the narrator- “The room was hideous. It had a single window, with thin green curtains, a three-quarter bed that had a cheap green satin bedspread on it, a fireplace with a gas fire and a shilling meter by it, a chest of drawers, and a green wicker armchair.” (Lessing p.980) She did nothing in the room. Nevertheless it gave her a reassuring presence. In it, she found peace and knew that it was here she belonged:

From the chair, when it had rested her, she went to the window, stretching her arms, smiling treasuring her anonymity, to look out. She was no longer Susan

Rawlings, mother of four, wife of Matthew, employer of Mrs. Parkers and of Sophie Traub, with these and those relations with friends, schoolteachers, trade man. She no longer was mistress of the big white house and garden, owning clothes suitable for this and that activity or occasion. She was Mrs. Jones, and she was alone, and she had no past and no future. (Lessing p.981)

Susan's freedom at the hotel room can be associated with Virginia Woolf's thoughts in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf has talked about the necessity of 'space' and 'privacy' in women's life. Therefore, space and privacy can provide mental peace and freedom to a woman.

On the other hand, her husband guessed she was having an affair and tracked her down. She even created a false lover named Michael Plant to meet her husband's expectation. However, slowly this mental pressure drove her to madness. At a certain point she fails to accept the harshness of reality and she commits suicide in a hotel room. The intensity of Susan's inner struggle had placed her life in danger. Susan realizes her life as a desert. As her resentment grew she rejected the prison of marriage and motherhood that have given her a dead end in life. It had become a "desert" for her. Her physical escape to the hotel room was filled with emptiness and further affected her spiritual and mental health which caused her suicide.

The last time when she visits the hotel she spent her time "delightfully, darkly, sweetly, letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river" (Lessing p.984). The ending lines describes the death where "she was quite content lying there, listening to the dark soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river"(Lessing p.984). That final image of the mythological river of forgetfulness is significant. It illustrates Susan's complete loss self-identity to the patriarchal collective in spite of her disillusionment with its ideals. The image reveals Susan's submission to the society which is centered by the patriarchal order.

In this story Lessing focuses on the mid-20th century male dominant British society where women are objects of protection. It demonstrates that there is a definite inequality in power among men and women. Here, though Susan has committed suicide, this symbolizes that she has revolted against her husband as she could not accept the reality of being cheated. Thus, Susan has revolted against patriarchal society; the conventional life of women being dominated by men.

Caryl Churchill is one of the most powerful contemporary feminists. She has mostly worked on political and social problems related to issues on gender. She has acknowledged herself as a feminist writer when she was asked about her writings and feminism.

Churchill concerns on the problems and situations that women have to face all over the world for centuries. She criticizes the institutionalized gender identities, gender roles and sexuality under the dominant ideology, which puts women in a marginalized position so that they are always politically disadvantaged and victimized. The play *Top Girls* deals with these issues. It is very challenging to display these thoughts and ideologies in a genre like Drama. In this play, Churchill makes several experiments on the structure and the dialogues. The unique structure of *Top Girls* violates the linear structure and breaks the chronological order of time setting, place and it uses overlapping and also continuous dialogues.

The major character of the play, Marlene was born in a British working-class family where domestic violence was a routine. She grew up witnessing her mother constantly being abused by her father without the least desire to defend herself or to retaliate against such mistreatment. Her mother's passive acceptance of the abuse suggests that she considers such treatment as natural and common which further encourages her husband to continue with his abuse. Marlene finds her mother's passivity in accepting her 'fate' to be so offensive that it has

left a deep mark in Marlene's mind and she is determined not to let herself in her mother's helpless, weak and submissive position.

Domestic violence in patriarchal society is a very common issue. Men usually torture their wives for various causes. However, the major reason behind this sort of inhumane behavior is the concept of patriarchy or male dominated society.

