

Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman

A

Thesis

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Certificate by Adviser

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman” submitted to the Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of original and independent research work conducted by Sundus Quyoom (11412879) under my supervision and guidance. The thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma/associateship/fellowship or any other similar title to any candidate by any university.

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Declaration

I do hereby acknowledge that:

1. The thesis entitled “Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman” is a presentation of my original work completed under the kind guidance of my adviser Dr. Ajoy Batta. All efforts have been made to incorporate the opportune suggestions provided by the Departmental Doctoral Board of Lovely Professional University, Phagwara.
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Introduction

Women have been struggling with the issue of gender discrimination for last few centuries. Feminism is not a new term and the struggle for women's emancipation started long back in late 19th century and the early 20th century. Since then the fight is going on as women have not achieved their emancipation yet. Women from their childhood are dependent on male counterparts who belong to their family: before marriage on their father, after marriage on their husband and after the death of husband on their son which makes them to believe that they are an inferior sex. Women are subjugated on various grounds especially on religion, race, and culture. Religion is considered to be an important part of one's life and usually, religion is also manipulated to subjugate women. On contrary, according to an overlooked opinion religion has always supported women empowerment. The tradition of women oppression has been a part and parcel of society which makes women believe that they are inferior to men in all the aspects and all spheres of life. The women have accepted this oppression as their fate and they hardly speak against it. They face different types of oppression across the globe among which the most common ones are sexual harassment and domestic violence. Sexual harassment is considered to be a crime which is committed in almost all parts of the world. The harassment leaves a deep scar on the minds of the women. They become so helpless that they lose all the confidence and become completely dependent on men. Sexual harassment at work place is also one of the commonest crimes of our society. Women hardly get the courage to work in a place crowded by men. It is also believed that sexual harassment is done to women not only by unknown person but by a known perpetrator. Marital rape is also one kind of sexual harassment which is

very common among masses. Women are taught to devote their entire lives to their husband and are prepared to satisfy their husband in any possible condition. Most of the men hardly care about the pleasure of women during sexual intercourse. Their main concern is to satisfy their own sexual appetite and for that, they don't even care for the feelings of women. This marital rape is a serious issue and women across the globe should be made aware of that. Women consider their husbands no less than demi-gods and they consider it mandatory to satisfy their husbands. So they take marital rape as a normal sexual intercourse between a husband and his wife and don't report against it.

Domestic violence, on the other hand, is also a serious issue which is prevalent around the globe and at an alarming pace. Organisations like United Nations Organisation (UNO) and World Health Organisation (WHO) have passed some reports appeals like “I Leave No One Behind: End Violence Against Women and Girls”, “Ending Violence Against Women” and others which respond to the statistics of domestic violence. This is one of the biggest causes that UNO and WHO are dealing with and they are trying their level best to eradicate it from our society. This crime is really a serious crime as it harms the women not only physically but also mentally. They develop an inferiority complex and finally get into a state of depression. This results in the loss of their identity and self.

The title of this thesis is *Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman*. This research work proposes to explore the discrimination done to women regardless of their region, religion, race, and culture. The present research explores that a woman mostly suffers irrespective of race, region, culture and religion. This present study focuses on five different books namely *A Girl is*

Half-formed Thing by Eimear McBride, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa and *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro. All these books depict five different nations viz. Ireland, Egypt, India, Nigeria and Canada with their own traditions and cultures. The writers have beautifully portrayed the subjugation of women in their particular regions. All these writers focus on some important issues prevalent in almost all the societies which subjugate women.

Chapter 1 entitled *Brief Candle* deals with the brief history of feminism in relation to race, region, and religion. It will talk about the physical and the psychological pain caused due to gender discrimination. Further, it focuses on different theories of feminism and will draw the biographical sketches of the writers with a brief introduction to their works considered for the research.

Chapter two entitled “Ireland and Misogyny: A Study of Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*” focuses on the plight of Irish women. It is the journey of an unnamed narrator from womb to her adulthood. Eimear McBride has talked bluntly about the sexual politics in this book. She has focused on themes like male child favouritism at home, child rape, sexual violence, self quest, fragmented identity which in true sense not only speak about the unnamed narrator but to the women across the globe. It seems like the writer has intentionally kept the narrator unnamed to universalise the pain of girls.

Chapter three entitled “Women and Indian Tradition in Sudha Koul’s *The Tiger Ladies*” focuses on the agony of Indian women. This novel is a memoir and it reflects the story of the writer and other ladies of Kashmir. India is well enriched with customs and traditions and Sudha Koul has shown the effect of tradition on

women. Sudha Koul focuses on themes like a barrier to women education, marriage, lack of opportunities for women, the plight of married women and widows and myths and folktales designed to oppress women. Koul strongly opposes to the ill treatment given to the newly wedded brides. She shows that the women by her in-laws is usually considered to be an outsider and gets the entry to house only after the birth of a son who carries the lineage of his father forward. This novel also shows a dark aspect of an old practice of Indian society by which the widows were not allowed to socialize and were instead kept inside a bungalow. The widows were secluded from the society and had to live a lonely life. But, this novel is a great motivational book as Sudha Koul traces that the bungalow has now been converted into a college now. She states that women empowerment is going on and women should understand their value and work in order to attain their emancipation. Koul talks about certain influences in her life that made her a successful person like Mrs. Indira Gandhi who motivated her to the extent that Sudha Koul became the first I.A.S officer of J&K state, India. Other influences in her life were Habba Khatoon and Lal Ded who struggled a lot in their lives but still fought for their aim and are now known for their beautiful poetry and humanity. Koul is against all those folktales and myths whose narrative carry the element of women's oppression to she urges the female readers to stop enjoying such myths and folktales.

Chapter four entitled "Culture and Africa: A Study of Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different*" will focus on the plight of Nigerian women. This chapter examines the themes that dominate women in Nigerian society like education barrier, early marriage, women employment, love and betrayal and plight of married women. This novel revolves around three friends namely Rose, Dora and Agnes who face struggle

in their lives but finally get empowered as they realize their worth. Nigerian society has always been a patriarchal society which is enriched with diverse culture and tradition. This chapter will focus on the impact of tradition and culture on the women oppression.

Chapter five entitled “Egypt and Women Objectification: A Study of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*” aims to study the plight of Egyptian women with special regard to religion and tradition. Nawal El Saadawi in this book talks about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), barrier to women education, early marriage, Mehr (marriage gift), prostitution and women employment. Female Genital Mutilation is one such evil practice in the society which is carried out in the name of Islam. The research explores that it has no connection with or roots in Islam. It is just a tradition carried out in the name of faith. Saadawi portrays that women’s education is still a unachieved goal in Egypt and women are usually prepared to get married as soon as possible. The writer shows that marriage in Egypt is no less than a contract as the parents sell their daughters to the wealthy person for the sake of Mehr. Mehr according to Islam belongs solely to women but mostly women are not given any part of it. Domestic violence is a universal crime and Saadawi focuses on this issue also. Saadawi didn't consider prostitution as something bad but through the character of Firdaus elevated it like any other profession.

Chapter six “Canada and Women Oppression in Alice Munro’s *The Beggar Maid*” puts light on the oppression of Canadian women. Western women are often considered to be free from male subjugation but Munro in this book portrays the real picture of the western society. *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro is a Canadian girl's

story who dreams to have a successful life but all she got was struggle, compromises, and sacrifices. Through the character of Rose, Munro focuses on certain barriers of women in Canadian society which oppress her. The main themes of this novel are domestic violence, sexual harassment, the life of a lonely girl, women's life after divorce, love and betrayal. Munro observes that sexual harassment is still present in Canada. Rose experienced it twice in which once she experienced it from a man who called himself the man of the church. This chapter will put special stress on the life of a lonely girl in the city. Munro has bluntly shown that the life of a girl in the city is very dangerous even in the western society. So, the writer through *The Beggar Maid* portrayed the real picture of Western society where women are still considered as secondary sex.

The main objectives of the present research are:

- To investigate whether the women belonging to five different parts of the world representing five completely different culture, language, race, religion, and nation, share the same pain or not.
- To universalise the concept of feminism and draw parallels between oriental and occidental perspectives on feminism by focusing upon the issues of women from five different parts of the world.
- To analyse the theological concept of feminism in order to arrive at a better understanding of cultural codes that play a significant role in moulding the psyche of the masses and to gain a better understanding of the modes in which theological principles or concepts are misinterpreted in the subjugation of women.

The methodology selected for the current study is Comparative and Analytical. Different feministic theories were incorporated to understand the psychology of different women in these novels. This present study will also focus on different theological theories given by religions so as to better understand the social and cultural lives of these women who hail from different religions and yet have one thing in common that they all are regarded as weak. All these methods are appropriate for the present study. For the typos and formatting of the entire dissertation, MLA handbook 7th edition has been considered.

In the entire research journey of *Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman*, resources were accumulated from different libraries like that of Punjab University, University of Jammu, Kashmir University, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla and Women Studies Centre, Bangalore. A consistent search was done using online resources available and assistance was taken from the already published research articles published in indexed journals and literary magazines.

The scope of this research is its contribution to the society in the field of feminism. It will help the readers to have a better understanding of feminism with special regards to Race, Region, and Religion. This present work will help women to be aware of the status and rights which religions have bestowed upon them. It will draw parallels between occidental and oriental perspectives of feminism as it focuses on the western country as well as Third World Countries. The researcher has tried to bring feminism at a global platform. This research has opened gates for different research to be conducted on feminism at universal level with special regards to race, region, and religion.

Transcending Race, Region and Religion: The Pain of Being Born a Woman



Eimear McBride (1976- Present)



Sudha Koul (1947- Present)



Flora Nwapa (1931-1993)



Nawal El Saadawi (1964- Present)



Alice Munro (1931- Present)

“Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience”- Mary Wollstone craft

Chapter One

Brief Candle

Women are an inseparable part of the human race which vitalizes the process of nurturing the future generations of humanity. In spite of playing such a significant role both inside and outside their homes, women are still regarded as the weaker sex. In every part of the world, women face a common problem based on gender discrimination. No matter what the culture or background is, they all are commonly referred to as weak and secondary to their male counterparts.

“One is not born a woman, but becomes one” (Beauvoir 301). This famous quotation from *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir explains that the very concept of being a woman is a male concept. The writer explains how a woman should be or how she should behave in the society is only defined by the man. The inequalities between women and men are based on the patriarchal power formed by the males.

Feminism according to *Merriam Webster Dictionary* is defined as “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” (“Feminism”). It simply means that women should be treated equally on all grounds i.e. political, economic and social. This definition is also supported by Elinor Burkett and Laura Brunell who define it as “the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes” (Burkett and Brunell n.p.).

Saly Hanger, Tuana Nancy and O’Connor Peg in their article “Topics in Feminism” explore that it is both an intellectual and the political movement that ask for the justice for the women and end of sexism everywhere” (Hanger, Nancy and

Peg n.p.). They assert that this movement demand justice in all fields including social, political, economic and cultural grounds.

Feminism started long back in the 18th and 19th century when the two key philosophers Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) published “The Subjection of Women” (Essay) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, respectively. However, the term was first used in the 19th century by the socialist Charles Fourier whereas Mary Wollstonecraft is considered as the mother of feminism and her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is often considered as the first feminist work. She focussed on the rights and the status of the woman against the patriarchal society. John Stuart Mill in his essay “The Subjection of Women” stated that women subjugation is the main reason for the hindrances to the human improvement. John Stuart Mill moved further for the emancipation of women by presenting the first women’s petition for the vote and made amendments to the 1867, Reform Bill in favour of women. But the seed of feminism was sown long back when Simone de Beauvoir wrote that the first time the woman who took up her pen in the defence of her sex was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieud'Amour (Epistle to the God of Love)* in the 15th century. Margaret Walters in her book *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, states that the most famous work of Pizan was *City of Ladies*, where she criticizes those learners and famous books which insult women and their behaviours. So in a way the struggle of women intentionally or unintentionally started long back.

The present research will explore the fact that a woman suffers the same pain of gender discrimination regardless of race, region, religion or culture. It’s not only physical pain, but it’s the emotional pain as well. It is a well known fact that the

emotional or psychological pain is more dangerous than the physical pain which in a broader sense means women are subjugated not only physically, but emotionally also and this psychological part haunts them throughout their lives . They cannot come out of this quagmire as they are made to believe that they are inferior. This emotional aspect makes women experience low self esteem, anxiety and depression, passivity and helplessness with post traumatic stress disorder and suicidal feelings. This all can lead to their fractured identity and they live a life having no meaning. For their entire lives, mostly women are dependent on the males they belong to, before marriage on their fathers and after that on their husbands. When it comes to female subjugation then hardly the class, colour and religion matter, the only thing which matters is that she is a woman.

This research work focuses on the subjugation and pain of females transcending all the boundaries of race, region and religion. The term ‘transcending’ has been deliberately used which means beyond or to surpass, to explore the pain which bridges the women across the world for just being a woman. It’s a well known fact that the pain of an African woman may differ from an Indian woman or Arab woman or a European woman. The domination of the woman differs and varies according to the regions, races and cultures like a white woman is considered to be more free, Arab woman is always considered to be dominated by the tyrant and stereotypical image of their counterparts, Africans are considered to be dominated triply – first by white males, then white female and lastly by a black male, and to talk about Indian then the domination is more based on culture and tradition. So, is there anything which actually connects these women across the globe? In every part of the world, women face this problem of gender discrimination. In this dissertation,

sincere efforts were made to explore this pain of gender discrimination which is suffered by women across the globe. This research work focuses on five different novels belonging to five different parts of the world, representing different cultures, religion, region and race. The five novels are *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (Irish writer), *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir: A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul (Indian writer), *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa (Nigerian writer), *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi (Egyptian writer), and *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro (Canadian writer).

No matter of what race or region a woman belongs to, she has to suffer surpassing all the racial and regional boundaries. 'Race' according to *Merriam Webster* dictionary means, "a category of Human kind that shares certain distinctive physical traits" ("Race"). In this research, the interest is in four important races where a woman is suffering viz. The white race, (Canadian and Irish), Nigerian, Indian and Egyptian.

Secondly this research work has laid emphasis on Region; 'Region' according to *Merriam Webster* dictionary means, "a broad geographical area distinguished by similar features" ("Region"), and in this research, the focus is upon five different geographical regions viz. - Ireland, Nigeria (Africa), Kashmir (India), Ontario (Canada) and Cairo (Egypt) where in this research has explained every aspect of a suffering women.

Both Race and Region are correlated as the race is inhabited in a particular region. Race and Region cannot be explained separately so country wise races has been explained.

Ireland or Irish Eire or the country of the Western Europe occupies five sixth part of the western Island of the British Isles. It is very famous for its wealth and folktales. Robert Walter states that “Although Ireland is now both urbanized and Europeanized, its culture retains many unique characteristics and social traditions that largely derive from and celebrated the country’s rural past” (Walter n.p.).

In a fact sheet “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment key focus of Irish aid”, Minister Flangan states that women empowerment is very important for a sustainable nation. “Empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality are critical in tackling maternal and child mortality, reducing power and ensuring that countries develop sustainability” (Flangan n.p.). The fact sheet explored that Ireland is working in favour of women empowerment in every possible way so as to end the gender violence in Ireland.

A report by UN Women “Ireland Vows Gender Equality a Foreign Policy Priority in the Push for the Sustainable Development Crises” explores the involvement of Ireland towards the women empowerment. It asserts that “Ireland remains firmly dedicated to implementation of Un Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.” (UN Women n.p.). The report argues that Ireland has started the Second Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2015-18).

Even though, such measures are taken to support women empowerment in Ireland, still women suffer discrimination and oppression in this country. Thomas Wilson in an article “Countries and their Cultures” talks about the prevalence of gender inequality in Ireland. “While gender equality in the workplace is guaranteed exist between the genders in such areas as pay, access to professional achievement,

and parity of esteem in the workplace” (Wilson n.p.). He states that there are job distinction between men and women and gender bias pervades in the institution of government, education and religion. Wilson explores that women empowerment is growing in this country but still there are certain obstacles in its way.

India also welcomed the wave of feminism and many Indian writers came forward to write about their struggle and condition. But this feminism is still not prevalent in all parts of India. The women of India had to struggle a lot. During the colonial rule in India, the females were the easy targets. As Gayatri Spivak says, “Subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 83). The history of Indian feminism can be divided into three phases which started during the British colonial rule when the Europeans started raising their voices against Sati Pratha. It is a ritual of Hindus in which the wife is burnt alive in the pyre of her husband. It was done only if husband was dead, then wife was not allowed to live any longer and she was burnt, but on the other hand, if the wife dies before her husband then husband didn’t have to face this and he was allowed to live his life happily. The second phase is when Gandhi incorporated women’s movement into the Quit India Movement and as a result independent women’s organization merged and finally the post independence phase, which focused on the fair treatment of women at home after marriage, in the workplace and she was given a right to political party. Even after making such good steps towards women emancipation, still women of India has not attained that equality. Women education is a big problem in most parts of India. Female infanticide is a crime in India, but still it is carried out not only by the illiterates but even the so called literates. And if talk about the writings of the female writers in India then they can write with free will. If

anybody writes bold and blunt then she is condemned. The best example can be of Kamala Das, who tried to write whatever has happened in her life, but she was considered to be a bold and blunt writer. Apart from those still in India, there are great writers like Kamini Roy, Mahasweta Devi, Anita Desai, and so on.

Historically, there are certain leaders in India who helped to give equal status to women, when she was being ridiculed and sidelined. Among them the most prominent were Guru Nanak Dev, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (the founder of Arya Samaj) Mahatma Gandhi, etc. In an article entitled “Women Issue and Arya Samaj” Indu Bala discusses the steps taken by the Arya Samaj for the emancipation of women. She states that Arya Samaj did a lot for the equality of sexes and made this point as their basic aim, so she writes, “the major concerns and social ideals of Arya Samaj are based on equality of the sexes, absolute justice and fair play between men and women and equal opportunities for all according to their karma and merit” (Bala 549). She asserts that Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of this Samaj did everything to find the solution for the women education. She further expresses that Dayanand Saraswati gave women the main authority in domestic matters and advocated equal rights to both the sexes in relation to education, marriage and even in the matter of property. She also explains that not only education, but Arya Samaj fought for many evils prevalent in the society regarding women like widow re-marriage, child marriage, Purdah system and many more. She argues that Arya Samaj was in favour of the marriage of widows. “The Arya Samajists published and distributed tracts and pamphlets and created greater awareness and approval of re-marriage of widows was not in contravention of Vedic tradition” (Bala 550). She further states that besides

fighting for the re-marriage of the widows, Arya Samaj opened many widow Ashrams in Lahore, Mathura and Haridwar where these widows were given shelter, food and re-married. For women's education, they opened Kanya Mahavidhalaya on June 14, 1886. After this school, they opened many schools like Arya Putri Pathshala, Abohat (1903-04), Arya Girls Middle School, Moga (1921) etc.

This present research will be focussing on Kashmir region from India. Kashmir has always been a controversial yet an important state of India. Kashmir is known all over the world for its enchanting beauty.

Who has not heard of the vale of Cashmere,

With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,

Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear,

As the love-lighted eyes that hang over their wave. (Moore, "Lalla Rookh" 295).

Women empowerment in Kashmir is at a low ebb and the plight of women there is also very pitiable. In an article "Women Education in India; with Special Reference to Jammu and Kashmir", Ruchi explains the importance of women education for the development of the nation. She gives a reference of University Grants Commission which states that if general education has to be restricted to men or women, then women should be given the opportunity as by educating women, it will be passed on to the next generation. She also gives reference from the ancient times when women were given education equal to men. She explains that Brahmin girls were taught Vedic knowledge where as Kshatriya girls were taught how to use

sword, bow and arrow. She then explores some of the famous Vedic educated women such as Maitreyi, Gargi, Ghosa and Sulabha. She further states that the women education of today's world is degrading because of the illiterate parents especially the mother. She argues that J&K state is lagging behind in women education. She then, explains the importance of women education not only for the women empowerment but also for other social concerns like population control, health care, education of children and many other factors. She states that steps are taken to encourage girls for education by the Education Commission of India (1964-65) as quoted by her:

The commission emphasized on the following `points:

- (a) Appointing women teachers.
- (b) Popularising mixed primary schools; and opening separate school for girls at the higher primary stage, wherever possible and demanded.
- (c) Providing free books and writing material and if needed clothing also. (Ruchi 104)

Ruchi explains that even though such facilities are provided but still women education remains a barrier in Kashmir.

In another article "Working Women in Kashmir: Problems and Prospects", Aneesa Shafi explores the role of Indian woman particularly that of a Kashmiri woman. She states that the role of women is undergoing changes with time and the changes are taking place in different societies. According to her, the role of woman is changing from one society to another. She further argues that Kashmir is also

undergoing such dramatic change. She argues that Kashmir is a patriarchal and patrilocal society which is undergoing rapid transformation. She examines that the Kashmiri women has no role outside their home related to the economic condition of the family. But the women of lower caste and class were traditionally working outside the home to feed their family. She further asserts that Kashmir like other Indian states bound the role of women on traditions and religious ethos. So she was not allowed to work outside and remain all her life inside the four walls of the house depending on the male for the financial aid. And moreover, if a woman wants to work outside her home, then she was considered to be morally bad. "In the past century and early part of this century, woman's removal from the outside world of work and concentration in the home was seen as reflection of what was 'right' and 'good'" (Shafi 2). She then examines the role of Indian male to that of Indian female. She asserts that the status of the Indian woman has been always lower or inferior to that of her counterpart. She related this lower status to the economic system which assigns a secondary status to the Indian females. She further expresses that Indian tradition gives high regards to females, but the actual condition is totally opposite. "In India there has always been a great discrepancy between the idealized notions of the role of women and the real life situations women found themselves in from time to time" (Shafi 5). She asserts that this lower status of women in India is due to lack of education, child marriage and many other factors. She further argues that woman in Kashmir is ruled by the family. She even points out on the social, political and economic developments in India have an impact on the overall situation of Kashmir. She later examines the Freedom Movement in Kashmir, where all the Kashmiri women in the valley participated against the feudal rule of Maharaja

Dynasty. “It was essentially in the context of that movement that women in Kashmir were provided equal rights, which were enshrined in the Naya Kashmir Program in 1983 that guided all Post- Independence period governments in J&K state” (Shafi 14-15). She further explains that after this focus on women was shifted and free education was given to all the girls from primary to university level and they were assured of government jobs.

Nigeria is located on the western coast of Africa. There are hundreds of languages spoken in this country and it is diverse in its culture and traditions. It is the most populated country of Africa and also economically the strongest as well.

Nigeria is mostly considered to be patriarchal and women subjugation is prevalent in this country. In an article “Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Implications for Counselling” Aihie Ose defines domestic violence as an abuse done to anyone that causes pain and distress. “It includes battering of intimate partners and others, sexual abuse of children, marital rape and traditional practices that are harmful to women” (Ose 1). He states that this domestic violence is not restricted to a particular regional, racial, educational or economical background but it is prevalent everywhere. But in Nigeria, the rate is at high level. He gives reference from UNESCO report 2001 by stating that the beating of wife and children is regarded as a sign of discipline. Ose explores that the main cause of this domestic violence is the economic dependence of a wife on her husband which develops the inferiority complex. He further explains that this beating of wife in Nigeria is considered to be a private affair and is kept shielded from the society and moreover, nobody interferes in it. He gives a reference from the Afrol News, 2007 that this non interference creates a silence among the victim to accept it without any objection

and as a result this crime is increasing at a very high rate. He later explains that this violence has not only physical effect but emotional also which leads to low self esteem of the women.

In another article “Women, Education and Work in Nigeria” Edlyne E. Anugwom explains the importance of women education especially in Nigeria so as to contribute in the world economy. Anugwom asserts that besides working in the kitchen, women in Nigeria are very productive in the economic development of its society. She further expresses that the women fail to help in the economic production is due to the constraint of education. According to her women have realised the importance of education and now certain private organisations such as NGO’s which are motivating and encouraging girls for education by starting certain schools and colleges. According to Anugwom, education enhances the women labour production. She focuses on the importance of not only for the labour thing but to broaden the experience of women which paves a way to the new opportunities and resources. She stresses on a fact that even though a women are qualified but still they will be found in the kitchen after the marriage because their husbands won’t allow them to do job. She is strongly against this notion and wants to end as soon as possible for the empowerment of not only women but for the nation also.

Egypt (Misr in Arabic) often called as the Arab Republic of Egypt has been a country with a rich history of civilization. The major geographical areas of Egypt are the Nile River and the Suez Canal. The culture and tradition of Egypt are very diverse since the ancient times, with the Pharaonic and Islamic period. Basically, Egypt is a part of an Arabic speaking community of about 250 million people spreading from Morocco to Oman. Molefi K. Assante in her book *Culture and*

Customs of Egypt, asserts that religion is the most important part in the life of an ordinary Egyptian. She argues that religion is the thing which starts with the waking up of the Egyptians till they sleep. She states, “Nothing is untouched by religion. Thus, the political, economic, and cultural life of the people is impacted and influenced by the religious outlook” (Assante 63). She further argues that Islam became the official religion of Egypt after Arabs conquered Egypt and built the first mosque in the country. To talk about the modern Egypt, Molefi asserts that it is essentially made up of the Islamic culture with the limited or hardly any regard for the ancient religion of the Pharaohs. She argues that with the coming of Islam in the country, the situation changed and both men and women started cherishing equal rights. She further expresses that:

The social relationships between women and men were not tyrannical. Women were generally well treated and had the privilege of owning property. Furthermore, they gave consent to marriage contracts, and could add the condition of reserving their right to divorce their husbands. They could re-marry when widowed or divorced. (Assante 66)

Assante states that Egypt like other Islamic countries also follows Shari’a which means the law based on the Qur’an and the teachings and interpretations of Muhammad (pbuh). She asserts that “according to the believers, the Shari’a law covers all aspects of human life, although there are some provisions that might be augmented from customary law” (Assante 72).

Kathryn M. Yount in an article “Like Mother, Like Daughter? Female Genital Cutting in Minia Egypt” states that the female circumcision is prevalent in Egypt like other Middle East countries. She asserts that, “qualitative data suggests that ideologies of femininity, pressure to conform to behaviours characterizing womanhood, and constraints to other opportunities perpetuate women’s support for female genital cutting in Minia, Egypt” (M.Yount 336). She then asserts that the education of women in Egypt is never taken positively in Egypt, but instead the female genital circumcision is taken as positive. She expresses that if a mother instead of giving education to her daughter supports female genital mutilation is regarded very high in the eyes of the society. She further asserts that the support for female genital circumcision is widespread in Egypt and she holds the view that if Egypt has to be modernized than it has to take active part in this movement.

In another article “Egyptian Feminism: The Effect of the State, Popular Trends and Islamism on the Women’s Movement in Egypt”, Kristina Nordwal talks about the growth of Egyptian feminism. She states that the women in Egypt got the right to vote in 1956. She explores that it is very difficult to categorise the concept of feminism in Egypt. However, there are three basic types which have been identified. The first type of feminism which she discusses is the ‘Secular Feminism’ which is related to the western concept of feminism which believes that every woman should have the basic rights and religion should be kept aside. The second type of feminism according to her is a ‘Muslim Feminism’ which is not related much with the western concept of feminism. She comments:

This group attempts to achieve greater rights and autonomy for women through an Islamic framework, but continues women to work

outside the home, to focus on their careers, and to choose their own husbands. It tries to move beyond the traditionalist interpretations of Islam in order to justify women's equality through a Qur'an lens. (Nordwal 5)

This means that this type of feminism is actually working for the women under the lens of Qur'an and allows women to work outside their home and choose their husbands. It is against the male interpretation of Qur'an and favours the women empowerment according to the Qur'an.

The third category of feminism is called as 'Islamist Feminism' which is considered to be a very ambiguous term. The society mostly believes that Islam and feminism cannot go together. She explores that Islamist feminists believe that "women are oppressed because they try to be equal to men" (Nordwal 6). This type of feminism is against the western concept of feminism as according to them; it makes women immoral and fight for what is not right for them. In spite of so many restrictions and strictness, this Islamist feminism is not against the women's education or marrying for love. So, in a way feminism in Egypt has started and women are fighting for their rights. Kristina Nordwal concludes her article by stating that the feminism in Egypt saw a very long and colourful tradition with the beginning of the 20th century.

Canada is located in the Northern portions of the continent of Northern America. The most used languages of Canada are English and French. Canada is culturally very diverse as in 1890's, it started inviting people from all over the world to settle in the country to help it grow and develop. Usually, it is said that men and

women in Canada share the same rights and status. But it is not true in all its sense. As far as the political scenario is concerned, again like other countries the male rule, excluding women and letting them to believe that they are inferior. Women in Canada live below the poverty line; most of them live as a single parent and work with fewer wage.

In a fact-sheet entitled “Violence against Women in Canada” Marie Sinha gives an account of the causes and effects of the violence against women in Canada. She states that violence against women is still a very sensitive issue prevalent in Canada. She explores that the actual cases of this violence is much more than what is recorded by the police. She explores a valid point that this domestic or spousal violence is not affecting the girls mentally or physically but its more about their safety and well being. This domestic violence actually disturbs the mental health of the women. She explains that the reason why women are not reporting these issues to the police is because they are made to believe that it is a personal issue and should be kept private instead of publicising them and in other cases the victim doesn’t want to involve herself with the police and other stuff. This article provides an insight of the causes and the effects of this domestic or spousal violence.

Meg Luxton in her article “Feminism as a Class Act: Working- Class Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Canada” states that one of the major breakthrough in the history of Canadian feminism took place in 1996 when the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) organized a National Women’s March against the poverty. The march was huge with almost 50,000 women who visited about 90 communities. This is considered to be the largest women’s demonstration in Canadian history. Meg

expresses that this march was based on the demands which were based on the situations of the working class and poor women. She then gives the reference of NAC President Sunera Thobani who declared, “Women’s dreams of equality can never be realised in a society polarised between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, where the poorer regions of the country are marginalised, racism grows, and the most vulnerable members of our community are abandoned” (Luxton 64). Meg later argues about the situation of the working women in Canada. She asserts that at work places women suffered discrimination and harassment. More than men, women also had to juggle the often conflicting demands of both their paid employment and domestic, family and community responsibilities, especially for child care. This article clearly shows that Canada, which is considered to be very free and neutral against women, is in reality totally opposite to it.

Transcending religion means that no matter of which religious community a woman belongs to, she still has to suffer. Feminist across the globe hold the view that religion is mostly interpreted according to the convenience of men to subjugate the women. But in reality, almost all the religions talks in favour of women. For example, in most of the religions, God is considered to have no shape, no gender and no image, but this patriarchal society takes God as male and ‘He’ is assigned to the God. Alice Walker in her famous book *The Color Purple* explains this notion as:

It? I ast

Yeah. It. God ain’t a he or she, But a It.

But what do it look like? I ast.

Dont look like nothing, she say. It aint a picture show. It aint something you can look at apart from anything else including yourself. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you ve found It. (Walker 177-78).

Alice Walker has beautifully explained that God has no gender but men has manipulated the concept of God and assigned a masculine gender to Him to oppress the women. But Alice Walker tries to convince the readers especially the female readers to understand this notion and should not consider themselves inferior to men.

The present research will be focussing on three important religions of the world i.e. Islam, Christianity and Hinduism.

Islam as a religion began in Arab and was revealed to humanity by the prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The word Islam means submission to the will of Allah and obedience to His law. Islam is believed to treat women as secondary sex, giving no status and right to women but it actually uplifts women. To talk about the teachings and sayings, Islam relies on two texts, i.e. the Holy Quran and the authentic Hadiths (which are the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)). One complete chapter in the Holy Qur'an focuses on women, i.e. Surah An'Nisa. 'Nisa' is Arabic word which means woman, so this chapter is all about the rights and status of woman. If we talk about Islam, which is considered to be the most misinterpreted religion, actually talks about the rights of females in almost all the aspects. Aisha Stacy in an article "Women in Islam: Oppression or Liberation?" states that Islam liberated women 1400 years ago when the religion came into being. She asserts,

“over 1400 years ago, Islam raised the status of women from a position of oppression to one of liberation and equality. In an era when women were considered possessions, Islam restored women to a position of dignity” (Stacy n.p.).

In another article “Girl Child from the Life of Prophet Muhammad”, Sayed Hamid Mohsin states that when Islam started the practice of burying girls was prevalent which was stopped by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He asserts that, “In Arabia, the custom of killing female children was very common. The Holy Prophet made it unlawful and cautioned parents that they would be a severe punishment for this act on the Day of Judgement” (Mohsin n.p.). So, Mohsin explained that such evil customs which killed the girls were all stopped by the Prophet Mohammad.

The Holy Quran speaks about the rights of women from the right to give her consent for marriage to property and most of the other things as well. But with the passage of the time, the male religious leaders misinterpreted religion, according to their convenience and made the women feel that they are inferior to the male counterparts and if they will speak against their husbands, then they will go against the will of Allah and the Holy Quran. So, the females in the fear of going against the religion remained silent and were suppressed throughout their lives. But in reality, Islam is considered to give equal rights to the women. This can be validated through the references from Holy Quran and the Hadiths. But the conditions of women in the Middle East are pitiable and women are considered nothing more than the child bearing machines. Now, the women in the Middle East are coming forward for their rights and the most important and interesting part is that they have recognized their rights and status according to their religion and are fighting for it on the basis of Holy Quran only. Education is the birthright of everybody and Islam is also in this

favour for both males and females, but education has always been a taboo in this country as far as females are considered.

The Holy Quran takes a man and a woman as the soul companions who have to respect each other and take care of each other's desires and needs. "They (your wives) are your garments and you are a garment for them" (Surah An' Nisa 2:187). This verse clearly states that like the garment is worn to protect the honour of ourselves in the same way husband and wives should protect the honour of each other. But what we find in the society is that the males are humiliating their wives at each step and consider them nothing more than a child bearing machine just because they are not man. Women have a very high status in Islam as the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) states that when a man marries, he has completed one half of his religion. Abu Hurrayrah narrated that a man came to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and asked, "O Messenger of Allah, who has the greatest right on me with regards to kindness and attention?" He replied, "Your Mother". Then who? "Your Mother", Then Who? "Your Mother", then who? "Your Father" (Sahih Al Bukhari 8.2). This incident clearly reveals the high status given to women, according to Islam, but what man is doing to her is completely opposite. Now, women in the Middle East have realized that it is not their religion which is dominating or suppressing them, but it the monopoly of the men who just for their convenience suppress women in the name of religion. No doubt, the most important and supreme role that a women play in Islam is the role of wife and mother but it's never restricted to that role only which can be proved with the example of Khadija, the first wife of Muhammad (pbuh) who was an entrepreneur and the first revert to Islam. Not only to business, but even in politics, women have proved their names by martyrdom as did Fatimah,

the daughter of Muhammad (pbuh), wife of Imam Ali and mother of Imams Hasan and Husayn, peace be with all of them. In Islamic marriages, Mahr which means the marriage gift is given to the girl at the time of marriage. According to Surah An’Nisa, women should be given Mahr, the alimony which should be given at the time of marriage only. In terms of property as well, there is the share of men and women from whatever is left by the parents.

الْوَالِدَاتُ كَمَا نَصِيْبُو لِلنِّسَاءِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ أَلْوَالِدَاتُ كَمَا نَصِيْبُلَّرَجَالٍ

مَّفْرُوضًا نَصِيْبِكُنَّ أَوْ مِنْهُنَّ مِمَّا وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ (‘‘Surah An’Nisa’’ 4.7)

For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much-an obligatory share.

This verse from the Holy Qur an states that the women have a right on the property left by her family. But women from ages have been mostly told that there is no share for them in the property left by the parents.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا هُنَّ أَتَعَصَلُوا هُنَّ لَا كَرِهَ اللَّهُ لَهَا النَّسَاءَ تَرْتُؤُا أَنْ تَكُنَّ جِلْدًا مَمْنُؤَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

فِيهَا الشَّيْءُ هُوَ أَنْ تَعَسَكَرَ هُنَّ مِمَّا هُنَّ فِي الْمَعْرُؤِ فَوَ عَاشِرُؤُ هُنَّ مَبِيْنَةٌ فَا حِشَّةٌ

ثِيْرًا الْخَيْرَ (‘‘Surah An’Nisa’’ 4.19)

O you who believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion. And do not make difficulties for them in order to take

back part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality. And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them- perhaps you dislike a thing in which Allah has put abundance of goodness.

This verse from the Holy Qur'an is very important as it focuses on some important issues related to women emancipation. This verse states that a woman can marry according to her wish and if she dislikes a man, she can reject him at the time of marriage. Mahr which is given to women at the time of marriage should not be taken away from them as it belongs to them only. But mostly it is found that Mahr is taken by the guardian or the husband which is not allowed in Islam. And the most important part of this verse focuses on the treatment of the wives which should be full of love and kindness.

So in nutshell, it can be concluded that women have been given a very high status and position in Islam, but this is always misinterpreted and the women are subjugated on this aspect. The most misinterpreted concept about Islam is that Islam allows multiple marriages i.e. polygamy. But this concept is totally misinterpreted as Surah An'Nisa states that a man can marry two or three or four women of his choice but on two conditions- one is the consent of the first wife and second is that he should treat each wife equally and should support them financially as well like his other wives. But if he can't do the justice to all the wives then he should marry only one.

Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahheri, an Islamic scholar has written a book, *The Islamic Movement for Women's Liberation* in which he gives the answers to the

objection raised by others against Islam with reference to the Holy Qur'an and the Hadiths. In this book, he focuses on various subjects like the social independence of women in Islam, women in the Qur'an, etc. He holds the view that according to the Holy Qur'an, both man and woman have the same innate character. In chapter 6 of this book, he states that in the Holy Qur'an with every great and saintly man, a great and saintly woman has been mentioned. He gives the references of the glorification given to the wives of Adam and Abraham and the mother of Moses and Jesus. The mother of Jesus, as he expresses, attains a very high spirited position. He states that Qur'an even mentions the wife of Pharaoh, Asia who was also the foster mother of Moses, as a great woman who was in the hands of a wicked man. So, eventually in the stories of the Qur'an, the stars are both males and females.

Saneya Saleh, another Islamic scholar and sociologist in her article "Women in Islam: Their Status in Religious and Traditional Culture" argues that Islam and extra Islamic conditions are two different and opposing things. She states that the study of Qur'an, Shari'a, and the Hadiths gives equal and complimentary status to the women. She further states that the position and status of women which is prevalent in the Muslim world today is not due to the Islam but extra Islamic conditions which are Middle Eastern and involve Middle eastern societies generally. She states that Islamic and traditional cultures should not be mixed as it confuses the interpretation of Islam among the people particularly westerners. "Westerners often claim that because of religion, Moslem women have a status inferior to that of men, and hence, are excluded from public activities" (Saleh 35). She argues that the Qur'an elevates the status of women as equal to men, as in Qur'an expressions like "the believing men and the believing women" appear frequently giving equal rights

and duties to men and women. She focuses on the question of polygamy. She states that a Muslim man can marry or can have wives up to four but the right of marriage to more than one wife is based on two important conditions, the first is to do justice to all the wives in all aspects and second is the financial capacity to wife and the children. She even states that polygamy did not originate from Islam but monogamy actually did. She holds the view that multiple marriages were allowed to support the widows and the single mothers of those men who died in the war and their wives have only two options –one of prostitution and the other of marriage. In the concluding part of her article she talks about circumcision. She states that circumcision, which is considered to be a part of Islam, is nowhere written in the Qur'an, it's just a tradition which is observed in almost all Muslim countries.

Hinduism is the religion of the people living in India and Nepal and it is considered to be the oldest living religion in the world. In context to female rights, it is also considered favouring women in one or the other way, but in India the women are marginalized and targeted in the name of religion. In an article "Facets of Feminism: Studies on the Concepts of Women in Indian Tradition", Raghunath Ghosh states that Panini has explained the term *patni* according to his aphorism- '*patyurnayajnasamyoge*' i.e. the suffix 'na' is to be added to the term '*pati*' to make it feminine if she associates her husband with the performance of the ritualistic activities. He further states that a man who is having no wife is not allowed to do any sacrificial rites. He validates his point with the example of Ramayana in which Lord Rama is desirous of performing Rajusuya sacrifice has to build an artificial golden image of Sita to acquire the right of the performance of sacrifice. He states that in Vedic literature, it is clearly mentioned that men and women are essentially

identical, as they are the manifestations of Sat, Cit and Anand (truth, consciousness and bliss).

In another article “Women in Hinduism”, Jayaram states that women are considered aspects of Nature or embodiment of Universal Mother Shakti, in her aspect as pure energy (Shakishwarupini). She is extolled as Mata, the Mother Goddess or Devi the auspicious one. He even mentions the names of women like Sita, Satyawati, Draupadi, Ganga, Kunti, Shakuntala, Meneka, Amba, Anasuya, and Damayanti who are among the important figures according to Hinduism. In an article “Women in Vedic Culture”, Stephen Knapp explores that the basic principles which state the role of women and girls in Hindu history are in the Law of Manu. Knap argues that Manu has directed to respect and honour women as quoted by him:

Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare. Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers. The houses on which female relations, not being duly honored, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek (their own) welfare, should always honor women on holidays and festivals with (gifts of) ornaments, clothes and (dainty) food. (qtd. by Knap n.p.)

He validates his point of women education according to Hinduism by giving references of the women rishis who revealed the Vedic knowledge to others in order to show that Hinduism is not against the women's education. He states that in the 126th hymn of the Rig Veda was revealed by a Vedic woman whose name was Romasha, 179th hymn by Lopamuudra and so on. According to him this all declined due to the interference of external influences which were either cultural or militarily who dominated India and saw women only as a source of sexual gratification. He validates the existence of women's education by the reference of Bhishma Pitamaha who said, "The teacher who teaches true knowledge is more important than the instructors. The father is more important than ten such teachers of true knowledge and the mother is more important than ten such fathers. There is no greater guru than the mother" (Knap n.p.). Stephen Knapp beautifully explains the pairing of the Vedic male gods with a female counterpart, thus combining both sets of power and qualities that each would have. e.g. Radha-Krishna, Sita-Rama, Lakshmi-Vishnu, Durga-Shiva, Sarasvati-Brahama, Indrani-Indra, etc., and thus maintaining the equilibrium in the divine spiritual powers. Sati Pratha which is considered to be very cruel for females has actually nothing to do with the Vedas. Knap holds the view that the Vedas on the contrary appeal to a widow to start life afresh and not waste life merely remembering the past. In Vedas women is denoted by several names like 'Aditi' which means not dependant 'Aghnya' –not to be hurt, then why is she being hurt every time by telling her that she is inferior to man, 'Mena'- which means respectable, but still she is being insulted just for the reason of being woman, 'Sarasvati'- which means she is scholar but still in India women education is the biggest issue, 'Virini'- which means she is the mother of brave sons

but still the women is considered to be weak even after being the source of origin of brave sons and she is bestowed with so many other names as well. He further expresses the elevated status of a girl who according to the Vedas after marriage should be treated like a queen.

The concept of 'Tridevi' which means three goddesses is prevalent in Hinduism. 'Tri' is a Sanskrit word which means three and devis mean goddesses. The three goddesses are Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati, who are the consorts of the divine trinity i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. These three goddesses are very important and powerful and are the embodiment of Shakti in Hinduism. Saraswati is the goddess of learning, knowledge, science, poetry and music. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, prosperity, fortune and happiness. Hindus usually worship Lakshmi during Diwali, the festival of light and lit the lamps outside their homes and believe that Maa Lakshmi will come and bless them with wealth and prosperity. Monier Williams in his book *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, states that the name Lakshmi indicates that she is the goddess of means to achieving objectives, including prosperity. Parvati or in her demon fighting aspect known as Durga, is the goddess of power, love and spiritual fulfilment. In the darker and fearsome side, she takes the image of Kali and Durga in which the feminine energy of Shakti becomes wild. They are dangerous and have helped to save the world. These Tridevis are the embodiment of the divine power, knowledge and prosperity. This clearly shows that in Hindu mythology, a high place is given to women and worshipped

Christianity has as such not directly favoured feminism, but still there is hardly any verse which indicates the domination of females. The research has taken the ideologies of religion just to prove that religion is not against women, but

instead it has always supported women emancipation. But, it is considered that the so called religious leaders and especially the patriarchal society has always played a role to misinterpret religion just to dominate the women and if women would speak against the domination or ill treatment which was given to her then the name of religion is brought and she becomes passive as she can't go against the so called religious teaching which are just made by the man. But later Christian woman realised that their parts were missing in the religion and they are always sidelined when religion is being discussed. They recalled the times of Christ when women used to stand next to the Christ in his struggle. In an article "Apostle to the Apostles: The Women Disciples of Jesus", Shawna R.B Attenberry gives the references from the four Evangelists namely Mark, Mathews, Luke and John, who attributed with the creation of the four Gospels which are the New Testaments, who considered females as an important part following Christ. She states that Mark tells that the women at the Cross were among those who followed Jesus and provided for him. She expresses that Mary Magdalene is one of those women along with Mary the mother of James and other women. She asserts that the synoptic Gospels (Mathews, Mark and Luke) all describe the women who had followed Jesus and Shawna is of the view that the writers of the Gospels intentionally used the word 'follow' over 75 times to show that following means being a disciple of Jesus for example Matt 4:19, Mark 1:18, Luke 5:11. Shawna further asserts that Mary Magdalene is the most important disciple of Jesus who followed him in Galilee and in Jerusalem. "She is always listed first in the groups of female disciples" (*The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 884). Shawna later asserts that Mary Magdalene was the first who, along with the other women stood at the cross and with other women saw where

Jesus was buried and was the first to see the Risen Christ. She then became known to be as the Apostle of the Apostles. Shawna states that all the gospel accounts women are the first to the tomb Sunday morning, and the first to see the Risen Christ by giving the following references from the gospels. According to Mark, as quoted by her:

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is a place they laid him. But go, tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” (Shawna n.p.)

The next she quotes from Mathew:

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb..He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you. So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Shawna n.p.)

Then she gives reference from Luke as quoted by her:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they [the women who had come with him from Galilee] came to the tomb . . . but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember, how he told you, while he was still in Galilee that the son of Man must be handed over to the sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the 11 and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and the other women with them who told this to apostles. (Shawna n.p.)

Lastly, she explains with reference from John as quoted by her:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone has been removed from the tomb So She ran and went to Simon Peter and other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” (Shawna n.p.)

Shawna thus asserts that all four accounts different names come, but one name is which is constantly occurring in all four gospels and that is Mary Magdalene. Thus Shawna focuses on the fact that it was a woman who became the first person to see the risen Christ and thus, becoming the first preacher of the good

news of the resurrection of the same men who had just been at the tomb before Jesus appeared to Mary. Shawna finally asserts that it is very ironic that with the low status of the women in that day still Jesus chooses to appear to Mary and other women. She states that Jesus did not appear to the Vicar of the Church neither to Peter who was Jesus' beloved disciple but rather appeared to Mary and other women.

In another article "Feminism and Christianity", Caryn D. Riswold explains the important status which Christianity bestows upon women. She talks about the kind behaviour of Jesus towards women. She quotes from "Galatians" chapter number 3 and verse number 28 to show both men and women are equal in the eyes of God which states that, "there is no Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (qtd. by Riswold 22). She examines that this particular verse should be the base of Christian belief which holds both men and women equal. She states that, "the idea that can be embraced by feminism here is the preservation and affirmation of the equal humanity of all people regardless of gender, race, or class" (Riswold 23). So in a way she urges the feminists to fight for women's right by taking feminism into consideration.

Hans King in his article "Women in Christianity", talks about the position and status of Christian women. He talked how Jesus included women into his group when the status of women was very weak in that particular era. He states that, "That Jesus himself relativized the fathers and their traditions, called women, too, into his group of disciples" (King 5). He later talks about important women who are considered to have an impact on the advent of Christianity. He explains that, "Prisca,

who with her husband Aquila is mentioned several times in Paul's correspondence also has a special status. That Prisca is usually mentioned before her husband Aquila shows that she was particularly important as a missionary and founder of a church" (King 10). This statement clearly shows that women were equally participating for the spread of Christianity.

Thus, it can be explored that there is no religion which is not in favour of women. Women in all the religions have been given a high status and respect but the people manipulated it in order to subjugate the females. In the process of this research, theological text based on the women will be applied to the books taken for the research i.e. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir*, *Women are Different*, *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Beggar Maid*.

People specifically women came forward and formulated different theories related to women emancipation varying according to the culture and region. But Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* is still considered to be one of the earliest works of feminism. It was basically a response to all those who consider females inferior to the males and were against female education. She asserts that women should be given education and should have a position in a society and she claims women to help in the nation building by transferring her knowledge to the children. So, she holds the view of women not only as wives but actually the companions to their husbands. She considers men and women as equal and strongly believes that women are not only the ornaments to society or a commodity to be traded in marriage, but the same human beings like the male and who deserve what their counterpart males

deserve. She further claims that women can have the same status in society like men by having the right to education.

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers;. . . the civilized women of the present century , with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. (Wollstonecraft 6)

Another important essay regarding the women empowerment is “The Subjection of Women” written by an important philosopher John Stuart Mill. This book is definitely one of the land marks in the history of the women emancipation. In this book, John Stuart Mill talks about almost all the things which were restricted for the women during the Victorian era. But the things which John Stuart Mill expressed for that era are almost prevalent in this era also. John Stuart Mill demanded for the equality of women as the women in that era were denied from many political rights, were not allowed to get education and had no social status. John Stuart Mill in this book argued that women were made to believe that their primary duty was to please others especially her husband without even thinking about their desires and feelings. He further argues that education is one of the chief factors for women empowerment as it helps to make the relationship better as both the partners connect to each other at the intellectual level. But the irony is that women were barred from education. He later asserts that women from the past times

only were either taken by force or were sold off by their fathers without even asking her. Women's only aim was to attract a good husband. The best of the woman was the one who once got married be at home, do all the household chores, produce children, take care of them and submit all her wishes and desires to her husband. John Stuart Mill states that women depend on her husband for almost everything which is a type of slavery. He expresses that it is very important to realize the importance of women as she plays a vital part in nation building.

An important essay regarding the plight of women and marriage, entitled "On Marriage" was written by Harriet Martineau. Harriet Martineau touched important aspects expressing how women are educated to focus on one aim in life, that is, marriage which should be achieved as soon as possible. According to the essayist, marriage is prevalent across the world and each society has set its norms to describe the treatment of women. Harriet states that society has made some rules for the women. Some married women are confined to the religion and spirituality, some are confined to the housekeeping only, some only as the companions to their husbands without knowing how bad is it for her and others are flattered to believe that they are so vulnerable that the men have to take care of them. She further explores that the society considers those men honourable who are strong and brave while those women who are not protected by the birth or the wealth or by the male part of their lives, are considered to be inferior. The essayist asserts that more opportunities should be open for the women not only for their development but for the development of the nation as well.

To talk about French feminism, it is considered to be more philosophical and literary. The most important writer is Simone de Beauvoir and her work *The Second*

Sex is still considered to be one of the most important works in the field of feminism. It was published in two volumes. The most important part of this book focuses on how women are considered to be 'Other' in the society. According to Simone de Beauvoir, the society characterizes man as the 'Subject' (Self), and the woman as the 'Object' (the other). This characterization according to the writer makes the woman feel inferior all her life as she is made to believe that she is an inessential part of the society. Simone De Beauvoir claims that woman all her life is dependent on the man which gives her a subordinate position in her life. She later explains that the girl child is conditioned to accept passivity and dependence on the male counterpart of her life. She explains that women are confined to the roles of wives, mothers or entertainers only. She has to submit all her wishes to the males just to make the society believe that she is a good woman. The writer has touched a very important aspect of woman's life when she becomes old and loses the primary role of her life i.e. the reproduction. Simone de Beauvoir has expresses a very beautiful thing in this book that the woman's situation is not the result of her character but instead her character is the result of her situation. The writer believes that woman can attain dependence only if she will support herself instead of giving her life entirely to the marriage.

The other important writers are Bracha Ettinger, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and many more. These writers focused more on the body and were considered to be more bold and blunt. As Helen Cixous says, "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (Cixous 335). She wanted to explain that there is nothing to be ashamed of one's body. According to her, females are very special and should not feel

embarrassed of their bodies at all. The females, according to her have the power to give origin, so they should feel proud of the things like menstruation, lactation, pregnancy and so on. She invented a new word 'Ecriture feminine' meaning female writing as she thought that the writing was phallogentric i.e. male oriented and according to her if females have to write then they should develop their own language to express themselves. She compels the women to write and that too for themselves. She encourages women to write about what they feel and what they desire for without feeling embarrassed. She further states that it is silly to think that writing is only for men:

And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven't written. (And why I didn't write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great-that is for "great men"; and its "silly. (Cixous 309-10)

The wave of feminism spread like a fire across the globe but it was limited to white women only. In a way it was biased and focused mainly around the white females. The Third World Women were neglected and ignored. Recently, the Third World women found their part missing in feminism and they felt the need to write about themselves, because basically, white woman was writing about them in her own perspective. So, it was the time to mend their history in the eyes of the world. They wanted to show that they were also suffering and the pain which was theirs could be expressed only through them. So all the Third World women started writing about themselves.

African Feminism cannot be justified properly if the part of Sojourner Truth is missing, who was a 19th century reformer. Sojourner Truth, a black woman was born into slavery in New York by the name of Isabella Baumfree after the name of her father's owner Baumfree. She had been sold several times and finally she married Thomas, another slave of Dumont. She had five children with Thomas but she ran away with her youngest children and eventually in 1827, New York law emancipated all the slaves, but she couldn't get the benefit as she had run away. She worked for the family of Issac Van Wagenen where she discovered that the member of the Dumont family had sold one of her children into slavery. As, the law had already been passed for emancipating all the slaves so, she sued the Dumont family and got her son released. In 1843, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth, which meant a 'travelling preacher'. Then, she started speaking about the women rights and her famous speech "Ai'nt I a Woman?" is still cherished around the globe. This speech was delivered in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. This speech is still considered to give a chill to all the men and women across the globe about their rights. She talks about the equality of man and woman in the speech by stating:

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And A'nt I a Woman? I could work as much as and eat as much a man- when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And Aint I a Woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen'emmos' all sold off to slavery, and when i cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And Aint I a woman? (Truth n.p.)

She further states that man don't give equal rights to woman because men consider themselves far more superior than women. She later in her speech raises a question about Jesus who was also a man but she states, "Den that little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as man cause Christ wasn't a woman! Whar did your Christ come from? Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do with Him" (Truth n.p.).

This speech is definitely considered to be one of the most thought provoking speech about the women's rights and will always be a landmark in the history of black feminism. Another famous black writer is Bell Hooks who wrote a book *Aint I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* in 1981 which is titled after this Sojourner Truth's "Speech Aint I a Woman?". This book is a very important monologue which Bell Hooks describes as a love gift to black women from her side. This book took her 7 years to complete it. In this book, she explains the experiences of African women in America from the period of slavery to the present. It includes the themes like the effects of racism and sexism on black women, the civil rights movement and feminist movements. She argues that during slavery, black women suffered racial discrimination and sexism which contributed in having them the lowest status and worst condition than any group in American society. She criticizes the stereotypical images given to the women like white women as the pure goddess virgin and black women as the seductive whore given at the time of slavery still haunt black women in America. She wants that all the women should do their bit in feminism regardless of worrying about trivial issues like jealousy, competition, etc. The sisterhood that is necessary for the making of feminist revolution can be achieved only when all women stop themselves from the feelings like hostility, jealousy and competition

with one another that has kept us vulnerable, weak and unable to envision new realities (Hooks 154).

Another important book by Bell Hooks is *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. The title only suggests that in this book, Bell Hook wants to involve everybody in the movement of feminism including male as well. She holds the view of feminism as a movement to end sexism and, sexist exploitation, and oppression. She wants that this definition should become a common definition of feminism for everybody. She criticizes that man every time asks a question about what feminists want. She says that if men will know more about feminism, they will no longer fear from it, but instead will find in feminist movement the hope of their own release from the bondage of patriarchy. “It is for these men, young and old, for all of us, that I have written this short handbook, the book I have spent more than 20 years longing for” (Hooks IX).

Not only theories, but many reports were passed in the favour of women to emancipate them. One of the most important one is “Declaration of Sentiments” which was a document signed by almost 68 women and 32 men present at the first women’s right convention organized by the women held at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Its principal author was Elizabeth Candy Stanton. This document is also called as the “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments”. This document talked about almost all the aspects of women where they were discriminated. The opening paragraph of this document is very important as it talked about the equality of men and women at that time. It states that both men and women are created by its creator with the right to be happy and equal and it further stated that the government should secure these rights for everybody. But the report expresses that how man have used

these rights and manipulated them to subjugate the women. The important thing about the report is that even though it was written and passed in 1848, but still the things or sentiments written in the report are prevalent even today as women are still subjugated. “He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead” (“Declaration of Rights and Sentiment” n.p.). This sentiment is true even today for most of the women living in any part of the world. As after marriage in most of the cases, man is made the legal master of the woman who subjugates her according to his convenience. Another sentiment of the report is very important which states that how woman is forced to promise her obedience to her husband as a loyal servant. One more sentiment talks about how women are barred from education and forces her to lead a dependent life. These all sentiments are true to this century also and women across the globe are still fighting to emancipate them.

Different prominent personalities of the world came forward and gave some very influential speeches regarding women empowerment like Emma Watson and Michelle Obama. Emma Watson, who is a very famous Hollywood star and also a goodwill ambassador for UN Women, delivered a very moving speech on 20th September, 2014 where she started new campaign “#HeForShe” which proved to a very powerful speech including both men and women in the process of women empowerment. Her speech covered not only women but also men for the complete gender equality. The most important point which she raised in her speech was that feminism is now associated with man-hating which she is totally against off. She just wanted to end that the notion of man –hating so that equilibrium can be achieved for gender equality. She even gave reference to Hillary Clinton, who also gave a very influential speech in 1997 at Beijing about women's rights. She

appreciates her speech and says that what Hillary said in that speech is still to be achieved. She said that the only drawback of that speech was that there were less than 30% of the male audiences. She said that the world cannot change and get involved in an issue unless men are invited to help women. Emma strongly makes a point that “No country in the world can yet say that they achieved gender equality. These rights are considered to be human rights” (Clinton n.p.). She further states that men should participate in this because it will make their daughters, sisters and mothers free from prejudice and at the same time their sons develop a complete version of themselves. One of the most important points of the speech was when she talked about the wages which women get which are very less as compared to men. She wants to fight for that issue as well. This speech turned out to be of the most powerful speech and this brought the Emma Watson’s campaign entitled “*#HeForShe*” into limelight and everybody started talking about it.

Another great speech is of Michelle Obama (wife of Barack Obama) who is definitely a very strong force related to women empowerment. She delivered her speech in New Hampshire on 14th October, 2016 which is quite a recent one when she was supporting Hillary Clinton for the candidacy for US next president. In her speech, she talked about the women's rights and how women are still degraded and considered only a secondary sex. Her speech was worldwide recognized and considered to be one of the most influential speeches for women empowerment. She started her speech by making women realize their worth and importance and stated that the nation can only progress if they treat their women well. And she encourages women that if they are not treated well then they should raise their voice against it.

She further talks about the language used against women and she feels that it is very painful not only for the women but the parents as well.

The shameful comments about our bodies. The disrespect of our ambitions and intellect. The belief that you can do anything you want to a woman. It's cruel. It's frightening. And the truth is, it hurts. It hurts. It's like that sick, sinking feeling you get when you're walking down the street minding your own business and some guys yell out vulgar words about your body. Or when you see that guy at work that stands just a little too long, and makes you feel uncomfortable in your own skin. (Michelle Obama n.p.)

The most important part of her speech stresses on the concept of women harassment or subjugation as an ancient thing and that many have struggled to end this violation, which she calls a myth. This struggle has never ended and women are still treated in the same way as even in this 2016 year, such cases are prevalent. And according to her, women are drowning in it which she wants to end. She argues that if it continues than what message are we going to give to our children? So she requests everybody to be aware of their rights and should actively participate to end this women's violation.

The writers selected for this research work have also actively participated in the process of women empowerment and their works portray the plight of women in different countries.

Eimear McBride is an Irish writer who was born in Liverpool in 1976. When she was 17 years of age, she went to London to study drama and had a dream of becoming an actress. When she was in London, she was very sceptical about her life.

I was much more superstitious in those days, I thought. Well my dad died when I was eight and that was hard. I had a bad time at school and all that, but that, the bad stuff. Now, I am going to be an actor and all the bad stuff is behind me and somehow had that, it sort of protects me from that happening again. It's a real child logic. (Conroy n.p.)

This statement of Eimear McBride shows that she was having an unhappy childhood and fortunately her writing impressed the world with her writing style. She became very famous writer with the publication of only two books i.e. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and *The Lesser Bohemians*.

A Girl is a Half-formed Thing was her debut novel and gained her worldwide recognition. This book revolves around a unnamed girl and the her journey. McBride through this book has focused on many issues which a girl faces in Ireland like male child favouritism at the home, girl child rape, and sexual violence, fragmented identity of the protagonist, self quest and death. The narrator suffered alienation and ignorance at her home because her mother used to love only her son and paid no attention to her daughter. She loved her brother a lot but her mother's treatment towards her made her feel lonely and secluded. Later her uncle raped her when she was only 13 years of age and didn't know the meaning of sexual intercourse. This was the just the beginning of her sufferings and this event changed

her entire life. She started taking sex as a causal thing and got indulged in it just to protect herself. She believed that if she permits boys to do sexual intercourse with her, she will have a power over them, but instead she got drowned in it and could not find a way out of it. And moreover uncle continued to do sexual intercourse with her and when started resisted, her uncle used to beat her brutally. When her brother died, she was raped by a boy and this was her high point. She could not take it anymore and finally embraced death as her relief.

Sudha Koul was born in Kashmir in 1947 in a Brahman family. She is the first women from the Jammu and Kashmir state to be selected in Indian Administrative Services. After marriage, she went to US and stayed there. Even though today she is in America, but still she writes from there for her native place i.e. Kashmir. Her major publications are *Curries without Worries*, *Come with me to India on a Wondrous Voyage through Time* and *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir*.