The issue of child birth is at heart of the play. Marlene gives birth to Angie at a very early age. Her pregnancy threatens her future plans and put her on the edge of repeating her mother's story. Marlene perceived the baby as a threat to her career oriented life. She gives the baby to her elder sister Joyce. Thus, Marlene escapes from the traditional trap of women life in the form of marriage. Despite her determination to be independent and successful Marlene cannot escape the trap of 'the myth of maternal instinct', a concept which believes that "the nurturing behaviors of mother toward their children are determined by biological factors" (Brannon p.200). Through Marlene, Churchill represents the era of the 1980s when the second wave feminism has emerged. Women had to face difficulties in combining motherhood and career together.

The two sisters of the play, Joyce and Marlene have different principles regarding intimate relationship. Joyce is a hard working woman who is handicapped by her low socio-economic status and by an adopted child named Angie. Joyce accepts the patriarchal society structure and the traditional role model. Thus she was married to Frank (who was dependent on Joyce). However, they were separated since he used to have an extra marital affair and Joyce could not accept it. Apart from this they never had a sound relationship in marriage. Joyce's life was full of obligations and responsibility which she regrets. Belonging to a lower middle class background, Joyce desired to lead a better life after marrying Frank; however, her life became more measurable after the marriage. On the other hand, Marlene tries to escape from her regular

fortune and tries to establish her career. Although she had several relationships, she avoided commitment and family obligations or domesticity. She works in “Top Girls Employment Agency” as manager. Her socio-economic condition is solvent.

Thus, the theme of marriage and women’s life after marriage is staged in Churchill’s writing. The role of women in marriage is generally found revolving around the particular subject that is men, domesticity, collective family life, motherhood and obligations. Women writers of the mid-20th century have depicted the force of marriage to focus on women’s life, body and mobility.

3.2. The Image of a ‘Modern Women’

In the poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law” by Adrienne Rich, the daughter-in-law is capable of establishing herself in the modern world however her duty in marriage and obligations are obstacle to the path. The literary text gives an ambivalent picture of a ‘modern woman’ who is educated and solvent but she faces many limitations. Thus, if the responsibilities and obligations are removed from a daughter-in-law of this poem, then she can perform enormously and establish her identity in the modern world.

The characters of the literary texts are ‘modern’ in the sense that they belonged to the changed time of women’s history.

In “To Room Nineteen” the protagonist Susan is an educated woman who once had a sound paid and establish job. She quits her job for husband and family. She had both enough time of her own (room of one’s own) and solvent financial condition (though dependent on her husband) that Virginia Woolf stated very essential for freedom of mind of a woman. However, she goes under a mental trauma due to destruction of faith and a strong feeling of failure. Susan’s

situation can be described by the theory of Marxist feminism that states- private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women.

Hence, it can be assumed that the problem begins when Susan quits her material or economic independence. It means when she has to leave her job for family life. Marriage for her becomes a turning point from equality to subordination. She faces an inferior and subordinate social position. This unequal social position is deep-rooted in her unconsciousness, of which she isn't aware. Marxist feminism considers this economic inequality as the root cause of sexual discrimination. Susan's dependence on husband makes her feel more inferior and this can be regarded as a symbol of patriarchy.

Since her economic dependence has led an inequality and a feeling of inferiority; in the mirror of Susan's life, she could not find the image of herself. That is, she found no visual of self-recognition or identification. Thus, the lack of self-identity has given her the reorganization that all her sacrifices for husband and family were in vain. Her husband has betrayed her for whom she actually rejected all her possibilities.

This short story vividly shows the authentic and common living condition of modern women. Susan similar to other women suffers a lot from the male-centered society. Her suicide attempt is not her failure to admit the reality however it can be considered as a revolt against the male dominated society, as she could not accept the betrayal of her husband for whom she sacrificed every possibility that she had.

Marlene in the play *Top Girls* is perceived to be a career oriented woman in the rapid progressing world. She is very successful in her career and life seems to be very shining for her. However, behind the curtain of a prosperous life, she seems to be very lonely since she sacrificed

her family life for her career. She wanted to be freed from the predetermined future that her life had to offer her. She has succeeded to escape the unwanted life, conversely then why she feels something is missing or guilt while she talks about Angie to Joyce.