In 1983, Sudha Koul founded Cashmir, Inc. a publishing house and for the last 20 years she has been the president of this publishing house.

The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir talks about the Kashmiri culture, but if we go in depth we will come to know that this book beautifully explains the plight of Kashmiri women both Muslim and Pandit. This book depicts the story of the writer, her grandmothers, her mother and other courageous women of the Kashmir including Habba Khatoon, Lal Dedh, Azmat (her family shawl-wala's daughter) who is very bright in studies and is actually bringing honour to her family, the principal of her college and many other women. In this book, the writer beautifully shows the plight of Kashmiri women, especially the condition of the

newly wedded brides. The misery of newly wedded brides is also narrated in the folk songs and folktales and the irony is that these folk songs are sung at the time of marriage and are cherished by women only. The question arises why these songs of misery are sung at the time of marriage? The answer is that these brides are mentally prepared that whatever is going to happen in her in-laws house, she has to accept that and should not come back to her house. Sudha Koul has also shown the condition of the rich widow women. Those widows were taken to a bungalow that was secluded. The widows had to cut all the contact with the society and had to stay there till their death. And if she would resist then she was told that at least she was not being burnt in the name of Sati Pratha which was prevalent across the country. So, in a fear of being killed, she would spend all her live there, all alone which was no better than death. Sudha Koul is not only showing the dark side of Kashmir but even the brighter side. The Bungalow has now become the college for girls. So basically, the place where women were dominated and treated only like a savage became the place for their emancipation. The writer is trying to inspire the women to study. What Sudha Koul wants to say is that, with full courage and hard work, one can achieve heights in life, no matter if it is a man or woman. The writer in her life was inspired by Indira Gandhi who, according to her is the daughter of Kashmiri Pandit. According to the writer, if Indira Gandhi being a Kashmiri woman can be at such height of success to run a country than every girl from Kashmir can work hard to attain success in life. The writer was so much influenced by Indira Gandhi that she started following her foot prints and became the first women from the Jammu and Kashmir state to be selected in the Indian Administrative Services. The writer gives the example of her Shawl seller who considered her daughter more important

than his boys and named her Azmat which means honour. She was a very intelligent girl and was no doubt bringing honour to her family. If on one hand writer is giving instances of domestic violence of newly wedded girls, on the other hand, she gives the reference of Habba Khatoon and Lal Dedh who even though suffered a lot in their in laws, still didn't give their lives in distress. They fought against it and with their inherent talent of poetry are known all over the world. So, it would not be wrong to call this book as a great motivational book for encouraging girls to work hard and attain emancipation in their lives.

Florence Nwanzuruahu Nziru Nwapa (Flora Nwapa) is definitely one of the most important Nigerian writers. She was born on January 1931 and died on October 1993. She is often regarded as the "mother of Modern African literature" (Adeleke n.p.) and became the very first woman to publish novels by herself as she founded the Tana press and Flora Nwapa Books publishing houses. She is famous for writing from an Igbo women's point of view. She never accepted to be a feminist and rather called herself 'womanist' based on the writings of Alice walker. She was highly inspired by Chinua Achebe and Christopher Okigbo, G.B Shaw and Hemingway. She worked during the Biafra war and helped many children and refugees and contributed a lot by helping the government in reconstruction. But today she is not only remembered for her social work but instead she is known more for her excellent ability of writing.

Her major publications are *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981), *Women are Different* (1986) .

As a child, she never dreamt of becoming a writer. She was appointed at Queen's College in Enugu when she was 27. From this college, she drew inspirations for many stories and finally wrote a novel. She sent that novel to Chinua Achebe, a well known African writer. She never expected his reply as he was a very famous and busy person but Achebe who was so impressed with her writings that he didn't only praised her work but sent one Guinea along with the reply as a postage fee to send that manuscript to England for publication. And finally in 1966, *Efuru* was published which became one of the earliest novels written by an African woman and certainly the first written by a Nigerian women. After *Efuru*, there was no going back for her and she wrote till she died. Flora Nwapa in her own words states that,

I write because I want to write. I write because I have a story to tell. There is this urge always to write and put things down. I do not presume that I have a mission. If you continue to read my books, may be you could find the mission. But I continue to write because I feel fulfilled. I feel satisfied in what I'm doing. (Nwapa n.p.)

She was always against the tag of feminism as for her feminist first victimize the woman and then emancipate them. For her, women were strong and hard working. She was tired of men portraying women from their point of view in the novels. She actually gave a make-over to the African femininity by creating a vast number of female characters having their unique qualities. In an interview with Marie Umeh, she stated, "When I do write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very very positive in their thinking, who are very very independent and very very industrious" (Information Nigeria n.p.).

She was married and had children but still she argued all her life that marriage and having children was not the end of everything for a woman. She encouraged and motivated women to survive in all the situations as there were plenty of things present in the world that can make a woman happy apart from the marriage and the children. She was in favour of the economic independence of a woman. She regarded that the concept of economic independence is still not known to many woman as they rely completely on the males. In her interview with Marie Umeh, she argued that every woman, married or single, must have economic independence.

Women are Different is one of the most important books to understand the Nigerian feminism. Flora Nwapa has painted strong female characters that are having their own unique survival techniques. This book is the story of three friend viz. Rose, Dora and Agnes who are admitted to a missionary school. Flora Nwapa focuses on many themes prevalent in the Nigerian society that restrict a girl to achieve her aim in life. This book focuses on the themes like marriage, relationships, women education, self quest, economic independence of women and many more things.

Rose, Agnes and Dora experienced different types of struggle and domination in their lives but somehow all of them survived from these situations and emancipated them. Education is one main element in the novel which was a step towards the aim for every girl. But through this novel, Flora Nwapa showed that how difficult it is for a girl to get education in this patriarchal society. Agnes was such a bright student who wanted to study to achieve her aim but she was made to marry even before the result of her secondary school examination. But Nwapa showed a way to many girls by creating the character of Agnes, who didn't give up on studies and continued to

struggle to get education even after her marriage. She has created the character of Dora whose personality and thinking is same like any other girl of the Nigeria or any part of the world. Dora lives in a fantasy to get married as soon as possible and for her education is not that important. She has only one aim of getting married to her boyfriend which is even fulfilled. Through the story of Dora, Nwapa had motivated girls that even if they are not interested in education, still they should be economically independent. Dora was always interested in baking and so she started her business and became very famous baker. Her husband could not take her success like a typical patriarchal man and went to abroad to study further to became more famous and rich. But he never came back and left Dora all alone. She survived on her own as she was economically independent. At last, he returned back to her and Dora even accepted him not for herself, but for her children. After his return, she was a complete different woman; she was a free and independent woman and didn't idolize her husband. Rose on the other hand was the strongest character. She was like a rebel and wanted to live her life on her own terms. She completed her education, got a reputed job and lived her life to fullest. But as she was a woman, she has to face many struggles also. She was also in a relationship but that man just got disappeared. Another man married her making her believe that he loved her but actually bluffed her and took all her money and eloped. Then, she fell in love with another man whom she considered to the best. She got involved with him and he too loved her but he suddenly disappeared and never returned. But later she came to know that he died out of cancer. She was dejected in life. She was successful but alone. And at last her childhood lover came back to her but she didn't accept him. She was fed up to all the men and especially of the notion of depending on men. She

realized at the end that even though she was successful but as she had no men in her life, the society will regard her as a low woman. But still she continued to live her life on her own terms without listening to anybody.

Nawal El Saadawi is the leading Egyptian writer, socialist, psychiatrist and an advocate of women's rights, especially in the Middle East. She is often called "Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab World" (Lunde n.p.). She is the most widely translated Egyptian writers and her works are translated into almost 12 languages. She was born on October 27, 1931 in Kafr Tahla, Egypt. Saadawi's books focus on women, particularly Arab women, their sexuality and status and on controversial issues like the female genital mutilation. She has always been a controversial writer and was even banished from the Egypt. She was not allowed to publish her works in Egypt so she has to get them published from Lebanon. With the publication of her first nonfiction work *Women and Sex*, she lost her job. This work became very controversial as she focuses on the issues like women, sexuality and religion which dwelled a high anger among the religious and political authorities. Her main focus was on feminism. In her interview with the guardian, she states, "For me feminism includes everything. It is a social justice, political justice and sexual justice. It is a link between medicine, literature, political justice, sexual justice. . . Feminism is all that" (Khaleeli n.p.). Saadawi even went to jail in September 1981, along with many other objectors to the Jerusalem Peace Treaty by the President Anwar el Sadaat. She was released after the assassination of the President. When she was released, she shared her experience by stating that, "danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up pen and wrote" (Khaleeli n.p.). Saadawi formed the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSW) in 1981. It was the first legal and independent

organization particularly for Egyptian women. But unfortunately the AWSW got banned in 1991 after criticizing US involvement in the Gulf war. To conclude it can be said that Saadawi struggled all her life but even today she continues to be a writer, journalist and an advocate for women's rights. She is definitely an inspiration for many women. Her major publications are *Women at Point Zero*, *God Dies by the Nile*, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, *Memoirs of Woman doctor* and *The Fall of Imam*.

In 2005, she won the Inana International prize in Belgium. In 2004, she won the North-South Prize from the council of Europe. She holds honorary doctorates from the universities of York, Illinois at Chicago, St Andrews and Tromso. Her other awards include the Great Minds of the Twentieth Century Prize which was awarded by the American Biographical Institute in 2003, the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe and the Premier International Catalunya in 2004.

Woman at Point Zero was published in 1973. It is a true story of a woman named Firdaus whom the writer met in jail. Firdaus was imprisoned for the crime of murder but she had refused to sign an appeal to the President for lifetime imprisonment instead of death sentence. She was a mysterious woman who never met any visitor also. The writer went to the jail as she was a psychiatrist and was studying the psychology of the women prisoners and got fascinated towards Firdaus' personality. At first, Firdaus refused to meet the writer, but later she agreed to meet the writer and narrated her story. Firdaus struggled a lot in her life. Her childhood was full of cruelty and neglect. She was not given the same love which her brothers enjoyed. Her only passion of childhood was education and that too was ignored by her family. When her parents died she was taken by her uncle who admitted her to school. But soon after completing her secondary school, she was forced to marry a man who was

double her age. Firdaus suffered domestic violence, depression, restlessness, and marital rape at her husband's place. So, one day she just ran away from that place but still her life didn't get better. She met a man in the café whom she told her story and showed her secondary school certificate in the hope of getting the job. But, that man took her home and used her not only for his sexual needs but sold her every night and made her a prostitute. When she escaped from there she met Sharifa, who lead her into a life of prostitution. Sharifa gave her all she ever wanted in her life. She gave her good clothes, good make-up, her own beautiful room and the best food. She got bewitched with these things. Sharifa told her that every woman's body has a value and some price, nobody just can't use it for free. Actually, Sharifa was also using her by selling Firdaus's body. Somehow, when she realized about the truth, she managed to escape from there. Then she became a profile prostitute on her own. Now she used to sleep with men only whom she wanted to. She was in a way free and living life according to her own wish. But, still a man followed her and forcibly became her pimp. And when she wanted to come out of that life of prostitution and wanted to do something good, that pimp stopped her and in that fight she killed him. She accepted her crime and never demanded for lifetime imprisonment instead of the death penalty. For her this was her source of emancipation. All her life, she wanted to do something big and this was her fight with the dominating man who just used women for their sexual gratification only. "However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face. But because I am a woman I have never had the courage to lift my hand" (Saadawi 10).

Alice Munro, one of the most gifted writers, was born on 10th July, 1931 in Wingham, Ontario. She started writing stories in her teens and got her first book published when she was only 19 years of age, the story collection *Dance of the Happy Shades*. She became very famous in Canada and today she is regarded as one of the most important short-story writers not only of Canada but in the English Speaking World as a whole. She is considered to inspire devotion among her readers and so many writers and critics praise her for her talent. “. . . for Margret Atwood, she is ‘an International Literary Saint’ and for New Yorker magazine, where her stories have appeared since 1970’s, she is ‘Our Blessing’” (Atwood n.p.). Her major achievement is that she became the first Canadian to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Franzen stated that “We have to wait a more than a century, but we finally have a Nobel for a pure short- story writer” (Allardice n.p.). While announcing the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy called her a "master of the contemporary short story” (Allardice n.p.). Other achievements of Munro’s include three Governor-General’s Award (1968, 1978, 1986), two Giller Prizes (1998, 2004), and The Man International Booker Prize for Life Time Achievement in 2009, as well as, the Canada- Australia Literary Prize, The Commonwealth Writer’s Prize (Canada and the Caribbean), and the O’Henry Award in United States for continuing achievement in short fiction. In 2005, Munro was listed as one of the Time Magazine’s “100 most influential people”. Her famous publications are: *Lives of Girls and Women (1971)*, *Who Do You Think You Are (1978)*, *The Moons of Jupiter (1982)*, *The Love of Good Women (1998)*, *Hateship, Friendship Courtship, Loveship, Marriage (2001)*, *Too Much Happiness (2009)* and *Dear Life (2012)*.

Munro is acclaimed for her finely tuned storytelling, which is characterized by clarity and realism. For writing about the female sexuality Munro says, “You are doing something that nobody will be proud of you for. When you are writing you feel like a necessity to go as far as you can. You feel wrong but still not sorry” (The Guardian n.p.).

The Beggar Maid was published in 1978. It won The Governor-General’s Award. The collection of the short stories revolves around the protagonist Rose who always wanted to do something big in her life by achieving her goal. The theme of identity is central to the collection. Now the question arises why she chose the title, *The Beggar Maid*? It is one of the chapter’s title from this short story collection only. But in actual the title relates to “King Cophetua and The Beggar Maid” an 1884 painting by Edward Brune Jones, based on earlier Elizabeth poem by Lord Tennyson. In the poem, King Cophetua falls in love with the beggar maid whose poverty lies in her simplicity. But in this book Munro has taken the actual experience of poverty. In this book Patrick Blatchford falls in love with Rose. Rose was never sure about this relationship, but even though she married him. Munro says, “If you weren’t married at 25, you were a failure” (Munro n.p.).

This is the typical orthodox thinking which is still prevalent in a place like Canada also. Why is the girl always living in the fear of getting married as soon as possible as if it is her ultimate aim? And what her actual aim was to become a historian was dropped off after she got married. The decision resulted in a marriage which didn’t last longer. Even though she married Patrick and tried to believe that he loved her came out to be a wrong notion. In love, partners always sacrifice and make adjustments to each other to make their life happy and peaceful. But in this

relationship, only Rose was adjusting. She was doing what Patrick likes, but all in vain. Patrick was not a wrong person, but in a way the compatibility between them was at point zero. Later, Rose fell in love with Clifford, who was also married. Then she realized what she wanted in life. But Clifford also just used her for his sexual gratification. Rose gave divorced to Patrick even after knowing that Clifford is not going to leave his wife. Later, she met Simon and they both developed a close attachment for each other, but again destiny didn't favour her and Simon disappeared unexpectedly and later she came to know that Simon had died. She was all alone again. Throughout the novel, Rose is trying to search for her 'identity'. At last she was left all alone but still she was satisfied with her life. She was not controlled by anybody and moreover could do whatever she wished.

Thus, to conclude, this chapter discussed a brief history of feminism with regard to race, region and religion. It also focussed on different feministic and theological theories so as to better understand the concept of feminism. It later discussed the biographical sketches of the writers and a brief introduction to their works which are taken for this present research.

Chapter Two

Ireland and Misogyny: A Study of Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*

A Girl is a Half-formed Thing is written by Eimear McBride who is a famous Irish writer. Eimear McBride was born in Liverpool in 1976. She has been very famous since she wrote her first book *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. Her achievements and awards include the James Tait Black Memorial Prize 2017, Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction 2014, Kerry Group Irish Fiction Award 2013, Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize 2013 and Goldsmiths Prize 2012.

She has written only two books viz. *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* and *The Lesser Bohemian*.

The Lesser Bohemian was published in 2016 which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 2017. It is her second novel which is set in 1990's Camden Town. It revolves around 18 year old girl Eilis who is an Irish student. She comes to the city to study drama and gets involved in a relationship with an actor Stephen who is much older to her. Stephen is old but a very handsome person who is broken deep inside. This book records the sexual encounters of Eilis and Stephen. Lara Feigel in her review "*The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimear McBride review-a Brilliant Evocation of Sex and Intimacy" writes that, "most of the book chronicles in microscopic detail their encounter in bed and out of it, offering a lens on to the touch and talk of lovers unlike any I have come across before" (Feigel n.p.). This novel has a simpler narration and is easy to read unlike its predecessor book *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*. But one thing that is common in both the books is that Eimear

McBride focuses on the issue of giving voices to the protagonists who struggle a lot in their lives. Jeanette Winterson in her review “*The Lesser Bohemians*, like *The Gift*” states that “. . . is all about voice. If McBride’s story is a well known formula, the form is all her own. What she doesn’t do is put the words where they usually go describing place and person, situation and encounter, building character and creating sympathy (or antagonism) in the reader” (Winterson n.p.). McBride has created a beautiful and a strong character in the form of Eilis.

A Girl is a Half-formed Thing was the first book of Eimear McBride which gained her worldwide recognition. She was very much appreciated for the writing style of this book. Eimear McBride wrote this novel only in six months but for the publication, it took her nine years. When she started writing this book, she had no idea except that she was writing about a girl and her journey. McBride states, “When I began writing this there was no real plan and nothing, I thought, that I urgently wished to say. All I had was an idea about a girl walking down a London street over a single day” (McBride n.p.) asserts that the protagonist of this book is not like other passive literary victims but instead she is a rebel and fights against all the odds of the society which tried to block her way. “She rages against the dictates of her deformed society, seeks control in the places she has been stripped of it, and rebels against dogma’s diagnosis of her chaotic sexuality” (McBride n.p.).

In a review “Bloody Hell: *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* Eimear McBride”, Joshua Cohen compares this book to the genesis. She states that in this novel, “. . . narrator who drinks, takes drugs and enjoys but is traumatized by sex” (Cohen n.p.). She also comments on the writing style of the book and states that after a chapter or two, the readers adopts the reading style and gets used to it. She appreciates the

writer for using such language and states that the narrator's identity was fractured throughout the novel and so the language was also meant to be fractured to reflect her true feelings.

In another review "*A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride-Review", Anne Enright calls McBride a genius. "Eimear McBride is that old fashioned thing, a genius, in that she writes truth-spilling, uncompromisingly and brilliant prose that can be, on occasion, quite hard to read" (Enright n.p.). She appreciates the writing style of this book and states that it is for the adventurous readers who can enjoy it to the fullest. She comments that the style is simple and direct and after few chapters it becomes one of its kinds. She also comments on the protagonist and the struggle she faces throughout the journey. "It is completely modern in its sensibility and completely old fashioned in the way it triumphantly ignores the need of the book market" (Enright n.p.). Enright commends McBride to write such a book which hardly cared about the need of the market and calls it a classic in its approach.

Smead Gleeson in her review "*A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, by Eimear McBride" comments that this book is a journey of an unnamed narrator from two years of age till twenty years. She asserts that the unnamed narrator was very close to her brother but with the passage of time, there developed lots of differences between them. Gleeson expresses that the narrator throughout her journey tries to find her identity and is always in a quest which indulged her in different sexual encounters. "The narrator struggles to relate to her brother and conflates burgeoning independence as a signal to seek more physical ways to explore her identity" (Gleeson n.p.). Gleeson also focuses on the writing style and appreciates McBride

for it. She states that, “McBride’s themes and language power prove her to be fearless, and her voice is utterly compelling and unique. Her is name we will be hearing a lot about in the future” (Gleeson n.p.). Gleeson is confident that Eimear McBride will definitely be famous in the future with her style and themes.

Eimear McBride has used a technique of stream of consciousness in this book in which the narrator records all the outgoing thoughts in her mind. In an article “*A Girl is a half-formed Thing? Girlhood, Trauma, and Resistance in Post-Tiger Irish Literature*”, Susan Cahill states that, “Eimear McBride’s 2013 debut novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* plunges us directly into the consciousness, or rather, the pre-consciousness of an unnamed teenage narrator” (Cahill 158). Cahill asserts that the writer takes the readers directly into the mind of a teenage girl and allows the readers to understand the problems which the girl struggles in her life. This book is often compared with James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.

McBride through this book has focussed on the prevalence of ‘Misogyny’ in Ireland Misogyny as defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary is “hatred of women” which includes prejudice against women. Misogyny is prevalent across the globe and McBride has shown its validity in Ireland. She focuses on certain themes prevalent in the Irish society that dominate or oppress the women. In an interview “Eimear McBride: I Wanted to Give the Reader a Very Different Experience” with Susanna Rustin, Eimear McBride states that it was very difficult to write this book. She asserts that, “You know, being an Irish, Oh God, sex, death, religion, shame, here it all is” (Rustin n.p.). Rustin wants to say that this book is the perfect example

of Irish literature with all Irish themes like sexual acts, death, religion, embarrassment and everything which reflects the Irish culture.

A girl child is often considered as a burden or a secondary sex in the family. She is not given much love and respect. This neglect which a girl suffers in her childhood disturbs her psychology and she always lives in the fear and alienation. So, the oppression of the female child starts from her home and then by the society. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* also comments on this issue. She states that the society has ranked and given status to the women. She talks about 'Gender' and states that it is related to psychological and cultural system rather than biological. "If the proper terms of sex are 'male' and 'female', the corresponding terms of gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; the latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex" (Millet 30). She strongly opposes to these roles assigned to men and women because she believes that it develops inferiority complex among the females. She asserts that because of such social system, male and female have become two different cultures. She holds parents, peers, and the cultural impact which is responsible for this notion.

It is the story of almost every house and the first person to make girls feel inferior are their parents that hit the psychologies of female child which results in their fractured identities. Eimear McBride has also touched this issue and through her protagonist she has shown that such practice of male child favouritism is still prevalent in the society. The unnamed protagonist of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* also suffers from this favouritism of the male child at home. Her mother often gave importance to her son instead of maintaining equality among her children. This developed a lot of difference between the narrator and her mother. The narrator

loved her brother a lot who was suffering from cancer. She also cared about her but her mother would always run after her brother instead of caring about the narrator. Her mother had a pride in her son and had hardly anything for her daughter. “Attentive loving mother. I remember. I have seen. Such a pride and joy in him” (McBride 7). Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book *The Second Sex* talks about the categorization of male and females. Simone states that the society has categorized male as the ‘Self’ (Subject) and women as the ‘Other’ (object) which make women feel inferior. Usually, this categorization starts at home only when preference is given to the male child and female child is made to realise that she is only a secondary sex. This male child favouritism is a part and parcel of the society which is prevalent across the globe. It makes the female child insecure which turns into fractured identity.

Same happened with the narrator in *A Girl is a Half-formed*. This distorted the mental setup of the narrator which made her to be insecure at her own home. She started feeling alienated in her own home and hated everybody as no one was there who would love her. “The house is dry and creaky. I am not at peace here anymore” (McBride 56). This statement of the narrator showed how much depress she was at home. Home is the safest and the most comfortable place in the world but this place was becoming a stranger’s place for the narrator. In an article “ ‘I Am Not That Girl’: Disturbance, Creativity, Play, Echoes, Liminality, Self-Reflection and Stream of Consciousness in Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*” Gina Wisker explores the subordinate position of the narrator at home. Wisker states that, “however, the girl in the novel also seeks to escape her subordinate position in a home characterized by treading fine lines between poverty and coping, isolation and

extreme family interactions”(Wisker 59). Wisker has beautifully explained the plight of the narrator, who because of her secondary status at home always lived in isolation and tried hard to get acknowledged at her home and in the society,

Her mother would always defend her son in every way possible. He was also studying in the same school with the narrator and was very slow in studies. Her mother would always come for his rescue at the school in front of the teachers but would never think or talk about her daughter. “Your brother. Aha? Not so well at school the teachers say. And? I say to them he studies every single night. I tell them I send him up to that desk. And what didn’t i buy him, books, copies, everything.” (McBride 41). This statement shows that her mother was doing everything to keep her son happy and was not caring about her daughter. This inequality among the children is a very dangerous thing. It develops an inferiority complex in the minds of the marginalised child and the child feels insecure and does certain things to get acknowledged or loved. This inequality is usually found between the male and the female child and McBride has beautifully shown that such practice of inequality in the family is still prevalent in the western world also. The narrator developed a different notion out of this alienation and she focussed on getting known or famous at any cost. But deep inside she wanted to be loved by her mother and so she always took her side whenever there was a fight between her mother and brother. Her mother would narrate the whole story of how his brother would treat her and as soon as the narrator would talk to her brother, her mother would scold her for talking to her brother like that. “And who asked you to or told you to or wanted you to? You self-righteous Madam. Looking down your nose at me and your brother. I can tell. We get on. Just fine without you here. Fine without you. And I’ll thank you not to

interfere. The cheek. The cheek of it” (McBride 95). This expression of her mother showed how cold she was towards her own daughter who was trying to protect her mother’s honor. Her mother instead of thanking her, made her realise that she was no one to talk between a mother and her son.

McBride has even touched a very sensitive issue of sexual violence in this book *A Girl is a Half-formed thing*. This crime is prevalent across the globe irrespective of class, colour, region or country. A report presented by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO “International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women” states that the violence against women and girls is a crime of global issue which is a threat to millions of girls. It asserts that, “Violence against women and girls knows no social, economic or national boundaries. It affects women of all ages and arises in various types of settings taking many forms including physical, sexual or psychological violence” (UNESCO, “International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women”). UNESCO in this report clearly states the effects of this violence which results in both physical and psychological disturbances in a girl’s life. In another report presented by United Nations (UN) “I Leave No One Behind: End Violence Against Women and Girls” states that this type of crime is the worst form of oppression across the world. “According to the report, on the basis of data from 2005 to 2016 for 87 countries, 19 percent of women between 15 and 49 years of age said they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey” (UN, “I Leave No One Behind: End Violence Against Women and Girls”). The statistics reveal that this crime is still prevalent in this world devoid of age.

The setting of this book is Ireland which is often considered to be free and liberal towards women. In a report “Violence against Women in Ireland”, Deborah Condon explores that this crime is prevalent in Ireland and the statistics are at a high pace. She validated her point by giving reference from a report ‘The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) report 2002’ that states, “one in four women had experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime and one in a five had experienced sexual assault as adults” (qtd. by Condon, “Violence against Women in Ireland”). This statistics is very high and it the right time to think about it.

In another report “New Rape Crises Network Ireland (RCNI) Child Sexual Violence report findings call for new responses in child protection”, Frances Fitzgerald talks about the sexual violence done to the girls in Ireland. He provides the statistics to validate his point of prevalence of high rate of this violence among small girls in Ireland. He explores that “this report spells out that a child under 13 is most likely to be targeted for abuse by a family member rather than an acquaintance” (Fitzgerald n.p.). He asserts that this crime increases with age of the girl. He holds the view that this crime develops such an impact on the psyche of the girls that neither they speak about it nor they ask for help.

Even Michelle Obama in her speech at New Hampshire on 2016 also states that women harassment is an issue of global concern. She is completely against the notion that people usually believe that women exploitation was an issue of ancient times and it is a myth. She strongly believes that it is still prevalent in the society.

We thought all of that was ancient history, didn't we? And so many have worked for so many years to end this kind of violence and abuse and

disrespects, but here we are in 2016, and we're hearing these exact same things everyday on the campaign trail. We are drowning in it. (Michelle Obama n.p.)

She states that many people have worked for a long time to end this practice but it is still growing every day.

McBride has also taken the courage to write about this sexual violence done to the female child in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. She feels like women are always considered as a half form being and men consider themselves superior and so they do sexual violence with women with pride. She made it clear from this book that white women also face this crime of sexual violence even today and most of them are helpless and thus, becomes the victim of the situation.

It was one summer when her uncle came to her house along with her aunt. The narrator had just entered into her teen age and was fascinated by the idea of love. But her uncle showed her a new world which was full of lust and sexual desire. She hardly knew anything about sex and her uncle who was like a father to her actually raped her. He started seducing her from the day he entered the house. "Shouldn't we be friends? I am your uncle after all. But it's the first time that we've met" (McBride 48). This was how he started talking to her and to make her more comfortable he even said, "You can think of me in a father way" (McBride 52). This is the hypocrisy of her uncle who took advantage of that thing which he knew will work. A narrator has no father, she kind of felt secured with this statement but she didn't know the real intentions of her uncle. A person who is calling himself a fatherly figure was had sexual intentions in his mind. When the advances of her uncle started

growing more and more, she realised that her uncle was in a different tangent and was not considering her a child. She was from a catholic family and was well aware of the fact that it was a sin to get seduced from her uncle. She tried resisting to his advances and started ignoring him. But his uncle didn't stop and continued seducing her and she was helpless and didn't know what to do.

Michelle Obama in her speech at New Hampshire also feels the pain of the women who suffer from this violence and feel helpless in the hands of the perpetrator. She states that, "It's that feeling of terror and violation that too many women have felt when someone has grabbed them and they've said no but he didn't listen" (Michelle Obama n.p.). Same was happening to the narrator in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*. One day when her mother and her aunt went out, her uncle found it a good opportunity to fulfil his evil intentions. He went to her and started touching her. She was just a small girl who felt uncomfortable with his advances. She tried resisting him but he didn't stop and the narrator started sweating. She went close to her and started kissing her. "Don't do that to me. I. Feel I might begin to cry or sink or fall" (McBride 53). She was saying no to him, but he was not listening to her and continued harassing her.

This is the feeling of a girl who didn't know much about sex. She was not known to such feelings and felt awkward and uncomfortable. But she was now sure about her uncle's feelings. She could see that on his face and was very scared. "His want me. Fuck me if he could and I and I and I and I. And I do not. Do not need" (McBride 57). She was a small girl but she knew that it was something which was not right but her uncle didn't stop molesting her. After that she felt so bad and guilt conscious that she went to a nearby lake and took a dip in it and baptized her. This

was not where her uncle was going to stop. He had to satisfy his sexual hunger and so he finally raped her in the most savage way possible:

It hurts me. And kissing choking me. Almost too much of my body taken up . . . I cannot cannot take this. Pain. Scratch him. Pain of it. Keep clawing at his skin. He doesnot. Does not know this. He is digging into me and me to him. In that tight spot. He is. He is. I will feel it bruising pains. (McBride 58)

These lines showed how savage her uncle was who didn't even think that she was just a small girl and raped. She was helpless and could only stargaze him in order to save herself. This was her first time with sexual intercourse that her uncle made the worst nightmare for entire life. After this incident, she started thinking about sexuality in a different way. Her uncle had introduced her to a new world where love was replaced by lust. She had dreams about like any other teen girl and used to fantasize about it but her uncle showed her new life which she was not even aware of. "And I do not. Do not need. Have something else I need to do. There'll others. Some others. Some day more who want me. I want to fuck them too. Thanks uncle for sage introduction" (McBride 57). Basically, the narrator was so much hurt and shocked because her uncle had introduced her to a new world which distorted her completely.

This event changed her life entirely. Shadia Abdel Rahman Tellez in an article "The Embodied Subjectivity of a Half-formed Narrator: Sexual Abuse, Language (un) Formation and Melancholic Girlhood in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*" comments on the plight of the narrator after she is being raped by her uncle. She states that, "Her crises of identity is worsened when she is raped

by her uncle, an event that causes her struggle to define herself, not only as a woman, but as an individual” (Tellez 2). Rahman asserts that this rape showed her the first phase of patriarchy in the form of her uncle. The narrator develops a fractured identity which haunts her entire life.

She didn't know what has happened to her and used to think about it. She knew that her uncle must have forgotten about it but she was not in a state to forget about this incident. “What was that I did? I think of it in bed at night as. On my own I. Think will it always hurt? Will it always bleed?” (McBride 61). This is the innocence of a teen girl who is not even aware of what was happening to her but her uncle didn't even think once before ruining her identity. She didn't even tell this to her mother because she knew that she would never believe her. So, she felt alienated as she could not discuss this with anybody and started believing that she was inferior which haunted her.

She has now understood the ways of society when she was only a kid. She had realised that saying no to the boys would hurt her because they would anyways do whatever they want to do and girls are too helpless to say no. She was well aware of the fact that this society was patriarchal and so she has to develop a way in which she would not get hurt. So, she decided that she won't allow men to chase her and molest her but instead she would say yes to them and would not get hurt later. This thinking is definitely wrong on her part but she developed it out of her experience with her uncle. When she was 15 years of age, she started sleeping with boys. But this sex was never meant to give her pleasure. She thought that this sexual thing was elevating her as nobody could molest her now. She went into a quagmire where she started believing that, “Offer up to me and disconcerted by my luck of saying no.

Saying yes is the best powers. It's no big thing the things they do" (McBride 71). Shadia Abdel Rahman Tellez in her article "The Embodied Subjectivity of a Half-formed Narrator: Sexual Abuse, Language (un) Formation and Melancholic Girlhood in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*" states that 'saying yes' was empowering her and giving her an upper hand over boys. She asserts that:

Hence, because she "offers" her body as a sign of sexual availability, she believes she occupies the obliging position, "compelling" men to have sex with her. However, in most of the sexual intercoursess narrated in the novel, she holds no power, constantly positioning herself in situations of vulnerability. (Tellez 7)

Tellez explores that instead of elevating the protagonist these sexual intercoursess were degrading her and were making her more dependent on men. She was going deep in this quagmire and there was no way to come out of this.

McBride has shown fragmentation in the character of the narrator who had very less power of reasoning and was taking herself to her doom. The narrator had started taking sex casually and thought that it was elevating her as she was having power above men, "Come all you fucking lads. I'll have you every one any day. Breakfast dinner lunch and tea. The human frame. The human frame requires . . . they will say my name forever shame but do exactly what I say" (McBride 72). But she was not aware that she was going deep in this thing which would change her personality completely. She was all alone but this sex was liberating her according to her thinking. She was feeling alienated from the family also as her mother's attention was only towards her son. There was nobody in her life who could guide

her to the right path. She finally decided to leave the house and go to the city. In an interview “Eimear McBride: ‘I wanted to give the reader a very different experience’ ” Susanna Rustin states that McBride defends the character of the narrator and states that, “There are terrible things that happen and there are the choices she makes, and some of those choices are bad but I don’t even like to say that because it feels like a moral judgement and I’m really not interested in that” (Rustin n.p.). McBride calls the narrator the product of the society and the treatment she got in her house and outside world. So, she states that in such situations, usually wrongs choices are made.

McBride is very realistic in her approach and has beautifully shown that how city life completely changes the personalities of youngsters especially the girls. The narrator got enchanted by the city life but deep inside she was alone and always felt nostalgic. Her life back at home was not happy but still she felt secured there. She somehow tried to cope up with the city life and made a friend with whom she did everything which brought a new twist in her life. A city is usually known for the vices it has which corrupts the minds of young boys and girls. Gina Wisker in an article “I Am Not that Girl: Disturbance, Creativity, Play, Echoes, Liminality, Self Reflection and Stream of Consciousness in Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*” also comments on the influence of culture on the narrator. She states that, “But the girl, as a young teenager, is also a victim of popular cultural insinuations that she be sexually available; that she define herself by the power her use of sex gives her” (Wisker 66). Wisker also asserts that the narrator believed that these sexual encounters gave her some worth in the society but it actually webbed her in a downward spiral journey with no coming back.

McBride through the character of the narrator has also focussed on how the city life influences the minds of young people. The narrator started attending parties, drinking, smoking, going to clubs and many other things which were a taboo for her back at home. She had adopted all the ways of this new life and had become a new person. Once, she went to a pub, she drank so much that she was not conscious enough and went with a man whom she just met in the pub. In the morning, when she woke up, she was sleeping with a man who she didn't even know much. "What have I begun or ended? What I've done. Sex as. Go to mass. Confession. And I thought I would not this again, as it is the same as? " (McBride 97). This statement shows that she didn't even know that she had a sexual intercourse. She was so drunk at night that she lost all her conscious and did a thing which she had decided not to do. But after this incident, she again fell in the trap of sex and continued to do it as she would do back at her town.

I met a man. I met a man. I let him throw me round the bed. And smoked, me spliffs and choked my neck until I say I was dead . . . I met a man with condoms in his pockets. Don't use them. He loves children in his heart . . . I met a man who was priest. I didn't did. Just as well as many another one would . . . I met a man who hit me a smack. I met a man who cracked my arm . . . I met a man and many more and I didn't know you at all. (McBride 97)

This was how she was living her life. Sexual intercourse in her life never meant to give her pleasure but a source to emancipate herself according to her but in reality she was drowning deep into it. She was having sexual intercourse with men whom she hardly knew. The above statement shows that she slept with all types of

men and one thing was clear that what she was elevating her was actually making her more inferior. Those men, whom she slept with her, physically abused her. They would do sexual intercourse with her in a savage way and used to beat her. But the narrator was so lonely and that she hardly understood that it was ruining her life. She was dejected from her family and had nobody to call her own. So, this was giving her some kind of power. She was living a life that no fixed goal or meaning. This is also validated by Susan Cahill who in an article “A Girl is a Half-formed Thing? Girlhood, Trauma, and Resistance in Post-Tiger Irish literature” states that this sex was to give her power and it was never meant to give her pleasure. She comments, “For her sex becomes about momentary assertions of power and sustained self harm, completely devoid of any expression of pleasure” (Cahill 160). Cahill has explored that the narrator was not getting any pleasure out of these sexual intercourses and instead it was harming her both physically as well as mentally.

In another article “Feminism and the Abomination of Violence”, Jacqueline Rose also explores the character of the narrator. She asserts that, “her uncle raped her as 13 years old girl. She responds with a form of crazed promiscuity that allows men, including the uncle, repeatedly to tear her to shreds” (Rose 67). She states that the rape changed her life entirely and she developed a confused notion for sexual behaviour which allowed different men and her uncle to rape and use her body with her permission.

The shadows of past always haunt and mostly changes one’s life and same happened with the narrator. Her life was completely aimless but at least she was living it according to her will. But soon, her uncle came back in her life and that devastated her life completely. Her grandfather died and so she had to go there.

There she met the person who was responsible for her character. After so many years, her uncle was the same and still had evil intentions for her. She felt so awkward and uncomfortable in front of him as if she was responsible for that crime. He took her to the hill and started seducing her again. She was not ready for it again. “So are you guilty? What? About what? About that time when you fucked me? About that. I feel and I am. Because I was thirteen? . . . At thirteen after all I was still a child” (McBride 106-07). She wanted to know why he did that crime to her but he was not at all guilty and wanted to do it again. She was amazed on his reaction and wanted to go back home as soon as possible. But his uncle had a different plan and it was to satisfy his sexual hunger. But she strongly resisted to his advances.

Stop. Don't stop he says. Stop. No. Stop . . . Go back now I say. What? Go back now .Your mouth. Hurts me. Too swoll he says. You're sensitive to that I remember from before. God. Be quiet. Just for a moment. Sit. Alright. Sit. Alright. Are you alright? He take my hand. I Am. Shake. There. Calm down. Go back. Now. Alright. Alright. Start the car now.” (McBride 108).

This conversation between them showed how desperate her uncle was to satisfy his need and how hard it was for the narrator to resist to his advances but still she didn't give up and convinced him that she was not ready for all this. The worst part of their story was that her uncle too had a daughter who was older than the narrator. How hypocrite her uncle was that he too had a daughter but was having ill intentions for somebody else's daughter. He didn't care about the essence of their relation and just wanted to hunt the narrator. And all this time, narrator was feeling

guilt conscious as if she had done something wrong. She went again to the lake to baptize her so that she could get rid of the guilt. "I'll baptize. I like again" (McBride 110). But somehow, uncle took her number before leaving that place.

The narrator was very close to her brother who was suffering from cancer and was almost on his death bed. She loved his brother the most in the whole world who was going away from her. This was killing her inside as she was all alone and could not express her situation with anybody especially her mother because they didn't share a good and healthy relationship. In the meantime, her uncle called her, and informed her that he was coming to the city to meet her. She didn't know what was going to happen when her uncle will come but deep inside was feeling happy as she believed that he could understand her situation and would support her. Her uncle went to her apartment and did sexual intercourse with her. This sexual intercourse was relieving her. She found a way to relax her and that was 'pain relieves pain'. The pain she was getting from the sexual intercourse with her uncle helped her to forget the pain caused to her by the sufferings of her brother and moreover, the presence of her uncle in her life was giving her strength and belief that she was not alone. "I want you. There is something. I say. Don't leave me alone. There is something going on in my. Please don't stop I say again. Till I am hurt or I am sick. Keep going until I. Then you can let me die" (McBride 132). And when he asked her that did that hurt her, she said, "Yes. A lot and relieves me for a while" (McBride 137). This statement shows how confused the narrator was in her life. She loved only her brother and knew that after the death of her brother, she would be left alone and devastated and the only way for her to come out of that grief was having sexual intercourse with her uncle and other boys. Gina Wisker in an article "I Am Not That

Girl: Disturbance, Creativity, Play, Echoes and Stream of Consciousness in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is Half-formed Thing*" also explores the confusion of the narrator in this book. She states that the narrator is in such a state that:

Her response is that of a victim whose identity becomes defined by the act, so that she seeks him out and seeks other abusive relationships, some more violent. It is a downhill journey for the girl and one which is predicated upon confusions generated by her own subordinate position, and her desperate need to be seen, singled out and love. (Wisker 59)

Wisker has beautifully explained that the narrator in order to be seen was going deep into the world of sexual desire that was ruining her life and making it more worst.

Self realization is one of the key factors which brought a twist in the narrator's life. She understood that all this was spoiling only her life. She wanted to stop all this and live a carefree and independent life. She just wanted to dedicate her life to her brother and wanted to care for him.

Just stop see and cut the cord the thread with this life and I'll be alright. Give it up, uncle up, that's the way. Not to be this. Ripped. Ah I see. Not. To. Do. This. Any. More. What. Nothing I don't do a thing. Few fucks here and then and who's that to do with? No one but myself. (McBride 143)

She had decided that she was not going to continue it with her uncle or anybody else. She has understood that it was all waste of time and her character was

coming to end with such life. So, she determined that she would stop this and start her life afresh. But her uncle was not ready for all this. He didn't want to end it because ending it would end all the pleasures he was getting from the narrator. He came to her and started doing it forcefully to her as she was resisting him.

He rip me open and hurt because I say though I don't want, he beg.
No that's all I ask. And take for yourself. Whatever. You. Want.
Because I know there's not much left. When he kisses. I am.
Strangle. And he pushed me down. Fuck that. Just hit me on the face.
No. Then get off. Get fucking off. Alright slaps my face . . . so he hit
til I fall over. Crushing under. Hits again. He his til something's click
and the blood begins to run. (McBride 143-44)

This shows that apart from sexual violence, her uncle started beating her also. This was too much for her the narrator but she was too helpless in this situation. She didn't know what to do next as her uncle was not ready to leave her and if she would resist he used to beat her like an animal. She just went to her home to his brother so that she can live peacefully but her uncle there along with her wife. He was not in a state to stay away from her as she was a source of sexual pleasure to him. Whenever he would get a chance, he used to sexually exploit her and beat her if she would fight back.

Don't touch me. All that's done. I'm much cleaner better here . . .
shut up. Hurt my arm I'll. Just be quiet. I won't be long he says. I
shut the light out. Shut the air. Hurt wrists to breaking. Fall all his

weight. Is fine. I can fine. Hear him say, you know I know you now and to hurt you very well. (McBride 165-67)

She was drowning deep in this sexual violence and there was nobody who would help her. She could not discuss this with anybody. She just prayed that it should end soon. "Pray this will all be gone" (McBride 166). She was so helpless that she prayed to God so that he should die, "Jesus save. Jesus pray. Uncle that. Let him die. Let him be dead" (McBride 166). Her uncle started taking her as her own property that only use and do whatever he wishes to do. Once, she was in the woods, some boys came and tried to rape her, her uncle came to her rescue. He after saving her put all the blame on her. "And you, he have me. By the hair. Slut always you can't you keep your knickers to yourself. Let go. Slap me. More than ever before I. God my face, The. God my eye is coming out it seems. Falling over in the. See whore, what you done?" (McBride 170). He wanted to make her realise that it was only him for her and nobody else can touch her as if she belonged to him. He beat her and this time brutally and his hypocrisy reflected when he started seducing her again at that point.

McBride has shown that if a girl goes in the quagmire of sexual violence, then it is very difficult for her to come out of this. The narrator was a very strong and rebellious girl but still she didn't have the courage to come out of this hell. She tried a lot to end all this but all in vain. But somehow, she was coping with the situation because of her brother but when her brother died, she broke completely. She was left all alone and had nobody to talk to. She didn't know what to do and how she would live without her brother. She was so confused and sad that she just went to the woods to spend some time alone where she could cry and relax herself.

But life for her was never easy, as she was chased by the same boys who once tried to rape her when her uncle rescued her. She tried telling them that her brother had died and she just came to the woods so that she can cry but they were not listening to her. They didn't only sexually abuse her but beat her brutally as a revenge for the last time.

Piull my mouth he pull m mouth with his fingers pull the side of my mouth til I no. Stop that fuck and rip. Scin. Stop heel. Tear my mouth. Don't I come all mouth of blood of choking of he there bitch there bithc there there stranlge me strangle how you like it how you think it is fun grouged breth scald my lungs til I. Puk blood over me frum . . . thanks for the fuck you thanks for that I. Hear his walking crunching. (McBride 197-98)

This expression of the narrator explains painfully how was she raped and beaten. She was already in the pain of the loss of her brother's life and now she was raped and beaten like a savage. But somehow, she came back home for her brother funeral. The hypocrisy of the family especially her mother lied in the fact that nobody cared about her plight. She came home all bleeding and bruised but nobody cared and instead her mother started cursing her. "Have you no shame?" (McBride 195). This broke her completely. Even though she was not having good terms with her mother but still she was not expecting such response from her mother when she needed her the most. She went to the bathroom to wash herself feeling all dejected. She heard somebody was outside her bathroom and calling her. He came inside the washroom and raped her again. He was such a filthy man that he didn't care about her situation or her pain. "Knock me on the door. Ssssh. Don't let everybody hear. I

lo I lo. I'll take care of you. Let me. Oh no no no no. I don't want. Want. Quiet pet. There he does it" (McBride 197). This shows that her uncle didn't leave any chance to satisfy his sexual hunger. The next morning when she woke up, her mother started cursing her without understanding her own daughter's pain. "You are disgusting. You are. Sick in the head. How you've lived. This filth you've made of yourself. So now your good kind brother is gone and God forgive me but its true. I almost wish it was you lying there in that box. You. And not. My. Son" (McBride 200). How can a mother talk like that? She should have helped her daughter from the beginning. Her daughter made certain mistakes in her life but somehow her mother was responsible for those mistakes. She never took care of her and always gave preference to her son which made the narrator indulged in those sexual activities in order to be loved and acknowledged. And at last, she was putting all the blame on her daughter when she should actually help her and come out of this pain. This was too much for the narrator, she was left all alone after the death of her brother and her mother has also disowned her. Her mother felt ashamed of her which killed the narrator from inside. She had no place to go and didn't know what to do in her life. she went to the lake where she used to baptize her, but this time, she drowned herself to death so as to meet her brother, the only person whom she loved dearly. "Turn. Look up. Bubble from my mouth drift high. Blue tinge lips. Floating hair. Air Famished eyes. Brown water turning into light. There now. There now. That just was life. And now. What? My name is gone" (McBride 203). This is how she ended her life. She felt that there was nothing left in the world for her. She suffered all her life and found peace only in dying.

Thus to conclude McBride through *A Girl is Half-formed Thing* has shown that women sexuality is the one of the most common type of oppressions that a girl faces in her life. McBride through the character of the unnamed narrator showed such crime is still prevalent in the western countries which are believed to be free and liberal towards women. The writer traces the life of a girl from the womb to her adult stage in which she struggles and faces certain problems related to women oppression. She faced favouritism in her house which developed a sense of inferiority complex and developed a fragmented identity. The hype to this fragmentation was done by her uncle who raped her when she was only thirteen years of age. This incident brought a drastic change in her life. She got confused that if she will allow men to do sexual intercourse with her, it will give her a power over them but in reality she got webbed in it and could not come out of it. McBride has also focussed on the point where mother disowns her daughter when her daughter needed her support and care, so the only way of escapism left for the narrator was to die and go to a world free from oppression and subjugation.

Chapter Three

Women and Indian Tradition in Sudha Koul's *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir*

The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir is written by Sudha Koul who is a Kashmiri Pandit writer. She completed her education from Kashmir with Bachelors of Arts and a Master of Arts in Political Science. After that she shifted to United States of America and since then she has been raising her family in New Jersey.

She has written three books viz. *Curries Without Worries, Come With Me to India: On a Wondrous Voyage Through Time* and *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir*.

Curries without Worries was her first book written in 1989. This book focuses on the recipes of the Indian Cuisine. This book provides all the information required to cook Indian food. This book focuses on minute details like seasonings and spices from India which are mandatory for Indian cooking. It gives the detailed recipes for the dishes like chicken, fish, vegetarian, curries, meat, kebabs, salads, snacks and sweet dishes. This book is mostly considered to be a perfect book to cook Indian food with simple and easy steps.

Come with me to India: On a Wondrous Voyage Through Time is the second book of Sudha Koul. It was published in 1997. This book is literary book which answers questions related to India by a writer living in America. It is considered that in USA, people are very curious to know about the Indian culture and tradition which Sudha Koul also felt and decided to answers those questions through this

book. It is in a form of a wondrous voyage to India which answers the questions like how to Indians live, what is their economy and what languages do they speak. It won't be wrong to call this book a travel guide to Indians for the foreigners.

The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir is a memoir by Sudha Koul where the writer traces the history of her emancipation. But when the book is read in depth, it is explored that it is not only the writer's story but it includes the stories of her mother, grandmothers, daughter of a pedlar (Shawlwala), mother of a fisherman and other ladies of Kashmir. Sudha Koul through *The Tiger Ladies* wants to motivate the women of Kashmir to pursue their dreams instead of being subjugated. She discusses about some important people in her life who inspired her to become a successful person. Sudha Koul as a young child was very much influenced by her grandmother who according to her was a very strong lady. Other major influences in her life were Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was the first female Prime Minister of India, Habba Khatoon, and Lal Ded etc. Indira Gandhi influenced her so much that Sudha Koul became the first woman I.A.S officer of J&K state, India.

Louisa Waugh in her review "The World According to Women" states that this memoir by Sudha Koul beautifully explains the culture and tradition of Kashmir. The love for Kashmir is the main theme of this book. She asserts that, "She does not so much describe as paint the colours of life both before and during the slow-burning war that is still ravaging her country" (Waugh n.p.). Waugh asserts that this book is like Sudha Koul is answering to the questions which people used to ask her in America about the Indian culture and tradition. ". . . people asking me if I can tell them how Indian can marry sight unseen, or wear marks on their foreheads,

or, if my husband and I have Tantric sex. You can almost hear her shaking her head and she says it". (Waugh n.p.)

Vinayak Razdan in his review "*The Tiger Ladies* by Sudha Koul" states that this book is about the writer's birth in Kashmir and how she grew up there and her present life in America where she recalls all her childhood memories of living in a happy valley. He asserts that it is a very inspirational book for women to achieve one's goal in life. "It is about women making new beginnings. It is about "Tiger Ladies" to make these beginnings. It talks about the some women in Kashmir which is considered to be patriarchal like other Indian states and where women's roles are limited to the house but still there some women who dare to make their lives better by achieving their goals. Razdan expresses that it is difficult for a woman to focus on her dreams in Kashmir as it is, "a world where women tell stories of a sad god-woman whose husband offered her only guilty sex and mother complex instead of love" (Razdan n.p.). But still in such part of the world, women like Sudha Koul focused on her dream and became the first woman Kashmir I.A.S officer.

Terry Hong in his review "*The Tiger Ladies-A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul (in Asia Week)", states that Sudha Koul traces the life of four generations of women form Kashmir which is stuck in tensions between India and Pakistan. She asserts that, "She weaves a magical childhood filled with mouth-watering scent, folktales, and family celebrations together with the unresolved political and religious battles that threaten the very existence of a most fragile region" (Hong n.p.).

Insha Malik in her review "*The Tiger Ladies-A Book Review*" appreciates Sudha Koul for maintaining the simplicity in writing about Kashmir for a Kashmiri

Pandit girl who considers it as a heaven. She states that, “Sudha Koul’s memoir *The Tiger Ladies* travels in time. In total of 228 pages, it makes a ‘Kashmir’ out of you. It narrates the lives of 1947 era till her being the third generation and her horrors of staying and working as a single woman in the government offices in India.” (Malik n.p.). Malik states that this book is an answer to her belief in her tradition and culture living in America. She states that Sudha Koul is in quest to find her identity of being Indian living in Kashmir. Malik strongly believes that this book is for every Kashmiri living outside Kashmir who is nostalgic.

The setting of this book is Kashmir, India. India is a land of different cultures and traditions and is a secular country. Religion is an important part of this country. There are many religions practised in this country but Hinduism is the most dominant religion in India. The main protagonist is a Hindu Pandit girl, who just dreams to have a successful life. She suffers all her life to achieve her aim of becoming a free and independent woman. Kashmir like other Indian states is very orthodox related to women and is a patriarchal society. Women in Kashmir are mostly suppressed either in the name of religion or tradition or customs. So, basically females in Kashmir act like a secondary sex to their male counterparts.

In an article “Study of Women Empowerment in Kashmir in Relation to Social Freedom”, Kamalpreet Kaur talks about the status and the plight of Kashmiri women. She explores that woman in Kashmir struggle like other parts of the country. They are not given the equal rights even though being an important part of the society. She states that men formulate the laws and rules according to their convenience and women just struggle to fit in those rules. According to her, women can achieve their emancipation only when they are given the social freedom. She

even explores that women in Kashmir are subjugated in the name of religion which is totally wrong because in reality Hinduism is in favour of women emancipation. She states, "In Kashmir, there are many religious restrictions and social bondages who do not allow women students to get maximum social freedom . . . Researcher concludes that the women students in Kashmir are enjoying less social freedom" (Kaur 10). Kaur explores that the women are manipulated by the culture and they do not think about their freedom as they consider it a taboo which is the reason of less women empowerment in Kashmir. Kaur through the paper advises the government to actively participate in the upliftment of the women especially in the field of education.

In another article "Enhancing Women's Empowerment: Reflections from Jammu and Kashmir", Nusrat Pandit discusses about the status of women in Kashmir. She explores that woman empowerment has been an important topic of discussion not only at national level but at an international level as well. But according to her, this can be achieved only when the society will take strict actions to eradicate the evil practices done to women. She focuses on the Kashmir region and states that this region has been affected by many protests and chaos in the past and the worst victim of this chaos was definitely the women but still Kashmiri women emerged to be very strong. She asserts, "Despite the fact that in these past 25 years of protracted violence the state has witnessed 68000 violent incidents, women suffered the most in this violence; they lost their spouses, son, father, mother, sister, brother and other dear ones but their will and strength remained intact" (Pandit 70). She later focuses on the implementation of programmes which government had initiated for the upliftment of women living below poverty lines.

Nusrat Pandit argues that J&K state is a disturbed state which makes it very difficult for a woman to live her life peacefully. She concentrates on the main difficulties which a woman experiences in this state like the violence against women, no or less participation in the political affair, lack of education, improper health facilities and many more. Pandit strongly believes that education is the most important thing in the empowerment of women but unfortunately, the literacy rate of women in Kashmir is very low. She states:

Literacy rate in J&K has considerably remained unsatisfactory. The low literacy rate of the women folk is growing and snaring at the policy programmes launched in the state where focus has been the gender (female), similarly the women's participation in work force as compared to men is still very nacent. (Pandit 72)

Pandit finally urges the society and the government to start working for the betterment of the women as they are very important part of the society.

Sudha Koul through this book shows the real picture of Indian society and how women are treated in this particular part of the world. She focuses on different issues where women are subjugated and considered as a secondary sex to their male counterparts.

Marriage is one of the most important and sacred thing in India. To get their daughters married is the main issue of the parents specifically for the mothers in India. Even the daughters are told from their childhood only that their ultimate aim is to get married. She is always treated as an 'Outsider' in the family and once she gets married even in her husband's house, she is treated as an 'Outsider'. So,

basically females in India have fewer dreams to achieve heights and rather prepare themselves for marriage. But at a broader spectrum, this is the plight of women not only in India but across the globe.

A book *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage, Essays on Gender, Religion and Culture* edited by Lindsay Harlan and Paul B Coutright discuss the role and status of Hindu women. The authors stresses on the importance of marriage in Hindu mythology. According to them, marriage is a sacred thing which unites two beings and balances the nature. They assert that, “many studies of Hindu marriage predominately focus on prescriptive literature, especially the Sanskrit moral-legal texts (dharamsastras), which interpret marriage as a set of normative rules and attitudes to be pursued in order to achieve merit and engender social harmony” (Harlan, Coutright 3-4). But they later reveal the present plight of married women in India. According to them, the marriage has lost all the essence and women are mostly degraded after their marriage. The women are made to believe that their ultimate aim is to serve her husband and his family. The author explores that the women has to forget her desires and put at priority the desires of her husband and his family. They state that:

When a bride marries into her husband’s family, she enters into this complex web of human relationships. While she is expected to serve the interest of his family as a whole. She had to walk a delicate and at times perilous path between her husband and the other members of his family, especially the other significant women, his mothers and sisters. (Harlan and Coutright 8)

This expression is the reality of Indian woman who is always webbed in relationships and has to respect everybody's wishes and desires and sacrifice her own wishes and desires. Sudha Koul in *The Tiger Ladies* has also explained the process of marriage and how Indian society consider marriage to be the ultimate aim of girl's live Koul explores the story of three generations grandmothers, mothers and daughters and the process of marriage. She has expressed in a beautiful way that even though there is a lot of generation gap between them but one thing which is common in these three generations is the concept of marriage. Throughout these three generations the women are told that marriage is their ultimate aim and they should get married as soon as possible.

This ideology of parents getting their marriage is also explained by K.A Kunjakkan in his book *Feminism and the Indian Realities*. He observes that the girl's marriage in India is one of the biggest issues and the parents prepare their daughters from their childhood that they belong somewhere else. The author states:

Since, the marriage of a daughter is the prime responsibility of the parents, and those parents who fail to get their daughters married in times is a victim of social ridicule and disgrace, the parents wanted to escape from this social accusation and arranged early marriage of their daughters as early as possible, even before the age of puberty.

(Kunjakkan 38)

So, he also points out that a girl's marriage has been and is still an important aspect of parent's life and usually girls are considered no less than a burden on their parents if not married soon. Kunjakkan has beautifully explained the mentality of a

girl child in India. He states that the parents are always worried about the girl's marriage and don't care about her feelings and desires. If the parents are not able to find a suitable match for their daughters, they become the talk of the town. So, in order to save themselves from the social ridicule, they get their daughter married.

Koul in *The Tiger Ladies* explains the process of her grandmother, mother and her marriage. Tulli, the grandmother of the writer got married at a very tender age. Katyayani, the mother of the writer got married at an age of fourteen years to her father's best friend's son. It was one spring that when Katyayani was twelve years only, she was forbidden from going to the groom's house. The groom was the friend of Katyayani and within a small period of time, they were engaged. He used to live next to her house. On her engagement day, she was totally ignorant about the concept of marriage as she was only a child. She got bewitched by the jewellery and the clothes which the groom's family brought for her. After engagement she was not allowed to play with the boys and was kept at home. "The twelve-year-old cares more for her friends and the boat rides than the upcoming marriage and cries and wants to go on the picnic, but the wedding date has been fixed and the question does not arise" (Koul 59). This statement shows that Katyayani was simply a kid having no sense regarding the marriage. She was just a small child who wants to enjoy her life by playing and going on picnics. She climbed to the attic to see the streets as if she knew that now she was imprisoned. Now she could not do what she wishes to do. As she got married at such small age, so she grew into a woman at her in-laws house. Initially, she got education at home but as soon as she got pregnant got involved in household activities and married life. This is the real picture of the society. The women have to forget about themselves and their lives and dedicate

their entire lives to their husbands' life and in-laws' life. But the irony is that women have accepted this as their destiny.

When Sudha was in the college, her mother started looking for a groom for her and started to collect trousseau. The question arises that if the mother has suffered the same pain of early marriage, then why does she expect the same for her daughter? The answer is simple because the women are taught that there is no life without marriage and if they don't get married at a right age then they won't get married at all. "A girl must be married off, may be not to the best possible choice, but even a not-so-good-match is hundred times better than an unmarried girl" (Koul 112). This is really shocking that the female is made to believe that their only motive in life is to get married without caring about her emotions or dreams. Sudha Koul's mother was collecting all her trousseau in her attic. The astrologer was called to look at her horoscope. In India, it is not enough for a girl to be beautiful and educated but what matters more is her horoscope. The astrologer told her mother that, "Your daughter is like a choice piece of meat surrounded by wolves" (Koul 111). How could an astrologer who is believed to be a man of religion talk like this about a girl? Even though relieved by the astrologer that there were many men waiting for her daughter to get married, still her mother was tensed due to the delay in her daughter's marriage. But her mother didn't give up any hope for her daughter's marriage. She used to tell Sudha Koul, "You belong to someone else, you are the property of another household, you have been entrusted to me by God, but I am just your caretaker. May the Almighty bring that day upon us soon when you go to your own home" (Koul 113). How could a mother talk to her daughter like this? In a broader sense, a mother is making her daughter realise that she is just a caretaker to

her daughter and her aim is to get her married as soon as possible. A mother is a female herself. She should understand the feelings of her daughter as she has suffered the same pain and should instead strongly oppose to this tradition of early marriage.