3.3. Women in History and in Present

In “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law” Rich imagines the life of another thinking woman, Emily Dickenson and one of her favorites in the fourth stanza. This 19th century isolated American poet lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, all her life. Rich says that in spite of Dickenson’s genius she could not prevent herself from being saddled with the housework like every other woman. One of her poems begins with the line “My Life has stood a loaded gun”. Yet for all her genius, she was surrounded not by fellow poets and writers, but by pans containing boiling jellies, by dusters and by irons— household belongings. This states the ever existing unsuccessful life of women under the pressure of society. According to Rich, “Knowing themselves too well in one another/ (...) Writing, My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun” (40-46).

In *Top Girls* by Churchill explores many aspects of women’s lives across the centuries. Marlene in her dream meets five extraordinary women taken from history and mythology, with whom she celebrates her promotion to a managing director post in the Top Girls employment agency (in reality she fell asleep in front of the television). These five female characters namely Pope Joan, Isabella Bird, Lady Nijo, Dull Gret and Patient Griselda are gathered together to celebrate Marlene’s success in her promotion as a managing director. All of these women are from different time period and place, history and imaginary. They have their own life story and their life experiences “symbolize the exploitation of women throughout the ages, providing the perspective for evaluating the contemporary model of success in Marlene” (Innes p. 465).The

purpose of breaking the linear structure is to gather the six characters and project the situation faced by each of them in their way of surviving inside a patriarchal society.

At the opening scene of the play *Top Girls* there appears five fictional characters from the history. They are presented to celebrate Marlene's promotion as a managing director. The presence of the historical characters in the contemporary setting creates a fairy tale like atmosphere. These fictional characters tell their lives' stories in an unstructured manner. This statement qualifies the fact that women always suffer no matter what century or country they belong to. This is one of the principal themes in Churchill's play. Consequently, she tries to prove it through characters from the past as well as from the present time.

Revisiting and re-imagining women's lives in history are one of the commonest agendas of feminist literary criticism. One of the earliest manifestation of this tendency is in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* where she not only investigates Characters such as Judith Shakespeare, rather describes many women and their writing in different chapters of the text. The purpose of this revisiting is to create a link between women's past, present and future. Caryl Churchill in her *Top Girls* furthers this project of linking women's life across different time.

In her play, Churchill has portrayed the figure of a powerful historic female figure named Margerat Thatcher; she was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and the Leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990. A Soviet journalist called her the "Iron Lady", a nickname that became associated with her uncompromising politics and leadership style.

As Prime Minister, she implemented policies that have come to be known as Thatcherism. She has introduced various opportunities for career oriented women; however, she has less successful to meet the expectation of the lower class women. Her character in this

play, symbolizes that even if a woman is in a powerful position in the society, she does not feel free to stand up for other women. Under the manipulation and pressure of the management system (which is basically male dominated), she is always pushed back.

However, Thatcher has introduced a new world of success in career oriented women's lives. In the play in Act three, the two sisters Marlene and Joyce are seen to hold opposite views about Margaret Thatcher. For Marlene, Thatcher has opened a new era of opportunities. On the other hand, nothing has significantly changed.

Apart from this, Churchill has portrayed two female characters of the modern 20th century. They are called Win and Nell. These two ladies are focused when they were discussing about their weekend experiences. Win said that she has spent the weekend with a man at his home in West Sussex while when his wife was away. On the other hand, Nell has been with two different men. One of them has asked her to marry him but she does not want to be tied down, 'to play house'. Rather she prefers work.

Although the situation during the past and present centuries has changed, lives of women are observed to be dominated and revolve around male and patriarchal society. To sum up it can be said that all of the characters of the play *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill have several similarities in a sense that they all have experiences dealing with the melancholy of living in a patriarchal society and are victimized by the system despite their effort to defeat the system. All of them have tried to beat the system either by adopting what are considered to be masculine or feminine individually, yet all of them are trapped in the social constriction of feminine traits or betrayed by their own fortune.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Feminism can be described as a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of woman's life by defying the conventional norms of the society based on male dominance. Feminism stands for the liberation of women from the shackles, restrictions, customs and norms of the society. It is an ideology that demands the equality between men and women in moral, social, political and economic fields. The objective of this movement is the creation of a new identity for women and making them aware of their rights.