This expression of Sudha Koul about the role of Indian woman being restricted to her house is validated by Aneesa Shafi in her book *Working Women in Kashmir: Problems and Prospects*. She asserts that women are made to believe that they belong to the four walls of the house and they should not dream anything outside it. The wife should dream only of serving her husband and his family with utmost dedication. She states that, “family is the area in which the role of women in Kashmir is traditionally the most prominent. Indeed, women had practically no role outside the home in traditional middle and upper class families and their whole life had been spent with the family” (Shafi 69). The author states that women devotes her entire life to the home and is completely dependent on her husband for her means of support. She hardly thinks about her dreams and aims. The author asserts that Kashmir region is mostly dominated by the patriarchy and still considers women as a secondary sex. The woman has to be under the protection of the male in her life to survive in the society. She expresses that, “her sphere of the life has been strictly limited and confined to home under protection of man and the husband’s field of activity is largely outside the home” (Shafi 70). Shafi has beautifully explained in this book that women are made to believe that they are so fragile that they belong to their homes only and if they want to go outside then she should be in the supervision of their husbands.

But the irony is that mother has accepted it and has made her daughter to believe that marriage and serving the husband should be the most important thing and should be done with complete devotion. Sudha Koul herself expresses that her mother has said these things so many times that it has quit traumatising her. But she was not like other passive Kashmiri girls. She did not dream of marrying only as she wanted to study and achieve the heights.

Sudha Koul got very happy when she completed her university with flying colours but this hardly made any difference to her mother. This was the thing that her mother should be proud of but she was not happy and instead she was worrying more and more about her marriage. "In their eyes, prior to marriage we are just waiting for our real home and it is getting really late for us. My accomplishments do not impress my mother, she thinks I take it all seriously and is rather embarrassed by my resilient bachelor status" (Koul 141). This is complete hypocrisy on the part of her mother. She was not able to sleep at night because her daughter was not yet married and was having an overcrowded attic. But the writer was focussed on her dream and she finally became the first female I.A.S officer from her state and only after achieving her goal got married.

Koul through this book has also touched a very sensitive issue regarding the plight of newly wedded girls in *The Tiger Ladies*. She expresses that a girl leaves her home, her surname and almost everything when she gets married in the hope that her husband and her in-laws will take care of her like their own family member. But this is just the fantasy in which the girl lives and is almost crushed when she reaches her in-laws. Daughter-in-law is rarely treated as a daughter and in most of the cases the situation of these newlyweds is very pitiable. A girl has never a house to call her

own. Before marriage she is told that the house in which she is living from her birth is not her real house but the one where she will get married will be her real home. But there also she is treated mostly as a guest.

K.A Kunjakkan in his book *Feminism and The Indian Realities* explains the real concept of feminism present in India from the pre-historic times. He basically stresses on the relationship between husband and wife. He argues that both men and women are equal and should live in harmony. He explains that the trinity in Hinduism i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh have their consorts i.e. Saraswathy-the goddess of wisdom and knowledge, Shakti-the powerful goddess and Lakshmi-the goddess of wealth. He later expresses that people usually consider Shiva to be the lord of the universe but Shiva is usually called Shakti-Shiva because Shakti is always a part of Shiva. He states about the Shakti as:

She is immersed in his body and hence Shiva is having more energy and power. He is called Ardhra-Nareshwara (Half male-half female God). Shakti (Parvathi) is the reason for his energy. Without Shakti, Shiva is powerless. Shiv-Shakti is a typical illustration of Prakriti-Purush combinations and the creative energy emanating from them, is responsible for the existence of all the beings of this universe.
(Kunjakkan 4)

This statement by Kunjakkan explains the importance of women's part in her husband's life as even Lord Shiva needed Parvathi to be powerful. He holds the view that the trinity along with their consorts define the real meaning of unity among male and female. Kunjakkan states that, "They are made for each other, for

mutual love, consideration and for the propagation of mankind” (Kunjakkan 4). He argues that the relationship between these gods and goddess actually define the standards for the husband and wife. He calls wife as one-half of her husband and husband as one half of his wife. So, according to him, both are equal. He even gives the reference of the Hindu law which considers both husband and wife as equal. He further explores that the society have forgotten the essence of this equality which the gods and goddess shared as husband and wife.

Sudha Koul in *The Tiger Ladies* has also portrayed the plight and status of newlywed brides of Kashmir. Koul explains that for in-laws, the bride is always a new thing. They don't accept her as their own daughter which they promise at the time of marriage. She states that:

She is an outsider who shares the son's bed, she is a suspect, and soon provides proof of her nocturnal antics in the shape of an oval belly. The belly will become her passport to the family. The fact is that even producing an off-spring who is a blood relative of her in-laws does not guarantee that she will become a real member of the pack. (Koul 20)

This statement by Sudha Koul shows that the bride is always in a deep fear of being rejected by the in-laws who treat her as an outsider. Outsider is a big word which means that she does not belong to her in-laws home which she thought would be her real home. This hits her psychology to core and for being accepted in the family she gets pregnant as the baby is the passport to the family. But Sudha Koul explains that even this passport does not confirm her position in the family. Simone

de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* also focuses on this fact that women are considered to be 'Other' (the object) and men are always the 'Self' (Subject). She states that all her life women are considered to be dependent on men and has no position of her own and is confined to only one role in life and that is reproduction. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* also stresses on this theme. She strongly opposes the idea of making women believe that her only aim in life is child rearing and house making. She wants women to realise their worth and should not focus only on reproduction but instead on their career as well.

K.A Kunjakkan in his book *Feminism and Indian Realities* also explains the plight of a married woman at her in laws house. According to him, women is never given due respect in the society. The society is biased against women and the women are treated only as a secondary sex. The wives never get the respect and love which her husband gets. She is mostly considered as an Outsider. She somehow gets the respect only when she gets pregnant. So, marriage is not only the way of earning some respect in the society. The women had to get pregnant in order to be respected and treated well. He explores that the woman lives in state of insecurity until she gets pregnant. Kunjakkan further asserts:

For and Indian woman, imminent motherhood is not only the personal fulfilment of an old wish and the biological consummation of life-long promise, but an event in which the culture confirms her status as a renewer of the race and extends to her a respect and consideration which were not accorded to her as a mere wife.
(Kunjakkan 26)

A book entitled *The Role of Religion in Marriage and Family Counselling* edited by Jill Duba Onedera also explains the role of women in the Indian society with special reference to religion. The author explains how women are dominated at all spheres of life. The author also explores that the Indian women especially the married ones suffer a lot in the name of the tradition. The author also holds the belief that Indian women get some respect only when they get pregnant and take the lineage of her husband forward. She states, "Indian women status depends on their ability to bear children, especially a male child. Inability to conceive can become a big issue for Hindu women. Most of them faced abandonment and experienced strained relationships from their husbands"(Onedera 126).

The worst part is that the bride is made ready to bear the torture from the childhood only. She is brainwashed from her childhood that this is not a new thing as it is a part of the society. Sudha Koul in the book gives references of the folktales and folksongs which are sung at the time of the marriage. The irony is that at the time of marriage the songs sung have the theme of the misery of the daughter-in-law. These songs portray how girls are torn away from their parent's house and are given to the new unforgiving house. "We sing the songs of these unhappy brides even at the weddings, and narrate heartrending tales that bring tears even to the eyes of the driest of the mother-in-law, because they have been brides themselves" (Koul 21). The question arises why are the songs of the misery of daughter-in-law sung at the time of marriage? Marriage is such an auspicious event and there should be happiness everywhere. The answer to this question is simple that the girls are being mentally prepared that if she has to suffer the torture in her in-laws house, she should not get surprised and should accept it as their fate as her mother and other

females have also suffered it without resisting it. Why is this thinking prevalent in the society? A female should oppose this and end this cruel practise. Even though the mother-in-law cries at the folksongs but her feelings are only temporary and in reality a woman turns out to be another woman's enemy and what she has suffered in her life gives it back to her daughter-in-law in the form of revenge or anger. This is very shocking on the parts of the mothers-in-law. They should be the one to protect the daughters-in-law as they are the only one who can understand the pain and suffering of the daughter-in-law's very well. But it's a completely different scenario. And the legacy of the misery of daughter-in-law's is taken from one generation to the other.

Sudha Koul has also touched an important issue related to married women in India. Daughter-in-law is mostly not allowed to go to her parent's home after she is being married and enter her in-laws home and even her parents not all allowed to enter her new home. Sudha Koul explains in *The Tiger Ladies* that the milk-mother goes to the daughter to ask about her health and well beings. "If the girl is too homesick or she has to return to her parent's house for ritual, or because of an illness, the milk-mother will bring her back for a brief visit" (Koul 20). This means that a girl is completely depended on her in-laws. Everything is decided for her and she just has to follow it without any question. She is not allowed to see her parents often whom she loves and cares about. Why is this happening in the society? Does marriage means end of relationship with her parents? Even the mother of the writer was not allowed to go alone to her mother's house. Whenever she felt homesick, she had to ask her sister-in-law to accompany her home. Sudha Koul then understands the plight of newlyweds and remembers what her grandmother wanted to mean

when she said, “Sometimes new brides have to face tough times at the hands of their in-laws” (Koul 21). Stephen Knapp in an article “Women in Vedic Culture” gives reference from the Vedas which proves that women when they enter in their in-laws house should be treated like a queen and not just an object. He takes a reference from the Atharva Veda 14.1, verses number 43-44 which states that “When a woman is invited into a family through marriage, she enters “as a river enters a sea” and “to rule there along with her husband, as a queen, over the other members of the family” (qtd. by Knapp n.p.).” This reference provides the best explanation for the position and status of women in Vedas which is only elevated. Women as a daughter-in-law should be treated as a queen but is happening in Indian society is that she is rarely considered a human. In our society, woman is only a child bearing machine and an outsider in the family. She has no identity of her own which is prevalent in the book *The Tiger Ladies* by Sudha Koul as well.

The women are mistreated not only by her parent in-laws but her husband as well. Sudha Koul remembers one story where one man who feared from his mother so much that he would stay away from his wife the whole day but at night used to do sexual intercourse with her as a hungry beast. It is a well-known fact that a mother is always jealous of her daughter-in law and this is also one of the reasons why she tortures her daughter-in-law. There was a man who would make sure that he and his wife are all alone and then would darkened the room by getting all the windows and doors and drawing all the curtains to do sex with her wife as if he was ashamed of being a married man. The woman has only one source of hope in her in-laws and that is her husband whom she thinks will protect her and respect her. But all these hopes are often crushed by the husband.

In silence he makes love to his wife, one hand on her mouth, and he consumes her with hunger. But he is like a man under siege, a man pursued. In the night he looks at her and is possessed by her luminescence and her hair and her nakedness. When morning comes and he draws the curtains from the windowpanes and open all the windows and doors he has closed the night before, he can see her teeth and nakedness stretched across the bed. He hears his mother calling him, and when he remembers his need in the night it makes his stomach turn.” (Koul 34)

This is the hypocrisy of the husband. If he loves his wife then he should respect her feelings and should treat her same every-time. But here it seems as if the husband at night in need to satisfy his sexual desire goes to his wife like a hungry scavenger and in the morning as his mother calls him, turns away from his wife and becomes a mama’s boy. Luce Irigaray in her book *This Book Which is Not One* states that women are no more than a prop for the males to satisfy their sexual hunger. She comments that, “woman, in their sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies”(Irigaray 23). This statement shows that how women have become only a source of pleasure to men and same is what Sudha Koul has also shown in this novel *The Tiger Ladies*.

A wife is a very important part of a husband’s life. She should be given due respect and status. But the irony is that a wife is treated like a secondary sex only. Even the gods in Hindu mythology treated their wives with respect and care. In a book entitled *Facets of Feminism: Studies on the Concepts of Woman in Indian Tradition*, Raghunath Ghosh explains the importance of wife to perform any sacred

sacrificial rites. He gives reference from Ramayana in which Lord Rama who wanted to do the Rajusuya sacrifice has to build an artificial golden image of Sita to acquire the right of the performance of sacrifice. He later explains that in Vedic literature it is mentioned that men and women are essentially identical, as they are the manifestations of Sat, Chit and Anand (truth).

Vedas have provided a high status to the wife. Stephen Knapp in his article entitled “Women in Vedic Culture” asserts that women should be respected and honoured by their fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law who desired their own welfare. This means that women should never be insulted or dishonoured. He states that Vedas state that if women are given due respect then even the deities like to reside there and where they are not respected, all the actions remain unfruitful. This was the actual place of women in the Vedic times in which they were respected and honoured. He states that Bhishma actually warned all the men of the earth to care, love and respect the women and should never ill treat them which would break their hearts. But what we see in reality it is a complete different picture. The women are mostly ill-treated and that too by letting them know that they are inferior and they should not protest against it as is shown by Sudha Koul in *The Tiger Ladies*.

Manasi Bhattacharya, Aryin S.Bedi and Amrita Chhachhi in their article entitled “Martial Violence and Women’s Employment and Property Status: Evidence from North Indian Villages” asserts that women are considered only to be meant for homes. She expresses that home is considered to be the safest place for women but in reality the physical violence done by the spouse is prevalent there and that disturbs the women not only physically but mentally as well. They believe that, “domestic violence is recognised as a violence of the basic rights of women, and,

freedom from such violence is an important aspect of women's welfare" (Bhattacharya, Bedi and Chhachhi 2). They later reveal that even today the number of spousal violence is on the increasing side only even after having so many laws for women empowerment.

In another article by Showkeen Bilal Ahmed Gul "Women and Violence: A Study of Women's Empowerment and its Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir" discuss the position of Indian women specifically of Jammu and Kashmir focussing mainly on domestic violence. He validates his assumptions with references to many reports which prove that domestic violence is spreading at an alarming pace in India. Later Gul gives a reference of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1994 report which shows statistics of women's domestic violence which is increasing day by day. Showkeen Bilal asserts that the violence against women is an extreme form of male control over women. The men want to dominate the women by showing them they are more powerful than the women and so the women should be afraid of them and should do what the men wants them to do. Showkeen Bilal states that this domestic violence is rising in Jammu and Kashmir. He expresses that even the educated and the economically independent women of the state have to face this domestic violence. He later in his article explains that this domestic violence is done by the husband and the in laws as well which includes physical and sexual violence which ultimately goes to the psychological violence. He states,

It's estimated that from 10 percent to 50 percent of women in the state have suffered this kind of violence. As almost 70 percent of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by the husband.

This is mostly relating to matrimonial disputes and family squabbles and harassment for dowry” (Bilal 4).

These figures reveal how domestic violence is only at increasing side rather than decreasing. And it is a high time now that it should be taken at priority and steps should be taken to completely end this practice. This is what Sudha Koul has also shown in *The Tiger Ladies*.

Myths and folktales are a part and parcel of every society from where it drives its morals and virtues. But the irony is that even these myths and folktales are made in a way in which women are only suppressed and dominated. These myths and folktales are mostly formed by the males and are according to their convenience and importance. Sudha Koul in this book gives examples of so many myths and folktales in which women are considered to be a commodity.

One of the scariest myth or folktales famous in Kashmir is that the women of Kishtwar (often called as the Small Kashmir) are witches. “The truth is that we are in wonder of these women because they can cast spells, which no one can remove” (Koul 107). This is so shocking that women are being called a witch and the worst part is that females enjoy these folktales the most. And to prove that the women of Kishtwar are witches, they had made a folktale which Sudha Koul explains in this book. The story goes like this that once there was a man who was posted in Kishtwar and he went alone there without his wife or family. In this hut in Kishtwar there was a woman who would do household chores for him. Initially, the man did not see the woman and when he saw her, he got bewitched by her beauty and they both started living together. The man forgot about his family and did not return to Kashmir. His

wife at once concluded that he would be in a spell so she went to a holy person and brought an amulet. As soon as she bought that, her husband returned back to her and never went back to Kishtwar. But as he has promised the lady in Kishtwar that he will return so suddenly he fell ill and there was a bird that used to sit outside his window. He used to stare at that bird and eventually died. And hence it was proved with a folktale that the women of Kishtwar are witches. This is really shocking. How could one just make a story to prove that point without any solid proof? Just to prove that women are witches, it was made up to validate it with the stamp of a folktale. And the worst part is that the story is circulated all over Kashmir by females only. The women need to understand the worth of themselves and other women as well. They need to stop degrading women only on the basis of these folktales and myths which are only based on assumptions.

There are some stories about women which are humorous also. These stories depict the plight of women who through small joys escapes to a different world. The women of Kashmir are inseparable from their hotpots (kangris). They roast their eggs in their kangris. This small happiness let them to forget the harsh reality of life for sometimes. They find pleasure in eating eggs secretly as they think this is the only thing which they are doing for themselves without asking anybody. This fact is common in Kashmir that the wives roast eggs in their Kangris. There is a famous folktale related to this roasting of eggs which is very humorous. Once there was a lady who was roasting eggs in her kangris and suddenly the eggs burst and there was an explosion and everything was pasted on her face. The women find it very humorous and but if we look deep to this folktale then we can conclude that the

happiness which women used to get from this roasting of eggs and which she thought was a secret is now mocked at.

Education is the birth right of both males and females. But this education has always been a barrier for girls. Luckily the protagonist doesn't have to struggle much for her education till her college. But after that it was a struggle for her to go to university and achieve what she wanted in her life. But the writer was firm and focussed in her life as she knew what she wanted from her life as a result of her hard work she became the first lady I.A.S officer of J&K state.

Raghunath Gosh in the book entitled *Facets of Feminism: Studies on the concept of women in Indian Tradition* gives the detailed analysis of female education in the Hindu tradition. He gives the references from the ancient texts regarding the support of female education. In his first chapter entitled "Feminism: Education and Ritualistic Rights in the Vedic Literature", he states that women education is prevalent in the Hindu society from the Vedic times. He expresses that women belonging to Brahmin, Ksatriya and Vaisya had full right to go through the Vedic texts and to teach the Vedas. He then argues that,

Women are found to be the authors of various mantras, the teachers of various sastras other than Vedas, disciples, seers etc. There are many woman seers who were composers of the mantras. Among them the names of Visvabara, Romasa, Lopamudra, Ambhrni Vak, Juhu, Paulami Kaksivati, Ghosa Jarita, Sraddha Kamayani etc, are worth mentioning. (Gosh 2)

Then the writer gives the references from Panini's sutras about the woman teachers in Vedic times which distinguish between acarya and upadhyaya and acaryani upadhayayani etc. The term acarya and upadhyaya mean the female teacher while acaryani and upadhayayani mean the wife of the teacher. Later the writer argues that women in the Vedic times used to receive multipurpose education including intellectual, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, military and physical. So, in a way in the Vedic times women were getting education and that too all round education to make them self-dependent but what we see today in this world is a completely different picture. Raghunath further argues that, "If human beings remain under the banner of self, everyone irrespective male or female would be honoured. All human beings including women would equally be respected without considering their quality, caste, creed etc. All are one from the stand point of self. . ." (Gosh 8). Raghunath argues that all that evolves assumes form or originate from the same source and is of equal status which in a way projects the idea of equality among all the human beings. In a broader sense, it can be said that both males and females are equal and should be treated as such only. There should be no discrimination especially regarding their education because it is the first step in developing them into proper and self-dependent being.

Stephen Knapp in his article entitled "Women in Vedic Culture" talks about the education of women which was prevalent in the Vedic times. He gives references of women rishis who revealed the Vedic knowledge to others in order to show that Hinduism is not against the women education. He states that the 126th hymn of the Rig Veda was revealed by a Vedic woman Romansha, 179th hymn was revealed by Lopamuudra and so on. He validates the existence of women education

approved by Bhishma Patimaha, who said, “The teacher who teaches true knowledge is more important than the instructors. The father is more important than ten such teachers of true knowledge and the mother is more important than ten such fathers. There is no greater guru than the mother” (qtd. by Knapp n.p.). This shows that an educated mother can actually help in building the nation by transferring her knowledge to her children. So, basically, women education is very important.

Not only in Vedic times, but women in India across the ages have proved their worth and capabilities but most of them remained unknown in the pages of the history. Amita Sharma in her article entitled “Feminism in India- A Fractured Movement” argues that this world has witnessed great women queen and warriors but their aura was confined to themselves and they are not in history which could show their capabilities and part in the world development. She asserts:

In India too, we have great women rulers and warriors such as Ahilyabi Holker who ruled princely state of Holker till her death in 1795, Rani Rashmoni of Calcutta who ruled till 1861, Kittur Rani Chennamma who ruled Kittur, a princely state of Belgaum in Karnataka, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and many others but they cannot be called Feminist or champions of women rights. (Sharma 75).

In the history of India, there were many leaders who helped a lot towards the emancipation of women when they were ridiculed and treated as a secondary sex. Among them, the prominent were Guru Nanak Dev, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (the founder of Arya Samaj), Mahatma Gandhi and so on. Most of them focussed on one basic issue and that was women

education which according to them was the main step towards the emancipation of women. In an article “Women Issues and Arya Samaj”, Indu Bala traces the steps taken by Arya Samaj towards the women empowerment. She argues that Arya Samaj treated but men and women equal as she states that, “The major concerns and social ideals of Arya Samaj are based on equality of the sexes, absolute justice and fair play between men and women and equal opportunities for all according to their karma and merit” (Bala 549). She further states that the Arya Samaj contributed a lot towards the women education. She states that they opened Kanya Mahavidhalaya on June 14, 1886. After this school, they opened many schools like Arya Putri Pathshala, Abohat (1903-04), Arya Girls Middle School, Moga (1921) etc.

In an article “Women in India: Their Status since the Vedic Times”, Arun R. Kumbhare discusses about the status of women since the ancient times. Kumbhare explores that during the Vedic times, women were given the same opportunities to get education. He expresses that, “the Vedic hymns repeat many times that the women ought to be educated to the same degree as men, which indicates the importance of this matter” (Kumbhare 2). Kumbhare explains that there was no discrimination to girls for getting education. He explores that the girls who were educated were given due respect. He later states that the girls were even given the education in martial arts also during the Vedic period. He states that the women could choose two ways of getting education and decide her future. He asserts, “These highly intelligent and learned women, who chose the path of Vedic studies, and lived the ideal life of spirituality were called Brahmavadinis; and the women who opted out of education and chose married life were called “Sadyavadhus” (Kumbhare 6). He holds the view that even co-education was prevalent during that

period. He concludes by stating that women during the Vedic period enjoyed a good status and were not confined in the four walls of the house but the women had the freedom to perform the same responsibilities like that of men.

Showkeen Bilal in his article entitled “Women and Violence: A Study of Women’s Empowerment and its Challenges in Jammu and Kashmir”, explains that the women become the victim to traditional practices that violate their human rights. According to him these old traditional practices subordinate the women and make them suffer with their own wish as nobody can talk against these practices. Bilal gives some examples of these practices viz. Sex- selective abortion, female infanticide and deliberate neglect of girls. He further talks about the empowerment of women which is the key source of nation’s development. He explains that women empowerment means different in different countries but he explains that the main point of women empowerment must be to make the women free from all the boundaries of social, political and economic developments as he states that, “the word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day to day lives in the social, political and economic terms- a power which enables them to move from the periphery to centre stage” (Bilal 5).

In an article entitled “Gender Disparity and Policies of Inclusion: A Case Study of Women’s Education in Jammu and Kashmir”, Fayaz Ahmad Shah, Fouzia Khurshid and Nazmul Hussain talks about the position of women education in Kashmir. They focussed on the women participation in all the fields of life for the betterment of the whole nation. They state that, “gender disparity hampers the overall well-being of society because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole nation” (Shah,

Khurshid and Hussain 136). They expressed that the most important thing for women empowerment is undoubtedly education which is an issue of universal concern. They validated their point by giving a reference from the Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which states the equality and importance of education in one's life. They focussed that education is very important for women as it makes them aware of their legal, social, political and economic rights which helps them to fight against all the evils of the society. They then discussed about the position of women education in the Kashmir region which is same like other parts of the country. "The educational status of women in Kashmir like their counterpart elsewhere in the country is also depressing and quite dismal. Women in the traditional Kashmiri society were generally subjected to discrimination, inequality and oppression" (Shah, Khurshid and Hussain 138). They expressed that the literacy rate of women is very low as compared to the men but still the government is taking steps to stop this disparity in education. The government has started different schemes and programmes to improve the condition of women viz. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Kastura Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya (KGBV).

In *The Tiger Ladies*, Sudha Koul got the empowerment when she focussed on her career rather than marriage. She achieved her aim in life and became independent. She was not against marriage but first she wanted to do something with her life. She married only when she wanted to and not on hearing the taunts of the society. Sudha Koul wants to develop this type of self-dependency in the girls. John Stuart Mill in his essay *The Subjection of Women* also focuses on the importance of

education for the women empowerment. He holds the view that women education is very important for their social status as they are an important part of the society.

The Tiger Ladies does not only show the pitiable plight of women in Kashmir but also the emancipation which is achieved till date. In the ancient times, the widow were supposed to leave their homes and live secluded. The women who belonged to rich families used to live in a big house called the Royal Bungalow. They were isolated from the societies with no strings attached and have to live an unknown life till they die. It was as if it was their mistake that they were widow and their husbands died. And they were made to realise that to live in this secluded place was better than the sati pratha which was conducted in other parts of country in which the wife has to die on the burning pyre of her husband. So, the widow of Kashmir accepted this wholeheartedly for living rather than to die. This is simply the monopoly of the husbands or the society to make the life of widow miserable and full of struggle. How can a person live a life in a secluded place away from the society? This is very shocking. So, basically the widow women live their whole life there till they die. "What else is a woman who does not have the good fortune to die naturally or by accident while still married?" (Koul 96). This is so pitiable how women are treated as if they can't decide anything for themselves as they don't have brains and have to accept anything which comes to them. But it was never the same for males. If a man gets widow, he doesn't have to live a secluded life but instead he gets ready to get married again and it is a matter of pride for him. Why is this hypocrisy prevalent in the society? Why are the females treated in an unjust way and the males in different ways? Why is there so much of discrimination against women? Why can't a woman just marry after the death of her husband or if her

husband deserts her. The answer is simple that women are brainwashed from their childhood only that husband is god to them. They can't live or even if they live can't lead a normal and happy life after the death of their husband. In a book entitled *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion and Culture*, Lindsay Harlan and Paul B Coutright explain the plight of the Indian widows. They explore that usually a wife is considered to be the reason of the death of her husband. It is mostly believed that the death of husband proves the incompatibility of women to take care of her husband. They assert:

Outliving a husband reflects badly on the wife because it means that she failed to protect and nurture him. She is to some extent responsible for his death, if not from injuring or neglecting him in this life, then from the ripening of the negative consequences of actions she committed in a previous one. Because of this, the widow is expected to live out her years doing penance, which though socially sanctioned is usually self-imposed. (Harlan, Coutright 13)

They express that the widow has to lead a very simple life. She is supposed to devote her life to religion. She is even omitted to participate in the auspicious functions like marriage and other celebrations as she is considered to bring bad omen. This is actually happening in the society and this is very sad on the part of widows that they are mostly not allowed to re-marry. They conclude by stating that the life of widow has no meaning and is a life with no meaning at all.

A book entitled *The Role of Religion in Marriage and Family Counselling* edited by Jill Duba Onedera also explains the plight of Indian widow. The author

states that Indian widow leads a very difficult life and is always considered to be a curse for others. She is made to believe that the death of her husband is her fault. She is not allowed to socialize and is always kept in solitude. The author asserts, “Death of the husband changes the status of the wife. Traditionally, a widow was considered to be a bad omen and was not allowed to participate in joyous occasions such as at weddings or at the birth of a baby. Some widows even shave their heads” (Onedera 128). This is really pitiable on the part of widows as they to live a tough life.

Mandakranta Bose in a book *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India*, argues about the re-marriage of the Hindu widow woman in context to the ancient religious books and verses. She focuses on the verse in dharamsastra literature viz. ‘Naste mrte pravrajite kliveca patite patau/ pancasu apatsu nariman patiranyo vidniyate//’ from parasarasmriti (quoted by Bose 7), which according to her ordain the re-marriage of the women. This verse according to her states that, “In [case of] the disappearance or death or renunciation or impotent or lost caste-status of husband: in these five predicaments, a woman is allowed to take another husband” (Bose 7). She further argues that even though this verse clearly indicates that the women can re-marry but still this verse has always been in controversy. She states that this verse allows women to re-marry on the basis of specific conditions of distress. She further explains why this verse has always been in controversy as she states that, “We must conclude that the controversy arose because at some historical point in the evolution of Hindu society, female re-marriage began to be seen as a threat. Whether the threat was to the dominant power structure or to its ethical superstructure is, of course, a matter for a more modern

controversy” (Bose 7-8). She later in the book explains that the concept of women’s re-marriage is found from the time of Vedic age. The term punarbhu, meaning a re-married woman appeared in the Atharveda for the very first time. She then gives references from the other religious texts also like in dharamsastra texts; Baudhayana uses the term punarbhu meaning a re-married woman in connection to his definition of punarbhava which means the son of a re-married woman. She explains the notion of Baudhayana from his text Baudhayana Dharamsastra volume number 4, chapter number 3 and verse number 27 viz. Kilvam tvaktva patitam va yanyam patim vindeta tasyam punarbhavam yo jastas sa punarbhava (qtd. by Bose 6) which means that a Punarbhava is he who is born of a punarbhu, who having left the impotent or outcast husband takes another husband. She further gives a reference from another verse from the same Baudhayana Dharamsastra, “Nihsrstayam hute vapi yasyai bharta mriyeta sahsa ced aksatayonih syad gatapratyagata sati paunarbhavena vidhina punah samsakaram arhati/ Baudhayana Dharamsastra iv-1.18”. According to her, this verse of Baudhayana clearly indicates that “If a the husband dies after offering ceremony of homa, remains a virgin, as also a woman who comes back to her husband after going away with another- such a woman deserves the performance of fresh marriage rites behoving a punarbhu. She, thus, from the Baudhayana dharamsastra recognises the re-marriage of woman under three conditions which are that if a husband is impotent, outcast or dead. She then gives reference from another text i.e. Vasistha dharamsastra which agrees to Baudhayana and adds one more point for the re-marriage of the woman if her husband is insane. “Ya ca Kilvam patitam unmattam va bhartarm utsrjyenyam patim vindate mrte va sa punarbhur bhavati/ (qtd. by Bose 7).” She states that this verse clearly indicates that the woman is

allowed to re-marry and be punarbhu after having left an impotent or outcast or lunatic husband or on the death of her husband. She finally gives reference from Manusmhitā which is considered to be least concerned about that topic of women's re-marriage.

In the Manusmhitā, the term punarbhu has been defined indirectly by the author's definition of the term paunarbhava. Manu says,

Ya patya va parityakata vidhava va svayecchaya/

Utpadayet punarbhutvasah punarbhava ucyate// manusmriti ix.175.

She, on being deserted by [her] husband marries again by her will or on being a widow and gives birth to a son who is called paunarbhava.

(qtd. by Bose 9)

She concludes, by saying that a women can re-marry by giving different references from the dharamsastras and smriti which fits directly or indirectly to approve it. But happens in India is a complete different picture. The women were mostly not allowed to marry after being a widow and were instead kept in a secluded place to live their life all alone or were forced to go for sati which means to die on the burning pyre of dead husband. The irony was that they were forced to do that in the name of religion which is completely wrong.

Raghunath Gosh in the book entitled *Facets of Feminism: Studies on the concept of Woman in Indian Tradition* states that widow remarriage is not a new thing and is completely permissible according to the Vedas. He also concluded from the Vedic reference that Sati Pratha should not to be forced on women; instead they

should be living a normal and peaceful life. Raghunath further argues that after the completion of the death rites of the husband, the wife is asked to come back home to live a normal life. "After the performance of the last rite of husband has been accomplished with the death of her husband and hence she is requested to come back to this world of a house holder. Perhaps she is advised to re-marry after forgetting the past and settle down"(Gosh 11).

In another article "Women Issues and Arya Samaj", Indu Bala explains the steps taken by Arya Samaj for the empowerment of women. She states that Arya Samaj fought many evils that were prevalent in the society such as widow re-marriage, child marriage and so on. She explains that Arya Samaj was in favour of widow re-marriage. "The Arya Samajists published and distributed tracts and pamphlets and created greater awareness and approval of re-marriage of widows was not in contravention of Vedic tradition" (Bala 550). Indu Bala later in her article states that besides fighting for the widow re-marriage, the Arya Samaj opened many widow Ashrams in Lahore, Mathura and Haridwar where these women were given shelter, food and re-married.

There are so many references which prove that women should get married after the death of her husband and all those references are from the religion only but still woman is all ignorant about all the facts. Her main source of religious education is the male counterpart and because of this weakness she believes in all what men says. A woman has all the right to lead a happy and normal life after being a widow. Even if she does not want to marry still she should be given respect and love as a normal being.

Sudha Koul showed through *The Tiger Ladies* that widows had to live a secluded life which fractures their identity. They had no happiness left and just wait for their death in that Bungalow. But Koul on the other side, showed the positive aspect of the society also. She explores that with the passage of time, things are trying to change and women are fighting to achieve their emancipation. Women to some extent have achieved it but still have miles to go. Like the 'Royal Bungalow' which used to be the hub of widow of women to live a secluded life have now become a college for women in Kashmir which is like a milestone to their emancipation. So, in a way things are changing but at a very slow pace. "The widow's palace, which is how the college is still referred to, has become a beehive of women's emancipation, abuzz with studies, classes, books, plays, song, dance, fashion, and debates" (Koul 98). So, where women were kept out of the society to live alone and a miserable life has now become a place where they are taught to live a free and independent life. The writer explains that how she still gets chill about thinking about those women. All the girls in the college are sacred but they hardly talk about those ladies. "We do not talk about the ladies, though their spectres haunt the college. How can we forget them? But no connection can be made between unmarried girls and widows; it's bad enough that we study in a house of ill-fated women" (Koul 104). It is definitely scary to study in that place but still women were struggling as it was the only source for their education and emancipation.

Sudha Koul was a very bright student who wanted to achieve heights in her life instead of living in a patriarchal society. She struggles very hard in her life to become what she is today. She wrote this book to inspire other women also so that they can stand on their own. She wanted to become an influence as there were many

women in her life who played a very important role in shaping her nature and character. First and the most important influence in her life was her grandmother. Her grandmother Dhanna was a very important person to her. She used to stay with her a lot of time. She was a very strong character with a simple but defined life. The writer learned a lot from her grandmother. When her grandfather died, her grandmother was left all alone. A life without a husband is very difficult especially in a place like India. A woman is not given that much love and respect after that as if she was responsible for the death of her husband. Initially, Dhanna was in shock and could not live her life as she used to live and did not even laugh for many months, but later she accepted her husband's death and realised that she cannot live all her life like this. So, she got the courage back in her life and started to live a peaceful life. It can be concluded that the courage and the strength in writer's life was actually because of her grandmother's personality and the stories and folktales which her grandmother used to tell her.

Another important influence in her life was Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the first and only lady Prime Minister of India. "Naturally, we, like the rest of the world, are fascinated by Indira Gandhi. She symbolizes an unlimited professional world for Indian women and for Kashmiri women in particular" (Koul 146). Indira Gandhi like Sudha Koul was a Kashmiri pandit, so Sudha Koul used to think that if Indira Gandhi can run the whole country in such a dignified way so she should also do something like that. She got so much influenced with her personality that she decided to quit her teaching profession and opt for something competitive.

Besides, I saw a Kashmiri pandit woman running India and it seemed to me that I had no choice but to give it a try as well. Thus, I decided

to give up teaching and sit for a competitive civil service examination. After the results are announced it is pointed out to me that I have become the first Kashmiri woman to be selected to the Indian Administrative Service. (Koul 147)

It was a thing of proud but her family didn't take it positive but were rather scared as it was stepping out from their world of orthodox to a free world. Her parents thought that this position is a hurdle in the road of her marriage but Sudha Koul was focussed and clear and joined the civil services. And on joining the job, fate favoured her so much that one day she got her duty with the countrywoman i.e. Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She was very happy to finally meet the woman who influenced and motivated her so much that she cracked her civil service examination. She got more and more attracted to the personality of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. "They say Indira Gandhi is more royal than the Queen of England and the only "man" in her all male cabinet of "old women" (Koul 165)". The writer is trying to explain through this sentence that Mrs. Indira Gandhi was not an example of old woman who used to be shy and submissive but a strong woman who is as courageous and stronger than a man and has to the ability to run a country.

Another great influence in her life was Habba Khatoon, a well renowned 16th century Kashmiri poetess and Lal Ded another important Sufi poetess. Both these poetess had a very dark past which is full of sufferings and struggle at their in-laws house. But both these poetesses didn't give up in their lives and struggled to achieve their emancipation. So, basically the stories of these two poetesses are very important and full of inspiration not only for Sudha Koul but for all the girls. In an article entitled "Some Women Poets in Kashmir", Gulam Nabi Khayal talks about

important poetesses of Kashmir. Khayal explores the struggle which these poetesses made to attain a high position in their lives. He asserts that Habba Khatoon was born in a small village Chandrahar of Kashmir and was named as Zoon which means 'moon' by her parents as she was very beautiful. She was married to a peasant boy Aziz Rather who was a backward and an illiterate person. Habba Khatoon on the other was a poetess and singer. He argues that Habba Khatoon had to suffer the anger of her husband because he could not understand or appreciate her talent and would never approve of his wife composing songs and then singing them in public. But her husband could not understand her beauty and she has to suffer the torture of her husband. He used to beat her a lot and physically assault her and the result was a broken marriage. Habba Khatoon was left all alone and depressed. Then one day she was singing poetry on Iraq rage while plucking saffron in the fields and one day a man named Yousaf Shah Chak heard her singing and fell in love with her. Gulam Nabi states that, "The King passed by was overwhelmed with this unique combination of beauty, talent and sweet voice" (Nabi 83). Habba Khatoon also fell in love with him and married him and finally changed her name to Habba Khatoon. And now Habba Khatoon is remembered as a pioneer of Kashmiri poetry and Yousaf lives with her as an object to desire. This is a very inspiring story which is very famous in Kashmir. It motivated one to understand their talent and never give up on one's life. Sudha used to love this story as it was very appealing to her.

Lal Ded, another important Kashmiri poetess has an influence on Sudha Koul. Gulam Nabi Khayal in the same article entitled "Some Women Poets in Kashmir" also discusses the life of Lal Ded. He explores that Lal Ded was born in rich family in the village Pandrethan of Kashmir. She was also ill-treated by her

husband and her in-laws especially her mother-in-law. Her mother in-law used to torture her in all ways possible. She states that about Lal Ded's mother-in-law that, ". . . who even used to keep a lump of stone in the bottom of Lalla's eating-bowl just to demonstrate that the daughter-in-law was getting enough of meals" (Khayal 80). He further argues that with all these sufferings, Lal Ded reached a stage of renunciation and started to live in caves and jungles in semi-nude attire. As a mystic she wandered naked, reciting her poems. The question is why still she is famous and the answer is that all her life she used to sing the songs of the unity of mankind. It is very difficult for a woman living in Kashmir to renounce her married life and sing naked on the streets. But her intentions were pure, she struggled and because of her true devotion to god Shiva, today she is a well-known poetess. In Kashmir one hospital is named on her i.e. Lal Ded Hospital.

Izmat was another influence of Sudha Koul who was the daughter of the Shawlwala. She was a very intelligent girl who belonged to a middle class family. The thing which Sudha Koul was attracted was that Izmat's father supported her daughter all her life. She was very close to her father. Kashmir is a male dominated area and women education is not much appreciated there. But Izmat's father used to be proud of her daughter and supported her in all aspects. He loved her more than her sons and this was the reason he named her Izmat which means 'Honor'. Izmat knew that she was the dream of her father and she indeed brought honor to her family by excelling in education and everything she does. Sudha Koul was very fascinated towards her and her father and through the story of Izmat she is trying to motivate and inspire the fathers to support their daughters in all the fields of life especially education which is a stepping stone towards women emancipation.

All these influences in Sudha Koul's life made her a strong personality. These women made her to believe in her dreams instead of submitting to the patriarchal society. Sudha Koul explores that if these women could achieve a position in their lives so she could also do something good with her life. And with her strong dedication and will, she fulfilled all her dreams and became the first lady I.A.S officer of the J&K state.

In this chapter, it is explored that India is a patriarchal country and women in this particular part of the world are being subjugated in the name of religion and tradition. Evidences from the religion and articles on religion were provided to prove that religion is in favor of women emancipation but it is mostly misinterpreted to subjugate the women. This chapter focused on important issues of Indian women where she is dominated like early marriage, education, plight of brides and the plight of widows. It further explored that *The Tiger Ladies* is an inspirational novel which can motivate women of Kashmir to fight for their rights and achieve their dreams.

Chapter Four

Culture and Africa: A Study of Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different*

Women are Different is written by Flora Nwapa. Florence Nwanzuruahu Nikiru Nwapa was born on 13th January, 1931 and died on 16th October, 1993. She is mostly regarded as the mother of African Literature (Margaret Busty n.p.). She is often considered to be the first woman to get her works published in English language. She founded the Tana Press in 1970. She often writes from the Igbo women's perspective and is considered to be a feminist. But she has always denied the concept of being feminist and often favours terms like 'womanism' and 'sisterhood'.

Her major publications include *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *One is Enough* (1981), and *Women are Different* (1986).

Efuru (1966) was her first publication which centres on a beautiful and successful woman Efuru having a bad luck with men. Efuru falls in love with a man Adizoua and elopes with him which makes her family and friends very upset. But somehow Efuru manages to have a good relationship with her father and her in-laws. Finally, Efuru delivers a baby but her husband started to remain outside more without telling her about his whereabouts. The child gets ill and finally dies and the father cannot be found for the funeral and finally a news came of him being married to another woman. This hits Efuru's psychology and she finally leaves her in-laws house and goes to back to her father. After few days only, a man Eneberi came in her life and they married and lived happily but he also left her in the same way like

her first husband did. Efurú's father also dies and is left all alone. So, she finally dedicated her life to the goddess of the lake Utoso.

Idu was her second novel which also centres on a young Nigerian woman. She had a beautiful life with her husband Adiewere but there was only one thing which was missing in their life was a child. They were very successful but the pressure of having a child was always in their lives. Idu forces her husband to marry another woman and he finally agrees. But as soon as he marries, Idu gets pregnant and the second wife leaves them quietly as she understood their love for each other. Idu delivers a son on the day of eclipse and she considers it to be a bad omen for them. After four years, she gets again pregnant but unfortunately her husband dies. She was shocked but didn't cry. She didn't remarry and finally died in order to reunite with her husband.

One is Enough was published in 1981 which also revolves around a young and strong woman Amaka who struggle to have an independent life. Amaka is married for six years and is happy with her husband. There was only thing she wanted in her life and that was a baby but she could not get pregnant for 6 years. Finally, her husband decides to have a new wife, which Amaka discovers was her husband's mistress and had two sons with. She got shattered but decided to stay strong and left the house. It was a very bold decision taken on her behalf. She decided to go to Lagos to start her new life but there, she founded that it was very difficult to survive there alone. She got involved with a Catholic priest as well. The book concludes where Amaka is confused to decide for her life whether she has the strength to stay alone and struggle in life or should she decide that one is enough.

Women are Different is one of the most important books written by Flora Nwapa which is worldwide famous. It was published in 1986. According to Darkowaa in a review “*Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa”, this book is very important to know about the lives of Nigerian women. He appreciated Flora Nwapa for writing on sensitive issues like “arranged marriage, child marriage, poverty, the importance of girl child education, sisterhood, betrayed love etc.” (Darkowaa n.p.). He stated that through the lives of Rose, Dora, Agnes and Comfort, Nwapa has built a microcosm of all the Nigerian girls. He asserted that this book did not end as romantically the girls wished in their school, but still all the girls were happy and successful in their lives.

Mary Okeke in her review “*Women are Different*, 1986, Flora Nwapa” commented that this book is about three different girls viz. Rose, Agnes and Dora having different backgrounds who met in a missionary school. “Life in a missionary school was fun, full of dreams and hopes for the future, romance novels were clandestinely read. They met boys; fell in love and talked about how beautiful would be with them” (Okeke n.p.). She asserted that these girls struggled against all the odds that came in their lives to have a successful life. Okeke commended Nwapa for giving an insight into the life of Nigerian women and how they struggle.

This book doesn't revolve around one protagonist but instead it is the story of 3 friends, their struggle and how they achieve their emancipation through the hard journey of life. The three main protagonists of this novel are Agnes, Dora and Rose who got admitted to a missionary boarding school which was a step to their dreams of achieving something big in their lives. These three main protagonists along with other characters in the novel depict the plight of the Nigerian women.

Nigeria is often considered to be a male dominated country where women are still considered as a secondary sex. In an article “Women Empowerment in Nigeria: Problems, Prospects and Implications for Counselling”, Dr. Yahaya A. Lasiele explores the role of women in Nigeria. Dr. Lasiele states that the role assigned to women in Nigeria is of house management. But she explores that Nigerian women have contributed their part in the development of nation. She asserts that Nigerian women lack behind due to the lack of education and economic and political dependence on men. She holds the view that, “The position of most of the Nigerian women is still traditional” (Lasiere 132). She focuses on the Nigerian culture and the status given to women. She argues that Nigerian culture gives preference to the male child and girls are considered as a secondary sex. She states, “Cultures and sub-cultures in Nigeria give preference to male children as they are usually regarded as the heirs or the pillars of the family. Female children are usually less privileged and consequently not given adequate opportunity to acquire education and formal training” (Laslie132). She focuses that women are told to be obedient, caring, kind and appreciative and men on the other hand are praised when he shows aggression and detachment. She strongly holds the view that the women should not feel jealous of other women and instead should support her so as to achieve women empowerment.

Another article “Patriarchy, Male Dominance, the Role and Women Empowerment in Nigeria” by Abidemi R. Asiyabola discusses the dominance of males in Nigerian society. Asiyabola focuses on the concept of home-making assigned to women. She holds the view that society has forced women to believe that the domestic works like child rearing and other things are associated with

women. Women not only help to keep the house clean, wash clothes and cook food but they also help at the field in planting and harvesting the crops. She states that on the other hand, “Males are classified as having the following qualities like strength, vigour, viril/powerful courage, self confidence and the ability to meet the outside world i.e. animal and human intruders head on and deal with it effectively” (Asiyanbola 2). She urges the society to work for the women empowerment in Nigeria so that the country should progress and prosper well.

This is what Flora Nwapa has also discussed in this novel. She has discussed the plight of Nigerian women through the characters of Rose, Agnes and Dora. *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa is also an attempt to show the second-class status of women and how the protagonist didn't give up to this male dominated society and achieved their emancipation through the hard struggle of their lives. This book is a long journey of these friends from their school time to their marriage and finally their struggle to emancipation. Flora Nwapa through her characters show the struggle of not only these women who belong to Nigeria but their suffering is true to almost all the women of the world. She talks about some basic things like education, marriage, sexual life, job, love, betrayal and many other things which all the women especially the Third World Women suffer in their lives. This book basically gives the insight of the sufferings of women who are always dependant on the males for their lives.

Education as discussed in the previous chapters is the most important part of one's life, as it makes one's life independent and make one aware about his/her rights. Education has always been a barrier for the women in almost all the

countries. Most of the girls are taught from their childhood that it is a taboo as it corrupts the minds of the girls.

This novel also depicts that the girls have to strive harder to achieve education which is a step to their aim of achieving heights. The three main protagonists along with other characters get admitted to the Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girl's School (ACMGS) Elelenwa after qualifying the entrance examination for it. The girls were happy to get admission in a Christian missionary school. Initially they didn't like the school but with the passage of the time, they liked it. The school was a great experience for all of them. A very funny yet shocking incident happened in the school. There was a debate competition in the male counterpart of the school and the topic was 'The Education of Girls is a waste of Money'. This is so ambiguous. A school is a place which should encourage more and more girls to enter to the school to get education but on contrary it was letting them to believe that education was a waste of time. The worst part was that there were some girls like Comfort who agreed with this statement as according to her, the only dream a girl should have is to get married. Mary Wollstone Craft in her famous book has focussed on a very sensitive issue where girls like Comfort are manipulated from their birth to aim only for husband. Craft states:

. . . and this homage to women's attraction has distorted their understanding to such an extent that almost all the civilized women of the present century are anxious only to inspire love, when they ought to cherish nobler ambition and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. (Wollstonecraft 2)

Mary Wollstone Craft is against this notion of women being modelled to opt only marriage rather than career. She believes that women are capable of doing wonders if they understand their capabilities. The world is changing and women are realizing the importance of education but still most of the girls are prevalent in the society who still focus on getting settled and consider women education as waste of money and time. Nwapa has shown the prevalence of such women through the character of Comfort.

On the other hand, there were girls like Rose who strongly opposed to this mentality and supported women education and their dreams and believed that the only way of achieving the goal is education. Her friends Dora and Agnes also agreed with her when Rose called this topic a 'silly topic'. This created an argument between Rose and Comfort regarding this topic.

But Comfort said she believed that their parents were wasting their money educating them. They would eventually marry, have children and forget all they learnt in school. Rose pointed out that she had read somewhere where it was said that the hand that rocked the cradle ruled the world. Comfort said that the hand that rocked the cradle was not necessarily an educated hand. All that mattered to women was getting married and having children and starting a beautiful home.

(Nwapa 12)

This thinking of Comfort is not basically her own thinking but Comfort is the product of the society which is male dominated.

This school even showed them a new phase of love life which every girl fantasize in their school lives. They all fell in love with the boys and girls like Rose and Dora even started to imagine marrying them and used to write to them and even met them during the vacations. Comfort on the other hand was a girl who would never stick to one man. She had many boyfriends and used to write to all of them. Agnes also fell in love with a boy but she hardly wrote to him like her friends. There was something mysterious about Agnes. She was always in fear and was hiding something from her friends. Actually, Agnes's mother had died and her father had married another woman and this woman in order to get rid of her fixed her marriage to a person who was her father's age and plus he was her stepmother's boyfriend as well. The irony was that that person used to pay for Agnes's education and even though Agnes didn't want to marry him, but can't run away as he was paying for everything. Agnes wanted to study further and Miss Hill, Agnes teacher convinced her father that he should allow her to sit for her Cambridge School Certificate and then marry after the examination.

In all of these girls, Rose was the most ambitious one who wanted to do something very good with her life. Her boyfriend Ernest tried to motivate her to study hard so that she could be admitted to the university. Initially he used to write her always but later he started avoiding her letters by giving excuses of being busy but still she continued writing to him and studied hard to get admission in the university. Rose finally got admission in the Queen's college. Agnes also wanted to go the university but she has to crush all her dreams because of her inevitable marriage. Dora on the other hand didn't want to study but what she dreamt of was getting married and having a beautiful life with her boy friend Chris.

Marriage as discussed in the previous chapters has now become only a kind of contract or business and it has lost all its essence and beauty. Women are never considered equal in the marriage and are always treated as a commodity in almost all parts of the world. This book even though shows the same thing but at the same time, it also depicts how these women cope with their lives and ended up in their emancipation without giving up in the life. Nwapa through this book tries to convince the girls not to give up even in the harsh situations so that they should achieve what they are worth of.

Harriet Martineau in her essay entitled “On Marriage” expresses the true essence of marriage in the society. She holds the view that marriage does not allow any freedom to the women. Girls are taught from their childhood to be prepared for marriage. She asserts that the role of women after marriage is also fixed. Some are confined to religion, some to the household chores, and others as the companion to their husbands while others are told that they are so vulnerable that they have to depend on men for everything. So, basically they are manipulated to believe that their only job is related within the four walls of the house.

Betty Friedan in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* as discussed in the previous chapters criticizes the role assigned to women by the society. She holds the view that women are told that they can find their fulfilment only through child rearing and home making. She criticizes the magazine to make a stereotypical image of a woman who should dream only about her marriage. She states:

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in

a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women, but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man. (Friedan 38)

She asserts that women become the victim of this notion which makes them completely dependent on men for everything. They try to find good husbands and then devote their entire lives to them without caring about their feelings and dreams. She argues due to this dependence, she loses all her identity and becomes unhappy which they themselves do not know. She encourages women to work for their dreams and achieve their goals outside the house. She further states that if women are not happy themselves, then they cannot keep their husbands and children happy. They will not be able to give a good upbringing to their children.

Flora Nwapa in *Women are Different* has also focussed on this issue. She has shown that how Nigerian society also holds the view that marriage is the most important thing for girls. Agnes was the first to get married and her marriage to a man who was of her father's age was the thing which was bothering her the most. She didn't love him but she could do nothing about the marriage as she was all dependent on her family to take the decision for her life. Agnes got married even before her result came out and she had finally passed her secondary school examination. Rose attended Agnes's marriage and she found that there were only few people invited for the marriage and the dress which Agnes was wearing was

pathetic and she looked so depressed. On seeing Rose, Agnes cried a lot and told her to meet her as she wanted to say something to her. The phrase ‘Woman is another woman’s enemy’ is again proved to be right here in this novel when Rose heard so many rumours regarding Agnes during her marriage. Women were talking like Agnes got married soon as she is pregnant and the person whom Agnes is getting married is actually Agnes’s step-mother’s boyfriend and that her husband was an impostor so many other things as well. One woman even said that it was her who told Agnes’s step-mother to get her married as soon as possible to get rid of her. “Marry her off as soon as possible, so she will be busy with her own family and won’t bother you with yours” (Nwapa 52). The worst part was that this woman even said that Agnes wasted all her money on education to just get a piece of paper. A woman is speaking against another woman and this mentality is prevalent across the globe. ‘A woman is another woman’s biggest enemy’ proves to be correct here also. This thinking has to be changed and only then women emancipation can be achieved. Bell Hooks in her work *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Woman and Feminism* has also focused on this issue. She states that women need to understand the essence of ‘sisterhood’ and only then women can grow and achieve heights. She asserts that, “it can spring from a heartfelt desire for sisterhood and the personal, intellectual realization . . . among women undermines the potential radicalism of feminism” (Hooks 68). Flora Nwapa strongly agrees with Bell Hooks and so she created another character who tried to motivate women readers to study for their growth and identity. The other woman replied to the one, who questioned about the wastage of money on education for a piece of a paper,

‘I don’t blame her,’ she answered her question. ‘A lot is changing. Our children will have to get that important piece of paper before they get married. I have told my daughter, she must have it. I don’t have it and that is why Papa Emeka behaves in such an atrocious manner to me. He seems to tell me during some of our quarrels: “If you can’t take it, go.” Then I think- where will I go with seven children? So I stay. But if I had that piece of paper which Agnes now has, I could have left him and gone to study.’ (Nwapa 53).

But it is very difficult to make it understand the women the importance of education as they have been fed from their childhood that the only aim in their life is to get married and that is all. And the one who questioned was still not satisfied with the answer and told her that she will encourage her daughters to get married as soon as possible. This mentality needs to be changed to get a real progress for women emancipation. Women need to understand it and should encourage their daughters to get education first so that they can be independent, having an identity of their and then get married. Mary Wollstone Craft in her famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* states that, “To rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted.” (Wollstonecraft 4.23). She explains this notion by stating that women are brainwashed from their childhood to get married as soon as possible. She states how women are made to believe that marriage is their only aim in life

The man who was marrying Agnes was considered to be impostor but her father still agreed to marry her daughter with him. Again here it is a business as he

was paying for Agnes education and her father had almost sold her as now marriage is nothing less than a deal. "Once they are given money, they sell their daughters" (Nwapa 53). This statement clearly indicates the plight of Nigerian girls whose destinies are sold for the sake of money.

But somehow Agnes tried to fit in her new life. There was a good thing about her husband that he loved her and made her the mistress of the house and gave her the full permission to run the house as she wishes. She was a good wife, did all the household chores and everything well as expected from a wife. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* has stressed on this issue. She states that after marriage the life of a girl becomes fully dedicated to the service of her husband. She hardly thinks about herself but Friedan encourages women to think is that all a woman wants in her life. She asserts that, "each suburban wife struggles with it alone. As, she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcovers materials, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children . . . lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question- 'Is this all?'" (Freidan 1)

Agnes in *Women are Different* also realized that it was not all for her. She dreamt of doing something good with her life and most importantly she loved studying which she quit because of her marriage. So, she took the courage and got herself registered for the Advanced General Certificate of Education examination with Wolsey Hall in England which was unknown to her husband. But there was something which was missing in her life and that was love which she should feel for her husband and that is the reason she never enjoyed sex with him.

Sleeping with her husband was nothing special. She felt nothing. She submitted herself like a lamb ready for slaughter and prayed that it should be over quickly so she would snatch some sleep and read her lessons at night while her husband snored. Sometimes in her relaxed moments, which were rare indeed, she wondered whether her husband enjoyed sex with her or not. She did not and she did not care. (Nwapa 57)

She focussed herself to qualify her exam and finally she did qualify her GCE Advanced level in History and English. In a three year of marriage, she was the mother of 3 children but she was determined. She was having her fourth baby when her result came out. Now her dream was to continue her studies further in mathematics and geography but for that she had to go for the night classes so she had to tell her husband regarding that. But like most of the husbands, her husband also resisted and stopped her. But Agnes was not going to stop. She protested it by not cooking food for him. Her husband got so angry that he called her father to talk to him. But this time, fate favoured her and her father supported her.

‘She has had four children for you. She wants to read and improve herself and you say no. What kind of man are you? How much money do you give her as food money or pocket money? Has she ever complained to you? Has she ever quarrelled with you? Has she not been a good wife to you? If she wanted to have men, how would you know since you are away all day? Has she asked you to pay for the evening lessons? You should count yourself lucky and blessed to have a wife like my daughter.’ (Nwapa 58)

This kind of support should have been given by her father for the marriage also. Then, the life of Agnes would have been different. Nonetheless, at least now he supported her daughter and this actually helped Agnes to study further without any hindrance. She enrolled at the university and there she met and finally fell in love with Ayo Dele. But she was always in guilt of loving Ayo Dele and one day when she came home, she saw her mother in a very compromising position with her husband. She always had suspicion on them but had no proof. This was the reason why her step mother forced her father to get her married to him. This is the reason that she never loved her husband and always felt alone. And on seeing her husband with her step-mother, her guilt became less. She didn't react to this matter and kept quiet for some days. Meanwhile, Mr Dele proposed her to stay with her and Agnes at once accepted to this proposal. Mr. Dele was a ray of hope in her life. So, she just left her husband as she was sure that her husband didn't love her at all and took her four children along with her. Agnes father was very sad on the elopement of her daughter and he died soon. On the day of the burial, all held Agnes responsible for her father's death. "Agnes smiled within herself in spite of her grief. Her husband, she thought, was old enough to be her grandfather, so why were they complaining?" (Nwapa 60). And soon her step-mother told her that she wants to get married soon. Agnes knew who she wanted to marry and didn't say anything to her. She felt much relieved on hearing this and her guilt of leaving her husband started vanishing. But she didn't marry Mr Dele as he was already married and had a wife and grown up children in London. But still he was really good to her and her children. He motivated her to pass the examination to enter into university. It was very difficult for her to go to the university as the university was located in Ibadan and she cannot

leave her children there without her. But Mr. Dele encouraged her to get the admission and a nanny was kept to take care of the children. But because of her motherly feelings, she always came back on weekends to meet her children. Finally with many hardships and struggle, she passed her intermediate examination. Now, she finally came back to Lagos, and before she could get a job, a very bad thing happened to her, Ayo Dele died suddenly. Again, she was left all alone. Ayo Dele's family came to Lagos, took over the house. Agnes didn't know what to do next. She was all dependent on Ayo Dele for her decisions. Ayo Dele even got the job for her. He was taking care of her everything which she ever dreamt of:

He was the first man Agnes related to, the first man she loved. He was both a lover and a teacher and a father to her children. Was she not being punished for deserting her husband? Was she not being punished for being over ambitious? How many women of her age at the time thought of University education? (Nwapa 62)

She was getting all types of weird thoughts in her mind. She was not prepared for all this. She was not even given the honour of burying him because it was all reserved for his wife. It was not her fault at all. It was definitely not any punishment. No doubt her husband also loved her, but she felt nothing with him because he was also in love with her step-mother and she never loved him back. Her husband never cared about her dreams and wishes. But Ayo Dele did. This was the only reason why she loved Ayo Dele. But somehow, she managed to come out of this grief for her children and got a job in a private school. After some times, she finally got a reputed job of Woman Education Officer in the Ministry of Education. She came back to Lagos for some work and she decided to pay a visit to her

husband. But her husband treated her really bad by calling her ‘wayward wife’. And he even threatened her to give his children back to him. “And the children, I hope they are well. Whether you answer my name or not, you are my wife and the children are mine. They are mine. You had them in my home, under the holy wedlock. So, whether you committed adultery or not, having them was my responsibility, they are mine” (Nwapa 65). She felt so bad that she left at once regretting why she came to visit him. She resigned from her earlier job and got a job in Lagos in a firm as an executive and the pay scale was also good.

Dora’s life on the other hand was also full of struggle and hardships but still she also managed to overcome all this and have a happy and good life. Dora was married to her childhood boyfriend Chris. She was very happy. She never wanted to study much in her life as she was a typical girl influenced by the society and the culture she was living in. She always wanted to be a good wife to Chris and that was achieved. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* states that women are brainwashed that they only dream of getting married. She explores that, “some women still remember painfully giving up those dreams, but most of the younger women no longer even thought about them” (Friedan 104). This was the real plight of Dora. She had stopped thinking about her career and instead focused only on getting married to Chris.

According to an article “Representation of Post Colonial Nigerian Society as Entrapped between the Old and the New in Flora Nwapa’s *Women are Different*”, Dr. N. Sibel talks states that Dora in *Women are Different* was a typical Nigerian girl who focussed only on getting marriage and becoming a good wife to her husband instead on her career. He states that, “Dora dreams about her future in the boarding

school demonstrates how Nigerian girls desire to work but at the same time become a good wife as the society expects from them . . . Dora was going to be a good wife to Chris. Nothing would cause a quarrel between her and Chris” (Sibel, 28). But this was not a fairy tale and a girl with no aim other than marriage so as to depend on her husband has to suffer a lot.