Over ages many changes have taken place regarding women's rights and freedom. Now-a-days, it has been very impressive that women are found to be career oriented and self reliant. Even though career oriented women, at the end of the day are commonly seen to manage household, family and responsibilities. It is not a comparison but according to reality, a man in general does not have to maintain his house hold works, children and feminine responsibilities after coming from their office or business institution. They can come back home and only relax, they will always portray the same impression that he earns for the family and it is always the most difficult task and therefore, he should have all the authority to dominate of the family. It never matters that the woman being a service holder is doing the same, in fact more. Thus, the main focuses of this thesis is to analysis the situation of women in different eras and see if there is technically any change in their mode of life.

In order to sum up, reference of a very relevant feminist writer of the Eastern World (India) can be highlighted who has talked about gender equality throughout her career. She is Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932). During her time, the Indian society was fast changing under the leadership of a new patriarchy, formed by the English-educated middle class. The

emerging middle class also led the anti-colonial nationalist movement. While portraying the consequences of gender inequality, she similar to Mary Wollstonecraft firstly mentioned low participation of women in the field of education as one of the major reasons for gender inequality which in the long run undermines social development. Begum Rokeya has mentioned the consequences of gender inequality in many parts of her writing. However, these have been best demonstrated in her texts titled *Stree Jatir Abanati* and *Ardhangi*.

In *Stree Jatir Abanati*, Rokeya notes that due to the existing gender inequality women do not get equal opportunity to develop and explore themselves in the fields of education and work. Therefore, they stopped participating in practical fields and as a result, they could not progress to a similar extent like men, and instead of being companions of men, they became their slaves. She further mentioned that over time women minds have become enslaved. Rokeya says that having acted as slaves for a long time, women have become accustomed to slavery. In this way women's 'mental faculties—self-reliance or courage—nipped in the bud over and over again for the lack of exercising them, now perhaps do not even germinate.' Rokeya mentions that the more men offered support, the more incompetent women became which could be compared to the beggars of the country. Like them now women 'do not hesitate to accept charity, having lost' their 'sense of self-respect.'

Begum Rokeya has urged that gender inequality ultimately ruins the potential progress of the society because women cover half of the social body. She mentions that the importance of men and women are equal according to her reference to the needs of a child, she says that 'a child needs his father and mother equally.' The social and economic consequences of gender inequality are further echoed in *Ardhangi*. Firstly, it has a direct connection with women's education. Gender inequality hampers women's education resulting into the enslaved or

uneducated mind of women. Secondly, a husband cannot be happy with a wife with an enslaved or uneducated mind, because this wife cannot be a good life partner or better half. Rokeya comments that in order to be a good partner of a husband, a wife should have equal knowledge and qualifications. Thirdly, a family cannot make good progress if the husband's mind is enlightened and the wife's is enslaved. And finally, since family is the basic unit of a society, with a wife having an enslaved or uneducated mind, a society cannot make progress.

Therefore, from every perspective of life a woman needs freedom of mind and the only key to achieve this freedom is through the light of *education*. There is no alternate to education. Only education can embrace and enlighten the life of women. Besides, the society also has to cooperate otherwise there will be no progress.

In this thesis, I have focused on feminist theories and female writers who have written about women's life from different perspectives. Though they individually belong from various time frames, they have portrayed the similar issues that women are facing for ages. The objective of this thesis is to develop a dialogue among the feminist theorists and the three literary writers. It aims to show how women since the beginning of civilization are subjects of subjugation and suppression by the patriarchal society. The impact of this practice is so immense that even now in the 21st century after being very much conscious regarding feminism, women cannot break down the shackles that the patriarchal society offers. Thus, my thesis intends to portray the reality of our society under the curtain of some legendary feminist theorists and writers of first and second wave of feminism.

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