Chris worked in the High Court and he used to take bribes as well. Dora worked as a nurse until her fifth child but later she decided to set up a bakery for her and she even convinced Chris that she will be a good baker. Initially she baked and used to sell in the hospital. She got very famous and she even started to bake bread. Even that got successful, so, she had to buy a van to transport her products. When Chris realised that Dora was earning more profits, she used to handle her accounts. Soon, they bought a piece of land at Chris’ hometown and started to build a house there. Dora worked very hard. Chris’ colleagues used to get angry and jealous of his wife and whenever they used to come back home, they used to beat their wives. Chris used to get very angry when his colleagues used to compare their wives with his. “How dare you compare your illiterate wife with mine! Mine went to school, yours did not. Mine speaks English, yours don’t. So where lies the comparison?” (Nwapa 69). Chris was getting arrogant and he was making more enemies and plus he didn’t even stop to take bribes as well. Chris even got a threat from his office to stop all this. He got scared and told Dora everything. Dora was so busy in her life that she didn’t even know this side of Chris. She advised him to join her business completely and resign from the job. She wanted a manger and she asked Chris to do the job. She even gave him the reference of their children who deserved better education and life and for that both their parents need to work hard.

Chris thought it was a good idea, but what bothered him so much was having to work for his own wife. That was the way he thought about his wife's proposal, and that was the way all his colleagues, friends and relatives would think of Dora's proposal. It was unmanly to do that. He would not do it. He was the breadwinner and his wife was not going to feed him. Let her go on with her business. He owned her. Her property was his because she was his wife. (Nwapa 69)

But Dora knew that her husband will never accept to work under her wife like most of the other men because of their so called 'Male Ego', so she tried many tricks to make him realise that he will be the real owner and she will be like a servant who will do all the hard work. But Chris would never be in a state to agree so as to protect his superficial honour. So, Chris made other plans and decided to go abroad and study law and come back like a lawyer and finally set up his practice or work in the civil service. And he asked in his office to give him leave for 3 years without pay and the leave was sanctioned. He didn't even ask Dora anything regarding this. When Dora came to know, she was so surprised. "Three years Chris- you took the decision all alone? You did not ask my opinion? And the children? Am I to bring them up all by myself? she wept" (Nwapa 70). But all her tears have no effect on him and could not change his decision and he went to abroad leaving Dora all alone with the children and all the responsibilities. This is what Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* points out. She states that, "A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future, making her stretch and grow beyond that small score of years in which her body can fill its biological function, is committing a kind of suicide" (Friedan 60) . Friedan is

completely against the notion of a woman completely dependent on man for her happiness. Same happened with Dora. She had loved Chris all her lived and knew nothing outside it. She was sacred to live alone without Chris.

Finally, Chris went and initially he used to write to Dora but within six months, he stopped writing to her. Dora didn't get weak. She controlled herself and continued with her business for herself and especially her children. The world around her was changing and the civil war was also on peak. She was a far-sighted woman and the first thing she did was that she changed her headquarters to Aba which she should have done earlier. Then she went to Ontitsha to see her house and keep it in order but there she realised that there was a family who was living in that house and she thought that Chris may have kept the tenants but soon she realised that they were not the tenants but instead they have bought the house. Chris has sold the house which Dora invested in without even telling her. This was a great shock to her but she was all helpless and could not do anything. "She believed so much in Chris and now he had betrayed her" (Nwapa 73). So now what would she do? She was again let helpless and had nowhere to go. But she was a strong woman and for the sake of her children she didn't lose herself and started thinking about her future. She was a talented woman and God had bestowed her with a talent of good cooking. So, the first thing she did was that she bought a small land in her village Orlu. Before the war started, she already had built a small bungalow and even started a bakery shop there. She was earning good as her business was going smoothly and during the war when most of the people were suffering, she was leading a good and comfortable life. But still she had a hope that Chris would return as she believed that a father can never abandon his children. Her children were continuously asking her

about their father's return. Dora was a very good mother and supported her daughter Chinwe in her studies. She didn't want her daughter to go for a job on the sake of her education. She wanted her to complete her education first so that she can stand on her own and make her destiny. Chinwe was soon married to a businessman and she went to London to check for her father and there she realised that there was nobody of that name living in the address which Chris has provided. "Infact no Nigerian had lived there for the past five years" (Nwapa 76). Then, Dora became restless and decided to search for Chris. Finally she came to know that Chris was involved in a Biafan war and finally went to Germany. She even went to Germany with the address provided and when she went there, she found that Chris was living with another woman who was German. She was so shocked that she thought it was not Chris, but when he asked her what she wanted, she recognised his voice.

It was Chris, her childhood love, her husband, the father of her children.

'Chris, it is Dora.'

'I know it is Dora all right. What do you want?'

'I want you, Chris, I want. . .' (Nwapa 77)

Chris was ignoring her and asked her to return. How could a husband behave like that? Dora was always a good wife, then how come Chris behaves in such a strange way. This was another shock to Dora. She was all puzzled and didn't know what to do? Chris called a cab and sent her back to the airport. When she returned back, she was really unhappy and locked herself in the room for a week. But then again, as she was a very strong woman, she decided to overcome this situation also.

She stood in front of the mirror and saw herself, she was young and beautiful. Then she removed all her clothes and saw again and still she was young unlike Chris who had aged and finally she felt pity for Chris. She decided to live her life and after few days, she went to Chris' home and divorced him legally. Now, she was living her life according to her wish and that too free but a man named Tunde came into her life.

Rose, out of the three friends was the most ambitious woman. She always wanted to do something big with her life especially related to studies. Betty Friedan in her work *The Feminine Mystique* has explored that if a woman wants to achieve something in her life, she has to work for that dream. "The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of their own." (Friedan 49). Rose in *Women are Different* also believed in this ideology. She never wanted to stop her education after that missionary school. She gave exam for the Queen's College but failed for the first time. So, she decided to come back to Aba and taught in a girl's school and at the same time, appeared for the exam again and finally qualified it. She joined the college but she dearly missed her childhood love, Ernest who had gone to abroad to study medical. She passed her exam and finally went to London for her Diploma in Education. In London, she tried to find Ernest but all in vain. Finally, she came back to Nigeria and got placed as Woman Education Officer in Queen's College. Later, she met Mark. "He was one of the most brilliant men Rose had ever met" (Nwapa 79). Mark was very ambitious. He had already passed his B.Sc. Maths as a private student and aimed to go to America to study economics. Rose was very much attached to Mark, "Nothing like that had happened to her before" (Nwapa 79). Mark was a very domestic type of person. He

used to love doing household chores which Rose was not interested in at all. Rose got really serious for him. Even Mark seemed serious about her and proposed her to get married to him. The next day he encouraged Rose to apply for the doctorate form in abroad as she was very intelligent. She thought it was a great idea as they can start their lives there and later he told her that he had already got the scholarship in Harvard and told her that he will go to his father and get the money from there. But he returned earlier and told her that his father was already in the hospital. So, technically, he can't ask money from him. He seemed to be very upset. So, Rose gave him the money and suggested that before going there, they should get married. Mark agreed to the plan. It was a very small ceremony having only 2-3 people. After marriage, Rose took all her savings and gave it to Mark for his studies in abroad. Mark told her that she should not change her maiden name so as to avoid confusion in the office in the future. She agreed to whatever Mark was saying. Finally, Mark went and after one week, he wrote back to Rose. But after that no letter came from Mark to Rose. She got nervous and went to Aba where Mark's parents lived. But she could not find his parents as well. Slowly she realised that Mark has betrayed her. She was again left alone and that too without hope. She got very much depressed with this life. "She had lost contact with Ernest, now Mark. She was miserable. She felt sorry for herself. She wept, but she shared her sorrow with no one" (Nwapa 82). But somehow she managed to control herself and focussed on her career and left Queen's College and looked for another job with a firm of Public Relations. She worked really hard in her life and finally the dark phase came out of her life and in eighteen months, she became a high executive.

According to an article “Representation of Post Colonial Nigerian Society as Entrapped between the Old and the New in Flora Nwapa’s *Women are Different*”, Dr. N. Sibel explains the plight of Rose. “Rose has successful career as she remains free from male oppression throughout the novel. However, she feels the necessity to get married as it is imposed on women by the society, she develops the idea that she is deficient since she cannot meet social norms” (Dr. Sibel 99). Dr. Sibel argues that how society has made women to believe that they are the secondary sex and no matter how successful they get, they still need a man in their life.

This book is definitely an inspirational book which encourages the women of Nigeria to stand against any evil practice done to them which subjugates them. Through the stories of Rose, Dora and Agnes, Nwapa has created three different characters who struggled in their lives but finally found their emancipation. These three women not only depict their lives, but actually represent all the women of the world who face problem due to gender discrimination. This book incites the readers especially the women, to stand for their rights and aim towards their goal. This chapter concludes that women in Nigeria are facing some serious problems like most parts of the world but Nwapa encourages the women to stand for the right thing. Nwapa showed all colours of women and their plights. She has shown the lives of married women as well as single women. She concludes that women has to suffer in all the situations but what makes her sufferings relieve only when she decides her own destiny instead of depending on the men. She has clearly shown that life of a lonely girl is very difficult but if she is successful then, hardly anything matters to her. This is definitely a motivational book which can encourage women single or married to dream and achieve those dreams as Mary Wollstone Craft states in *A*

Vindication of the Rights of Women, “But in order to render their private virtue a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single” (Wollstonecraft 9.28). This quotation can be related to Nwapa’s *Women are Different* which can also inspire young girls to focus towards their career along with marriage and achieve their goals to have a position and status in the society like men.

Chapter Five

Egypt and Women Objectification in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

Nawal El Saadawi is the leading Egyptian writer, socialist, psychiatrist and an advocate of women's rights, especially in the Middle East. She is often called “Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab World” (Lunde n.p.). She is the most widely translated Egyptian writers and her works are translated into almost 12 languages. She was born on October 27, 1931 in Kafr Tahla, Egypt. Saadawi's books concentrated on women, particularly Arab women, their sexuality and legal status and most importantly the female genital mutilation. She had always been a controversial writer and was even banished from the Egyptian society. As a result, she was forced to get her works published in Lebanon. She was even expelled from her job at the Ministry of Health with the publication of her first nonfiction work *Women and Sex*. This work became very controversial as she was talking about women, sexuality and religion which dwelled a high anger among the religious and political authorities. Her focus was only one thing and that was feminism. She says, “For me feminism includes everything. It is a social justice, political justice and sexual justice. Feminism is all that.” (Khaleeli n.p.). Saadawi was even imprisoned in September 1981, along with many other objectors to the Jerusalem Peace Treaty by the President Anwar el Sadaat. She was released after the assassination of the President. When she was released, she shared her experience by stating that, “Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up pen and wrote” (Khaleeli n.p.).

Saadawi formed the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSW) in 1981 which was the first legal, independent female organization in Egypt. The AWSW was banned in 1991 after criticizing US involvement in the Gulf war. Saadawi struggled all her life, but she never stopped this struggle and even today she continues to be a writer, journalist and an advocate for women's rights.

In 2004, she won the North-South Prize from the council of Europe. In 2005 she won the Inana International prize in Belgium. She holds honorary doctorates from the universities of York, Illinois at Chicago, St Andrews and Tromso. Her many prizes and awards include the Great Minds of the Twentieth Century Prize, awarded by the American Biographical Institute in 2003, the North-South Prize from the Council of Europe and the Premi International Catalunya in 2004. Her books are almost translated into 28 languages worldwide.

Her major publications are *Woman at Point Zero*, *God Dies by the Nile*, *The Hidden Face of Eve* and *The Fall of Imam*.

God Dies by the Nile is one of the most important works of Nawal El Saadawi which focuses on the issues of religion and sexuality in the Arab countries. The story is set in an Egyptian village Kafr El Teen, a village situated on the banks of Nile. It talks about the peasants and how they suffer the turmoil and hardships in their lifetime. Saadawi writes that the easy targets are the women. The village is governed by the Mayor who is assisted by the Imam of the village mosque, the barber and the local healer and the head of the village guard. All of them control the affairs of the village i.e. religious, social and political spheres. These men scare the villagers in the name of the Mayor and procure young girls for the Mayor. A girl

named Zakeya belongs to a very poor family who is exploited by the patriarchal system. She is conspired to believe that she is the reason of her family's suffering. Kinna in her article "God Dies by the Nile-Nawal El Saadawi" states that, "the important facet of this book is its demonstration of the use of religion and sex to oppress women" (Kinna n.p.). Zakeya throughout her life asks her Lord to be just and restore her family.

The Hidden Face of Eve is also an important book by Nawal El Saadawi which gained her recognition around the globe. This book is also very controversial as it touched some aspects of sexuality which are usually considered to be taboo in the Arab world. It is also a kind of memoir and the writer criticizes the practices going in the Arab world to subjugate the women. This book is divided into four parts- The mutilated Half, Women in History, The Arab Woman and Breaking Through. Female Genital Mutilation remains an important part of this book and the writer has criticized it in every way possible. Nawal El Saadawi through this book asserts that 'Bint' (an Arabic word for women) is never considered to be an important part of the society. The writer focuses on the inferior status of the women starting with Eve who is considered to be the first woman according to the major monolithic religions.

The Fall of Imam is yet another important work of Nawal El Saadawi. This book was published in 1987 and focuses on the theme of religion and sexuality. The book revolves around two characters one is the Imam who is very arrogant and is full of hatred for anyone who flourishes better than him and the second is an illegitimate orphan named Bint Allah (Daughter of Allah) who is a very beautiful girl. The book marks two important events, one is the stoning and the mutilation of a

woman which shows the brutality of the ruling power in Arab against the woman and second event is the assassination of the Imam and the chaos which happens after that.

Jane Housham in his review "*Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi Review- Classic Feminist Novel" asserts that this text has a high visual quality which represents intense emotions and expressions. The reviewer wants to say that on reading this book, an image is developed in the minds of the readers and every emotion and pain is felt with the words written. He states that "the searing narrative is rendered epic by the use of long repeated passages that make explicit connections between the stages in Firdaus's journey towards murder" (Housham n.p.). The reviewer explains that the narrative clearly explains the plight of Firdaus and describes her journey from an innocent girl towards a murderer.

Woman at Point Zero is one of the most important works of Nawal El Saadawi which gained her reorganization around the world. Mary Okeke in her review "Woman at Point Zero, 1975, Nawal El Saadawi" is shocked to know that it is a true story and cannot believe that how can a woman suffer in her life because of so many misfortunes. She expresses that the title of this book is the most apt title as it clearly signifies the plight of Firdaus. She strongly believes that everybody should read this book. She beautifully explains the journey of Firdaus as, "From experience, she learnt that she could as well exploit her own body to her heart desire which she did and made fortunes. One thing led to another, and in self defense she killed a man" (Okeke n.p.). She does not hold Firdaus as a culprit but the victim of the patriarchal society which ultimately made her the murderer.

Another review of this book is given by Minna Salami who in her review “An Egyptian Classic of Feminist Fiction” calls this book as an important part of feminism. She expresses that it is one of the most outspoken books reading the plight of women from all parts of the world. She explains the journey of Firdaus as:

She goes on to tell a harrowing story of growing up poor, of being raped by family members of being genitally mutilated, of being married off as a teenager to a 65-year-old, of being beaten up time and again, of taking to the streets, of becoming a prostitute, and eventually of having had enough, and of murdering a man, leading to her imprisonment. (Salami n.p.)

She expresses that even though this book was published four decades before, still this book reminds women of one thing that if they get a chance to make a choice, then they should not fool themselves to make one because the patriarchy does not allow them to make any choice.

Saddik Gohar in his article “Empowering the Subaltern in *Woman at Point Zero*” explains the effect of patriarchy in the life of Firdaus. He argues that this book is a suffering and struggle of Firdaus in the masculine system who considers women only as a commodity. He explains that the protagonist tried hard in the beginning to fight against this patriarchal system but later fails. He explains:

In the beginning, the muted protagonist struggled to coexist with the most abusive practices of a merciless environment. On the long run, she failed to tolerate the hypocrisy of a masculine society. The protagonist, who is driven to “the streets” and ultimately kills her

pimp, recalls her painful memories retelling the story of vengeance against her abuses prior to the night of her hanging. (Gohar 175)

Gower explains that Firdaus achieves her emancipation only after killing that pimp which releases her from both public and private spaces of patriarchal domination. Because on killing the pimp, she could feel as if the burden on her shoulder had fell and she is free from everything.

All these reviews and researches show that the feministic aspect of this book has already been achieved. This present study will also work on the feministic aspect but focusing on the religious and regional influences. The religion will be taken in positive aspect and the references from the religious texts would be taken so as to validate that religion is also in favour of women emancipation but usually women are not aware of it. Different feministic theories would also be taken into consideration while focusing on the plight of Firdaus (protagonist of the novel).

Woman at Point Zero was published in 1973. It is based on a true story of a woman named Firdaus whom writer met in jail. Firdaus was in jail for the crime of murder. She had even refused to sign an appeal to the President so that her sentence must be reduced from death to lifetime imprisonment. She never met any visitor. The writer was a psychiatrist and she was working on women's psychology and was fascinated towards her personality and wanted to know about her story. At first Firdaus refused to meet the writer like she used to refuse to talk to anybody. Why was she behaving like that? But later she agreed to meet the writer and narrated her story. Helen Cixous in her essay "The Book of Promethea" states that, "It makes me cry, I want to talk about something I am not sure I can talk about, I want to talk

about the inside from the inside, I do not want to leave it. I am so happy in this silky damp dark of labyrinth and there is no thread” (Cixous 29). It was same for Firdaus to narrate the story. Till now she didn't tell anybody why she became a murderer, neither did she demanded for life time imprisonment instead of the death penalty, but now when the time of her death has approached, she wanted to speak. But she was not sure how to start her story which was full of sufferings and discrimination. Firdaus struggled all her life. Her childhood was full of cruelty and loneliness. She was not given the same love which her brothers used to enjoy. Her only passion of childhood was education and it too was ignored by her family and when her parents died, she was taken by her uncle who educated her, but soon after completing her secondary school, she was forced to marry a man who was double her age. She also suffered domestic violence and when she escaped from him, her life didn't get better. She met a man in the café whom she trusted as he promised to give her a job as she had a secondary school certificate. But he took her home and used her not only for his sexual needs but sold her every night. When she escaped from there she met Sharifa, who takes her into a life of prostitution. Sharifa gave her all she ever wanted in her life. She gave her good clothes, good make-up, her own beautiful room and the best food. From her childhood only whenever she used to eat food, everybody used to keep an eye on her plate as if to keep a watch that she should not eat more, including his own father and after his death when she shifted to her uncle's place then he used to keep an eye on her plate and the irony is that even her husband also did the same thing. But at Sharifa's place there was no eye on her plate and she could eat comfortably and as much as she can. She got bewitched with these things. Sharifa told her that every woman's body has a value and some price; no body just

can't use it for free. Actually Sharifa was also using her by selling her body and giving her money. Somehow, when she realized about the truth, she manages to escape from there. Then she became a profile prostitute on her own. Now she used to sleep with men only whom she wanted to. She was in a way free and living life according to her own wish. But still a man follows her and forcibly becomes her pimp. But when she wants to come out of that life of prostitution and wanted to do something good, that pimp stopped her and in that fight she killed him. She accepted her crime and never demanded for life time imprisonment instead of the death penalty. For her this was her source of emancipation. All her life she wanted to do something big and this was her fight with the dominating man who just uses women for their sexual gratification only.

The setting of this book is Egypt which is often called as the Arab Republic of Egypt. Egypt is very rich in culture and tradition. It is a part of an Arabic speaking community of about 250 million people, which spreads from Morocco to Oman. Like other Middle East countries, Egypt is also dominated by the law of Shari'a. But this is also the male oriented monopoly that misleads the woman in the name of Islam, which is totally wrong and subjugates them. The real Shari'a gives equal rights and high status to women. But now even the basic rights of the women are not given to them and are dominated. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* states that, "Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men" (Wollstonecraft 47). The central character of this book is Firdaus who is a murderer; she is imprisoned and soon to be hanged for her crime. The writer of the book,

Nawal El Saadawi who is also a psychiatrist goes to the prison to study the psychology of the women prisoners where she meets Firdaus and studies her. She concludes that Firdaus was not the culprit. The murder she committed was the outcome of the society. In fact the whole character of Firdaus was the outcome of the society which made her a criminal. She was only a small innocent girl who wanted to do something big with her life. But all she could do was to complete her secondary school and become the victim of the male dominated society.

Nawal El Saadawi through this book *Woman at Point Zero* has touched different aspects of the Egyptian society which dominate the woman and regard her as inferior.

Female genital mutilation is an issue of global concern. It refers to the cutting of the female genitalia. It is a much older practice done and is still prevalent in the society. According to an article "Female Circumcision in Egypt: Social Implication, Current Research, and Prospects for Change" by Marie Bassili Assaad, this evil practice is still prevalent in Egyptian society. According to Assaad, female circumcision is the partial or the complete removal of the external female genitalia which is practiced in almost 40 countries. He further argues that the female circumcision, excision, or clitoridectomy is often called Khafd (reduction) in classical Arabic and is more popularly known by the term Tahara which means purification. How can such practice purify girls? But the irony is that it has been accepted in the society. Marie Bassili Assaad further gives the definition of this female genital mutilation as, "It is the partial or the complete removal of the prepuce of the clitoris, the labia minora, and the labia majora" (Assaad 3-4). She later explains that this practice is performed to the girls at a tender age of 6-10 before

they even reach to puberty. This is really shocking as small girls have to suffer all this without protesting against this evil practice. The question arises that why these girls or their mothers do not oppose this practice? The answer to this question is given by Assaad that the women have accepted this to be their fate and moreover, they often think that an uncircumcised woman retains masculine features that make her unfit for marriage. This concept is totally wrong. But the woman's mind has been manipulated by the society and even if the woman knows that is harmful to them, still believes in it and have submitted their will to this practice.

According to a report by UNICEF “Changing a harmful social convention: Female Genital Mutilation in Innocenti Digest”, it is mentioned that every year almost 3 million girls and women are subjected to genital mutilation which is a very dangerous and life threatening practice causing a lot of pain and suffering to the girls. According to this report, this practice is actually violating the basic human rights of girls and women, which stop them in their physical and mental integrity resulting in the discrimination, violence and in more severe cases of their lives as well. The report gives the detail regarding the cutting procedure which is done with the use of unsterilized, makeshift or rudimentary tools without any proper hygienic concern. The report rightly suggests the cause behind the females accepting this issue is because of social convention. “Social convention is so powerful that the girls themselves may desire to be cut, as a result of the social pressure from peers and because of fear- not without reason- of stigmatization and rejection by their own communities if they do not follow the tradition” (UNICEF 11). This statement clearly reveals that the girls accept this evil practice only to find a place in the society which would otherwise condemn them. How could the society which is male

dominated decide the fate of females without even realizing or caring about the pain and sufferings of the females? The report also suggests that the females are even told that this custom is a part of religion and they should not go against religion. But the report clearly reveals that there are no religious justifications for this practice. So, basically this all custom is based on a fake interpretation of males about the religion so that the women should not oppose it. “Although there is no theological branch of Islam that supports FGM/C of the Sunna type, the Koran contains no text that requires the cutting of the female external genitalia” (UNICEF 12). The report later validates its justification of Islam having no connection with this practice by giving a statement given by the Grand Imam, Sheikh Mohammad Sayed Tantawi, Sheikh of Al Azhar who said, "Islamic Shari'a protects children and safeguards their rights. Those who fail to give rights to their children commit a major sin [...]. FGM is a medical issue, what the doctors say we heed and obey. There is no text in Shari'a, in Koran, in the prophetic Sunna addressing FGM” (UNICEF 14).

In another article “Female Circumcision as a Public Health Issue” Nahid Toubia explains the medical issues caused due to this evil practice. Toubia explains that due to this there are certain medical complications which women have to suffer after the circumcision. “The mildest form, clitoridectomy, is anatomically equivalent to the amputation of the penis. Under most conditions in which most procedures take place, female circumcision constitutes a healthy hazard with short and long term physical complications and psychological effects” (Toubia 712). He further asserts that a small amount of tissue is dangerous and has serious and irreversible effects. He gives the account of complications caused by the female genital mutilation which are hemorrhage and severe pain which can even lead to shock and death. And there

is prolonged lesser bleeding, and then it can even lead to severe anemia, which results in the poor nourished child growth. Toubia later reveals that even the infection of the wounds, ulcers, delayed healings, gangrene and many more complications have also been recorded. Toubia also agrees with the fact that the female circumcision is accepted by the society only because of the fear of the society. "Among girls who live in communities where female circumcision carries high social value, the desire to gain social status, please parents, and comply with peer pressure is in conflict with the fear, trauma, and after effects of the operation. Physical complications add to the psychological trauma" (Toubia 714). So, basically it is the society which is manipulating the minds of the girls to accept this social practice without opposing or protesting against it. He explains that this practice is rooted in the girl's mind to prepare them for the physical marking of the marriageable age which actually controls their sexual pleasure and their reproduction. But every report and article has shown the same thing that with this evil practice not only the girls suffer from the physical trauma but the mental trauma also. But the irony of the world is that for us our pain is very less in front of the cultural identity. "Cultural identity is often stronger than the individual interests, and it may take some time and much new information for people to abandon traditional customs" (Toubia 71).

Firdaus, the protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero* was no exception. She was a girl who belonged to Egypt and therefore had to follow all the customs and traditions of Egypt. For her, it was a thing which she was not aware of at all. Suddenly one day her mother brought a lady to do her circumcision. Firdaus was so innocent that she doesn't even know that it was her circumcision. "Then she brought

a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs” (Saadawi 12). This statement of Firdaus reveals that she even didn't know that it was called circumcision. She believed it to be the punishment which her mother gave her because before this circumcision she had gone in an argument with her so she had beaten her and after that only brought the lady to the process. This shows the psyche of the girls. It's simply because she was so small to understand all this, but the only thing she could understand at that point was the pain. She cried all the night with the pain, but nobody came to comfort her. She was suffering all night and that too all alone. The only help which her mother gave her was that next morning she didn't send her to the fields. Not only that day, but she stopped her going to the fields every day. Instead, she used to make her do other household works. Why did she stop her? The answer is simple because her circumcision was done now and she according to their custom has arrived at the marriageable age and so she could not go the fields and play with the boys anymore. This was the only thing which Firdaus enjoyed. She liked to play with her friends as at that point she could be free and enjoy her life. But her small happiness was also taken away from her as she was now a grown up girl and she could not be with the boys anymore. But like other girls, she also accepted this and started helping her mother in the household works.

Education is second important thing which Saadawi has focused in her book. Feminist across the globe are fighting for the women education, but unfortunately, it is still a taboo in almost every part of the world. Mary Wollstone Craft in her famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* states:

A Profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that woman, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. (Wollstonecraft 1).

Craft explained that women are deprived of education and are considered a weak sex which she is strongly against. The status of women as a secondary sex is common across the globe and women are given a stereotypical image of being fragile and weak who deserve protection. Education is mostly considered the right of their counterparts i.e. the men.

Egyptian culture follows the Middle East format of Male Islam Version where female education has always been a problem. Egypt is also dominated by the same monopoly of the male supremacy and females are subjugated and not allowed to get the education on the basis of false interpretation made by the male about Islam. Margot Badron in a book *Feminist, Islam, and Gender and Making of Modern Egypt* traces the history of Egyptian feminism with special reference to women education. She explains that Egyptian women first used this term feminist in order to define themselves and their organization Al Ittihad al Nisa'i al- Misiri. She explains that the first Egyptian-run school for girls was founded in 1853 by Coptic arch bishop. She further states that, "1873 Tcheshme hanim, a wife of Khedive Ismail, became the patron of the first state school for girls, the Siyufiyah School" (Badron 9). She later in her book asserts that education was one of the important aspects of Egyptian feminism as it was like educating the whole nation. She assumes that the Egyptian feminists grounded their theory of female education on the basis of Qur'an and in Muslim history. To validate her answer she gives the reference of

Ihsan al- Qusi, who in her lecture at an American university in Beirut approved the women education according to the Qur'an.

She turned to early Islamic history for examples of women known for knowledge and piety, to refute the common belief that learning leads to women's ruin. Her list included 'A'ishah, the young wife of Prophet Muhammad, a renowned transmitter of hadiths (sayings of the prophet), Zaynab, a granddaughter of the Prophet versed in theology, and Sakinah, a poet in 'Abbasid Baghdad. (Badron 145)

So, in a way she was trying to show that Islam never stopped the women education but instead supported it. Later Margot in the same book explains that it was not only in schools but women were also being supported in extracurricular activities as in 1920, Nabawiyah who was one of the key thinkers of the Egyptian feminism persuaded the mothers to arrange sports for their daughters in order to raise them with strong mind and bodies. So, basically Egyptian feminism has been fighting and struggling for women by giving references from the Qur'an. The society is changing but still, the women are not getting equal opportunities for education. It is not only in Egypt but almost all parts of the world. If a parent can support the education of only one child they without taking a second thought support the male child without caring for the female child. So in a way, females are suppressed and their voices remain unheard as the females have accepted this as their fate.

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* has explained the importance of women education to shape the nation. She argues that women are equal to men so they

should be given the same status and position in the society. But the irony is that the condition of women education across the globe is miserable. She states that:

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than a human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate views and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. (Wollstonecraft 2)

Mary Wollstonecraft explores that females from their childhood are being taught or rather brain washed that the ultimate aim is to find a suitable husband who will take care of them for the rest of their lives. So obtaining the education is not an important thing. She wants that females should be given education like their male counterparts and should not be deprived of it. "If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of ignorance?" (Wollstonecraft 32). But still, women struggle to get education across the globe.

Same is the case of Firdaus in the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, who all her life struggled to get education do something big in her life. She is not like other Egyptian girls who get suppressed and don't demand for education but instead she is stubborn who wants to achieve something in her life. But the irony here is that she

was also born in a male dominated family and was not allowed to go to school but instead at a very tender age she has to do some household works. She was an innocent girl with high dreams. Her uncle used to study in El Azhar university in Cairo and whenever he used to come home for vacations, she used to listen all the stories about university life and used to dream that one day she will also go the university and when she expressed this desire to her uncle, he used to laugh at her and say, "El Azhar was only for men" (Saadawi 14-15). The question is why? Why is university only for males? This male monopoly is prevalent everywhere. And when her uncle used to go back to the university she would hold his leg and ask him to take her along so that she could study and stay with him. But all the time she was given a negative response. And the shocking part of her life is that the dream of her getting education was fulfilled only after the death of her parents. She was taken by her uncle to Cairo and admitted to a primary school and then to the secondary school. She used to like school a lot. She was always in a quest to know everything and for that she used to spend her free time in the library. She was not like other girls who used to waste time in gossiping about boys or other girly stuff but instead used to devote her time in the productive readings to know about the world. She even stood second in the school and seventh in the state in the secondary school examination. "I liked classes, and I enjoyed studying, despite the unfailing vigilance of the superintendent, and other things. When the results of the final examination were announced, I was told that I had come out second in the school and seventh countrywide" (Saadawi 32). All the parents and the guardians were present in the ceremony but Firdaus, who stood second in the school, was all alone there. Her uncle didn't come for that ceremony. She was not sad but instead was happy as she

was approaching towards her aim and this secondary school certificate was a step towards her future. She was a bright student and was hoping that her uncle will allow her to study further and she will be admitted to the university but all in vain. As soon as she finished her secondary school she was forced to get married to a man who was double her age and moreover a widower. This school was not only to know about the world but to do something good with her life. She wanted to do a job also but all her dreams got crushed with her marriage.

Marriage is a sacred thing. But marriages now are no more than a business. People simply sell their daughters to earn some money. And for that, they don't even mind their ages. Girls are forced to get married as if it is the only ultimate desire left for them. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Structures on Political and Moral Subjects*, states that how female from her childhood only is taught that marriage is her ultimate aim.

Women are told from their infancy and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunnings, 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 33)

The girls are being told that they came to this world only to get married and serve their husbands and rest of the things especially knowledge is of no use to them. Mary Wollstonecraft is against this notion. She holds the view that women are

not merely wives but actually the companions to their husbands. But this view is always disregarded and women are considered weak and submissive.

Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari in her book *Women and Her Rights*, talks about the women with respect to Islam. She says that during the pre Islamic period the Middle East like other countries used to think that they had full authority over the marriage of their daughters and sisters and even mothers. According to them, she says that there was no right of women to choose the husband and the choice was made by the fathers or brothers and in their absence their paternal uncles. She further asserts that the males could give their daughters in marriage even before they were actually born. This practice was stopped by Islam. Islam gives full right to marry according to her choice. As quoted by Ayatullah from the hadiths,

Years ago, during the pre Islamic days, Tariq ibn Murqa'a and I took part in a battle. During the fighting he came to require a lance and cried, "Is there anybody who will give me a lance and take a reward?" I went to him and asked him what reward he would give. He said that he would bring up for me the first daughter that was born to him . . . I went to him and reminded him of the promise. But he back on his promise and demanded a fresh dower. Now I have come to you to find out whether he is right, or I am right . . . The Prophet (Pbuh) replied, "If you ask me, neither you nor Tariq is right. Go after your business and leave the girl alone". (Mutahhari 16)

This hadith clearly reveals that it is not only the consent of father for marriage which matters but actually the consent of the girl is most important. This is

the basic human right given to females in Islam. But today people in the Middle East even after knowing this fact restrict females from this right and get them married according to their wish.

Same is the case in Egypt. The people of Egypt hardly let their daughters study and force them to get married. Girls are also now mentally prepared that the only aim in their life is to get married and serve their husbands. But Firdaus was not like other girls. She wanted to study and achieve heights. She studied till secondary school and even stood second in the class and was hoping to get admitted to the university. But the irony is that as soon as she completed her secondary school her uncle and aunt got her married to a much older person who was a widower but rich. 'Women are women's greatest enemies' is a well known phrase which comes out to be true in this case as well. Her uncle's wife couldn't stand Firdaus staying at her place. She just wanted to get rid of her in any case. So she suggested her husband send her to the university where she could live in the university quarters. But her husband opposed to this suggestion. Her uncle stated, "To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men?" (Saadawi 37). So her aunt who was a wicked woman and whose only aim was to get rid of her suggested another idea of getting her married to her uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud who was thrice the age of Firdaus and moreover a widower. Not only this, he also has a deformity on his face. On his chin, there was a large hole which used to swell in the middle. But for her aunt, this was not any deformity. "Deformity? Who says it's a deformity? Besides, your holiness, as the saying goes, "nothing shames a man but an empty pocket" (Saadawi 38). The question arises here who created such phrases? Is money the only criteria for the girls to get married? This clearly shows the hypocrisy of the society and the

women who believe it to be true. The irony was that her uncle first resisted the marriage but as soon as her aunt convinced that they will get a big dowry, he got interested.

How much. A hundred pounds, or perhaps even two hundred if he has the money . . . 'If he accepts to pay one hundred pounds that will be sufficient blessing from Allah. I will be able to pay my debts and buy some underwear, as well as dress or two for Firdaus. We cannot let her get married in the clothes she's wearing.' (Saadawi 38-39).

This conversation between her uncle and his wife over Firdaus' marriage shows the hypocrisy of the people. They are talking like selling vegetables or any other thing to earn money. The emotion of Firdaus was not realized and she was not even involved in the conversation as it was her marriage. Just for the sake of money, they got Firdaus married who was only at the tender age of 19 and the man whom she was about to marry was over 60. But her guardians hardly matter about her age because they were more interested in money to pay off their debts and get rid of Firdaus at the same time, so, the feelings of Firdaus were crushed. And the irony is that Firdaus was not asked what she wanted which is very important in Islam. The girl's consent is very important. According to Ayatullah in the book *Women and Her Rights*, she gives references from hadiths that it was note-worthy that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) allowed full liberty to his daughter Fatimah Zahra (pbuh) in choosing her husband. She further argues that according to hadiths as quoted by her:

He gave in marriage several other daughters also, but he did not deprive them of their freedom. When Ali Ibn Abi Talib (pbuh),

approached the Holy Prophet, seeking Fatimah's hand, the Prophet said that several other people had already approached him and that he had conveyed their proposals to Fatimah, but she turned her face away, as a mark of disapproval. The Prophet assured Ali that he would convey to her his proposal as well.

The Prophet went to Fatimah and told his beloved daughter what Ali wanted. This time she did not turn her face away, but kept quiet and thus expressed her consent. When the Prophet came out, he was happy. He exclaimed. "Allah is the Greatest". (Mutahhari 16-17)

This is the status which Islam gives to women for their marriage. This hadith clearly indicates that the woman has full authority over her marriage. She should be asked like the Holy Prophet used to do. So basically it is not the religion which restricts the woman to marry according to her wish but the males who interpret it according to their convenience and let women believe that Islam is against the girl herself choosing the husband which is completely baseless. Here also Firdaus who wanted to study more was not asked anything and the most important decision of her life was taken without even consulting her. This practice of selling daughters in the name of marriage for big dowry was also done by her father. Moreover, the Mehr or the dower which Firdaus' uncle wanted out of her marriage is actually against Islam. According to Islam Mehr or the dower is the right of the girl only. It is a kind of security for the girls. Ayatullah in the same book *Women and Her Rights* discusses that during marriage man gives a present to women. It has nothing to do with the parents. The writer further explains that woman receives this present and she preserves her social and economic independence. She states that the girl chooses her

husband from her free will and not completely depending on her parents. She holds the view that neither the father nor the husband has any right to enslave or exploit her. She explains that there are numerous verses from the Qur'an which emphasize that the dower is exclusively of women and besides this dower or Mehr; the husband still has to maintain all the expenses of the women. To validate her argument, Ayatullah gives a reference from the Holy Qur'an, Chapter 4 and verse number 4, as quoted by her, "Give to the women a free gift of their marriage portions" (qtd. by Mutahhari 87). But Firdaus was not even shown a penny from her Mehr and was simply sold to a rich old man. Even though Firdaus didn't resist the marriage to her uncle but was not ready for this marriage. So, she decided to run from the place and she just took her secondary school certificate along with her. When she came out in the street and started to walk, it seemed to her that she had seen the street for the first time. She didn't know where she was going, so she just kept on walking and walking. During the night, she found a place in the corner of the street to rest till the dawn. All her energy was exhausted and she was very hungry. Suddenly, she realized that somebody was there who started to come closer and closer to her. The eyes of that person were staring at her starting from her legs, to her thighs to her belly, breasts, and neck. She was all shocked and started to shiver out of terror. At once she saw a shop and started to run towards that shop. As soon as she realized that the eyes which were following her have gone, she ran quickly back to her uncle's house. This is the real face of the society. The girls are not safe out there. If a girl is seen out in the late night she is thought to be a prostitute and almost all men want to take advantage of her. Why is this thinking prevalent in the society? Can't the girls move freely in the society?

This incident shocked Firdaus so much that she didn't even realize that how she came back to the house, what happened to her when she return to home, was she questioned where she was, and how she got married to Sheikh Mahmoud. All she remembered were those eyes which scared her to death. Now she was Mrs. Sheikh Mahmoud and her only job was to serve him. Sheikh Mahmoud also didn't ask Firdaus whether she was ready for that marriage or not. It was completely reflected on her face that she didn't want to marry him. Even in the Holy Qur'an, it is written, "O you who believe! It is not lawful for you to inherit women forcibly" (*The Qur'an*, Surah An-Nisa 4.19). And the next verse which is very important is that Mehr should not be taken away from the female in any case according to the *Holy Qur'an*. "Nor should you put constraint on them (women) so that you take away part of what you have given" (*The Qur'an*, Surah an-Nisa 4.19). So, basically whatever was happening to Firdaus was against the Qur'an but she was shown as if marriage was a blessing to her from the Allah. And so she simply accepted this as her destiny.

Saadawi through this book has also focused on the plight of Arab married women and their problems. She has specially stressed on the theme of domestic violence. A girl leaves her home, her family and even her surname just for her husband. Marriage is often seen as a trust in which the husband promises to keep her wife safe and protected. Marriage in every religion is considered sacred and very pious. God created both men and women equal and Islam also holds the same belief. "Woman has been created of the same species of man, and both man and woman have the same innate character. He (Allah) made all of you from one being, and from that being He made its mate" (*The Qur'an*, Surah An-Nisa 4.1). This verse indicates that Allah has made both men and women from the same material so in a

way they both are equal. So according to Islam, there should be no discrimination in regard to superiority or inferiority and the husband should treat his wife equally as he promised to do during the marriage. But mostly this trust is crushed and the girls are ill treated, tortured and even brutally beaten by the husbands. Ayatullah in her book *Woman and Her Rights*, argues that both men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah but men always take women for granted and treat her as if Allah created women only for men. She gives reference from the Holy Qur'an that it expressly says that the earth, the heavens, the air, the clouds, the plants and the animals have been created for the man but that does not mean that women have been created for the sake of men. She asserts that both man and woman have been created for one another. She quotes from the *Holy Qur'an* Surah Al'Baqarah, chapter number 2 and verse number 187 that, "They (women) are raiment (comfort, embellishment and protection) for you, and you (men) are the raiment for them" (qtd. by Ayatullah). This verse clearly reveals that both men and women are made in order to compliment, protect and comfort each other. There is nowhere written that it is the duty of the wife only to serve her husband and be a slave to him.

Helen Cixous in her essay "Laugh of the Medusa" argues that women have accepted that they are inferior to males which need to be changed as soon as possible. According to her, males have made females to accept the notion that as they differ from males in all aspects especially the body so they are the inferior beings and should hate themselves. She states, "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs . . . They have constructed the infamous logic of

anti love” (Cixous 114). Cixous has clearly pointed out that men have made women to hate themselves which develops an inferiority complex in them.

So, basically women do not protest against the violence. They accept it submissively as they are completely depended on men. Same was the case with Firdaus. Her only job was to do the daily household work for her husband during the day and at night, a sex partner to him.

According to the *Holy Qur'an*, in Surah an-Nisa it is written that both husband and wife should honor each other and protect them. “They (your wives) are your garments and you are a garment for them” (*The Qur'an* 2:187). This verse shows that like a garment is worn to protect the honor of a person and so like a garment husband and wife should protect each other's honor. But in case of Firdaus, her husband used to dishonour her in each and every possible aspect. He used to torture her physically as well as mentally. Sexual intercourse between husband and wife is thought to be a very personal and special moment for them. But in this case, her husband used to come and without even talking to her would start it in the most savage way possible without caring about the feelings of Firdaus. Firdaus stated, “At night he would wind his legs and arms around me, and let his old, gnarled hand travel all over my body, like the claws of a starving man who has been deprived of real food for many years wipe the bowl of food clean, and leave not a single crumb behind” (Saadawi 45). This was very pitiable on behalf of Firdaus. Her husband treated her only as a commodity.

So in a way, domestic violence started not physically but mentally for Firdaus. Mentally she was all alone. The guilt and mental anguish had traumatized

her life and there was not a single pleasure left in her life. She was living a life with no aim left. The second instance of her mental torture was that whenever she used to eat, her husband used to stare at her plate as if she should not eat more and should not waste things. His eyes used to be on her plate only. But this was also not a new thing for her. In her childhood also, her father used to stare at her plate and keep a check on how much she will eat. The two most important people in the life of a girl are her father and her husband. But both used to keep a check on her food. This is very sad on the part of Firdaus. She had never eaten to the full stomach as she was always under the eyes of surveillance. Not only on her meals but her husband used to keep an eye on almost everything she used to do. As he had retired from his job, so he would sit next to her and keep a watch on all her works. When she used to clean utensils in the kitchen and if by chance some soap powder will spill on the floor or when she used to cook food and if even few grains would spill on the floor, he would immediately stand and shout at her for being careless. He used to be like a jailer in the house and all the time Firdaus used to be scared and disgusted with her life. Helen Cixous in her work entitled "Hyperdream" states that,

Almost every day I can feel myself suffering mainly in the head, I can explain the pain to myself but knowing it came from the inflammation of my imagination does not prevent it being reality itself. What's more I'd be crazy not to go crazy. We don't know what an illness is. On awful hurts we plaster little old words, as if we could think hell with a paper bandage. (Cixous 345)

Cixous has also commented that such situations make women lose her identity and she feels suffocated all the time as there is nobody whom she can

discuss her life with. This was the exact situation of Firdaus. She was suffering and dying day by day but could not revolt against it. This was the only reality left with Firdaus.

One day her husband found that the leftovers of the food were there, so he shouted at her and this was the point when he got into a habit of beating her. After this incident, he used to beat Firdaus even if she had done anything wrong or not. Isn't it shocking that he used to beat her like a savage even after her all day long work? This is the misery of a girl. So she had to bear all the beatings and ill treatment because her family won't take her back now. One day he hit her with his shoes all over her face and body got swollen and bruised. So, she took the courage of going out of his house and went to her uncle's place but she was not welcomed at all. This is the hypocrisy of a family who took all her dowry and sold her to a man thrice to her age. And when he used to beat her like an animal, and she was in the greatest demand of the support from the family, her family dejected her. And instead, her aunt told her, "A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband" (Saadawi 47). She was not even given the food and was sent back to her husband's house. Why was she treated like that and that too by her own uncle? Wasn't it the responsibility of her uncle to take a stand for her? This is the real face of the society. This is how the married women are treated.

Back at her husband's house, as she was very hungry, no sooner did she tried to put food in her mouth, her husband shouted, "Why did you come back from your uncle's house? Couldn't he bear to feed you for a few days? Now you will realize I'm the only person who can put up with you, and who is prepared to feed you" (Saadawi 47). This is the helplessness of a girl. She had no place to go now. She had

realized that her husband was the only godfather for her. She kept quiet and listened to all his abusive language with patience. But this was not it. Going from his place was an attack on his ego. So how could he be satisfied with abusiveness only? He took her and leaped on her like a mad dog. She submitted to him. She was full of misery but she couldn't help herself.

This domestic violence was not something new to Firdaus. She has seen this before also when her father used to beat her mother. This evil practice is prevalent in almost all parts of the world. Female subjugation in the form of domestic violence is the most prominent form. Her mother used to sit at her father's feet and used to wash his legs with cold water during summers. And when Firdaus grew older her father used to make Firdaus do this job. The craving for a male child is one of the main causes of domestic violence. And for this reason, Firdaus had many brothers and sisters. "They were like chicks that multiply in spring, shiver in winter and lose their feathers, and then in summers are stricken with diarrhoea, waste away quickly and one by one creep into a corner and die" (Saadawi 17). And the irony is that when the child died used to be a boy then her father used to beat her mother a lot.

But this was not the life which Firdaus wanted. She was a girl with full of aspirations and hopes but now left all alone with her miseries. But deep inside, her hopes were still alive. One day her husband hit her with a heavy stick that he used to carry and didn't stop to beat her unless blood ran out from her nose and ears. How can a husband behave like that? A husband who is considered to protect his wife can beat her to almost death? Don't they fear from anything? This is a male dominated society. All the rules, myths and beliefs have been created by the males only and the most important rule is to serve your husband and never complain. The

fact is that fearing is only meant to be for women. But this was the limit for Firdaus. This was the point when she had enough from life. She had to stop herself for being violated and assaulted all the time. She had to listen to her inner self as Helen Cixous in her famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” states, “we must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing” (Cixous 877). This time she had to do something with her life. So, she just left the house but this time she didn't go to her uncle's place because she knew he won't help her and instead will take her back to her husband's place. So she just walked to the street with blood and bruises all over her face.

Sexual harassment is another issue discussed by Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero*. It is one of the widely known issues related to women. Women no matter what region or religion or race she belongs to suffer from this evil practice. And Egypt is no different with this issue. Sexual harassment in Egypt is a common thing and women have accepted this as their fate and hardly any women speak against this evil issue. According to an article in a famous Al Monitor magazine “Sexual Harassment in Egypt: Women are People, Too”, Alaa Al Aswany criticizes the society for the not dealing with the issue of sexual harassment properly due to the lack of the respect towards women. Aswany further says that women in Egypt are only the pleasure giving machines that men use till it gets damaged or is of no use. He says that all the phrases regarding women that she forms half of the society, for she is a sister, wife or mother do not actually stand true for society because in reality the society hardly respects the women.

Whoever harasses women does so because he considers them no more than a body owned by a husband or father. When someone who

thinks in this way can't buy themselves 'a body' via marriage contract in order to gratify their desires, and is merely looking for opportunities to grope other women and then flee from punishment, of course he won't hesitate to harass them. (Aswany n.p.)

Aswany further reveals that this sexual harassment is restricted not only in the society but the worst part is that a girl is harassed even in her home, may be by a relative or later by her own husband who marries her to protect her but actually degrades her both physically as well as psychologically. “It is the disease of reducing a woman to her body and taking no interest in her feelings, her mind or her capacity as a human being. It is the disease of viewing a woman as a means of pleasuring men, whether acquired through a marriage contract or illicitly enjoyed by groping in crowded places” (Aswany n.p.). He later focuses on the statistics of the study which was observed in Egypt covering over 1000 women both foreigners and native origin conducted by the Egyptian Centre of Women Rights in 2008 showed that 98% of the foreign women and 83% of the native Egypt had gone through this sexual harassment in one or the other way. This is really shocking. This statistics clearly show that the women in Egypt are not safe but the worst part is that hardly any women came forward to oppose this evil practice.

According to another article, “Closet full of Dreams: Inside Egypt's Sexual-Harassment Crises”, from Times magazine, Jen Tse focuses on how difficult it is for the females to deal with the sexual harassment prevalent in Egypt. Jen Tse states that a woman in Egypt has to face this sexual harassment. The writer says that the magnitude of the sexual harassment is transmitted with about 99.3% of Egyptian women being sexually harassed in their lives, according to 2013, UN report. This is

really a shocking figure. The figure is growing day by day and the women in Egypt are not safe. How can a woman live in such a society? Is it really a pain to be born a woman? The answer is definitely 'No'. But the irony is that our society is so male biased that it becomes difficult for a woman to defend herself or raise a voice against this practice.

Firdaus, like other Egyptian girls had to face this harassment and the worst part is that she faced it from both the society as well as her from her own family. The first instance of the sexual harassment in her life was from her childhood friend Mohammadain whom she used to play all day long. He used to pinch her under water. They used to play bride and bridegroom and he used to assault her but as she was a child she used to think that it is also a part of a play and tried to enjoy it. The second instance of her sexual harassment was from her own uncle at her home. She had the job of kneading dough whenever it used to be a baking day. For kneading the dough she would sit on the floor with the trough between her legs and because of that her galabeya which is a dress wore in Egypt used to slip to her thighs. “. . . I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle's hand moving slowly from behind the book he was reading to touch my leg. The next moment I could feel it travelling up my thigh with cautious, stealthy, trembling moment” (Saadawi 13). Her uncle used to do this by hiding his face behind the book so that Firdaus could not tell whether the voices he was making was from his snoring or panting in awake but one thing that Firdaus was sure of was that his hands would continue to press her thighs with an almost brutal instance. Her uncle was the real brother of her father, so in a way was like a fatherly figure to her but he didn't keep

the essence of his relationship with Firdaus and like a true savage and typical man, used to think of Firdaus as a girl who is meant to give pleasure.

Firdaus was sexually harassed by her own husband which is comes under the category of marital rape. He used to do intercourse with her without actually caring about her feelings. He cared only about him and his pleasure and again considered Firdaus only as a sex machine. According to Luce Irigaray in her book entitled *This Sex Which is Not One*, she states that woman is considered only a source of pleasure without caring about her pleasure and feelings. She bluntly argues that male think that it is the only penis which is supposed to get pleasure. According to Irigaray, men consider them only worthy of having pleasure and women only as an aid or prop to achieve that pleasure. She is against this theory and wants women to realize that they should know what they want and they are also worthy to have equal pleasure like their husbands. "Woman, in their sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies"(Irigaray 23). She explains that it is the fault of females also as they don't know what they want because males of their life have taken them only as a commodity.

A husband is supposed to be better half for his wife, whose job is to protect, feed and keep her wife happy. But the irony is that in most of the cases, sexual harassment is done by the husband. And it is not only in Egypt, but across the globe, the statistics are almost the same. This type of harassment completely changes the personality of a girl and she develops an inferiority complex. And finally, the stage comes when she thinks of herself as a low and degraded person with only one purpose in this life to serve her husband. This develops into a serious psychological problem which makes a girl completely cut off from the society and suffers from

mental illness. So this sexual harassment from the husband leads not only to the physical harassment but also to the mental harassment. Firdaus also suffered from this sexual harassment from her husband. He used to do sex with her without considering her as his wife. For him, Firdaus has to be submissive to his needs and desires as he owns her. This thinking is prevalent across the globe. Husband usually thinks of his wife as a commodity and a sex partner whom he owns as a master. But one day, Firdaus ran away from her house with her secondary school certificate. She had enough from her husband now. She was trying hard to adjust with her husband but he was hardly caring about her feelings and desires and instead considered her as his slave. So, she just ran away but then she met Bayoumi.

Bayoumi was the person she met in the cafe when she ran away from her house. He gave her water and took her to his home by promising her that he will help her in getting a job. Initially, he used to care a lot for her. He didn't keep an eye on how much she was eating and for the first time in her life a man used to ask her about her likes. He promised her to get a job for her as soon as possible and till then she could work for him in his house and could live there. She started liking him as he was the first man in her life who actually showed some respect and care for her. This is a typical human nature. When somebody feels alienated and rejected by everyone, and if at that point somebody shows care and shares your pain, then the person gets automatically attached to that person. And same was happening to Firdaus also. She developed a liking for him but used to ask everyday about her job. But he used to ignore by saying that no jobs were there. He asked her to sleep on the bed. Initially she refused to do that but he made her to sleep on the bed as he was showing her the utmost love and respect and as soon as she slept on the bed he made

a sexual intercourse with her. But she kept asking him about her job and one day when she asked him about the job, he slapped her tight and used to lock her at home when he used to go for the work. When Firdaus would ask about her job, he used to say, "How dare you raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you street walker, you low woman?" (Saadawi 52). Every day he would come in the middle of the night, slap her and would rape her. But Firdaus realized that the weight of the body over her used to be different every day, so one day she asked the man who he was? He responded that he was Bayoumi but when she asked him again then he replied, what difference it makes who he was? He raped her brutally like a savage person. "He sank his teeth into the flesh of my shoulder and bit me several times in the breast, and then over my belly. While he was biting me, he kept on repeating: 'Slut, bitch.'" (Saadawi 53). How could Bayoumi do this to her? The only mistake of Firdaus was that she trusted Bayoumi that he was not like other men and he would help her to get a job so that she could stand on her own and achieve her aim. But what Bayoumi did to her was very shocking. He made her a prostitute and used to sell her everyday to earn money. Where has humanity gone? The world has really turned out to a place where women have no respect and she is only a thing of pleasure. She has no identity and no value. This was the limit for her and one day with the help of a neighbour, she ran out from that place.

Sexual harassment to the female employee was the next harassment suffered by Firdaus. With many hardships in life, Firdaus finally got a job. But when Firdaus started working for a company, she realized the plight of female employees. One day when she was running after the bus to catch it, one of the top executives came to her in a car and asked to give her a lift. Firdaus saw her eyes which according to her

clearly said, “you’re a poor, miserable employee, unworthy of esteem, running after a bus to catch it. I’ll take you in my car because your female body aroused me. It is an honor for you to be desired by a respected official like myself. And who knows, maybe someday in the future, I can help you to get a rise before others” (Saadawi 81).

So she just refused to go with him. It may be her imagination only, but it is what is happening in the reality. The female employees are treated like this only. They are not considered worthy of doing a job. They are only a kind of eye candies in the office. She did this job for almost 3 years and observed the plight of other female employees as well. She felt sorry for the other girls who offered their bodies and their physical efforts every night in return for a for food and a good annual report or may just to ensure that they would not be treated unjustly or discriminated or even transferred. All the men in the office just behaved like scavengers to the female employees according to her who just wanted tone thing from girls and that was a sexual pleasure. This was the point when she realized the worth of female employees in nothing. “I came to realize that a female employee is more afraid of losing her job than a prostitute is of losing her life” (Saadawi 82).

Saadawi in her book *Woman at Point Zero* has also talked about prostitution. Prostitution is not restricted to Egypt only but it is prevalent across the globe. Usually, the girls associated with prostitution are considered very low in status. They are never considered a part of the society which is definitely male oriented. Males consider them low and abuse them and make other girls also feel disgusted about these women but at night most of these men go to these prostitutes to fulfil their sexual desire. This is definitely the hypocrisy of males. But the question is why

the girls opt for this profession which is considered to be very low in status? What is the thing which forces the girls to sell their body to those males who abuse them in the day light and do not consider them to be a part of the society? The answer is simple and it is 'the survival'. The girls all their lives are depended on the male counterparts, before marriage to their father and after that to their husbands. And often the girls are not much educated especially the girls living below poverty lines. So what is the option left for them? The answer is prostitution. Even if they don't opt for prostitution then also the girls who live all alone are not safe and are sexually harassed or raped. And after being raped which is not their fault they are still considered to be wrong because the society held them responsible for tempting the boys and finally the girls are called prostitutes. So in both the ways the girls are considered wrong.

In case of Firdaus, she opted for this profession twice in her life. She was not illiterate; she was an intelligent girl with a secondary school certificate and who wanted to achieve something in her life. Then the question is why she became a prostitute. It was because of Bayoumi who promised to get her a job and took her to his house and asked to stay there. But Bayoumi turned out to be an evil man. He used to lock her all day in the house and used to sell her every day to his friends. The irony is that initially, Firdaus didn't know that the person who used to come at night was not Bayoumi.

He took to lock me in the flat before going out. He would come back in the middle of the night, pull the cover away from me, slap my face, and then bear down on me with all his weight. I kept my eyes closed and abandoned my body. It lay there under him without a movement,

emptied of all desire, or pleasure, or even pain, feeling nothing. A dead body with no life in it at all, like a piece of wood, or an empty sock, or shoe. Then one night his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelt different, so I opened my eyes. The face above me was not Bayoumi's. (Saadawi 53)

This statement from Firdaus explains her plight. She even called her a dead body with no life and feelings at all. The worst part was that Bayoumi started selling her to his friends. But one day somehow with the help of a neighbour, she ran out from his place. She just ran and walked how much she could and finally sat near the Nile over a bench. There a woman sat next to her which proved out to be the next person who indulged Firdaus in prostitution. She started asking her who had done this to her? Firdaus was surprised that how can she come to know what has happened to her. She even took many names of the men who would have probably done this to her and the surprising part was that she even took the name of Bayoumi. Firdaus was shocked to hear this. Then she asked Firdaus that who started all this to her, her father or her brother or any uncle? Firdaus replied her uncle and she laughed. This way their conversation started and she introduced herself as Sharifa Salah El Dine and said that everyone knew her. She looked like an aristocratic woman with the finest clothes, makeup, and shoes. She took her to her apartment and on her way, Firdaus narrated the whole story to her. On reaching the apartment, Firdaus took a bath and was given the finest clothes she has ever seen in her life to wear. Sharifa asked her about almost everything about her family. When Firdaus told her that she had nobody as her parents and siblings were dead, so Sharifa replied that everybody has to die but the important thing is to know how to live until

one dies. Then she made Firdaus realize that all the men who came in her life didn't realize her worth. She started brainwashing her and basically trained her to be a prostitute. Sharifa told her:

A man does not know a woman's value, Firdaus. She is the one who determines her value. The higher you price yourself, the more he will realize what you are really worth, and be prepared to pay with the means at his disposal. And if he has no means, he will steal from someone else to give you what you demand (Saadawi 58).

Sharifa was actually manipulating Firdaus and was trying to brainwash her. She tried to persuade Firdaus that she will take care of her and will not cheat her like other people did. Firdaus was fascinated by all the limelight of Sharifa's lifestyle. First time in her life she felt she was free to eat whatever she wanted and can wear the finest clothes and makeup. She was bewitched with all this glamour. Firdaus had nobody to go back to as she was all alone and felt helpless in that situation so she had to trust Sharifa and follow what she instructed her to do. Firdaus had a hope that Sharifa would help her to get a job and even showed her secondary school but Sharifa had some other plans for her and Firdaus ended up becoming a high class prostitute. But every night when the men would do sexual intercourse with Firdaus, she could not feel anything and when Firdaus asked this to Sharifa then she simply laughed and told her that it was only a business and work and pleasure should not be mixed. She got her to believe that the only pleasure was to live in a clean apartment, to wear good clothes and makeup and to eat whatever one wishes to. Firdaus believed all this and she even never went out of her apartment not even from her room. Every hour men would come and she had to please them. "There were so

many of them. I did not understand where they could possibly have come from” (Saadawi 61). Firdaus did not like it but still was going deep and deep in the quagmire of this prostitution. She was doing what Sharifa was telling her as she had nobody left in her life. But one day a person named Fawzy came. While doing the intercourse with her, he asked her if she was feeling any pain. He was the first person in her life who asked her about the pain. She was completely surprised and told her that she do not feel any pleasure or pain. And moreover, Sharifa has told her not to mix feelings with the work. Then he told her that Sharifa was fooling her and was taking all the money which men used to give to spend nights with Firdaus. Again, in Firdaus’s life, a woman turned out to be her enemy. This is how the society works. Mostly the women across the globe are considered to be another women’s enemy and this should stop. Bell hooks in her famous book *Ain’t I a Woman?: Black Woman and Feminism* also states that it is very important that woman should believe in the concept of sisterhood and should help each other to grow instead of drowning deep in the quagmire of oppression. Sharifa did the same thing to Firdaus. She was a prostitute and took advantage of Firdaus’s situation and made her a prostitute for her personal benefit.

This was the point when Firdaus realized that Sharifa was only using her for her benefit and was shattered. She didn’t know what to do and just took her bag and ran out from there. She was walking on the streets all alone and that too at night. As she was walking and thinking about her life, a policeman came and stopped her. He forced her to come to his house. Firdaus resisted his actions and even showed him her secondary school's certificate and told him that she was searching for a job. He argued with her and said that he will pay her and when she resisted, he told her that

he would arrest her for being a prostitute. How can a policeman behave like this? They are supposed to help the people and safeguard them especially the women. But this policeman was doing a completely opposite thing and even threatened her to arrest her, "To clean up the country, and protect respectable families from the likes of you" (Saadawi 67). This statement of the policeman reflected his true self and if he was so much against prostitution then how can he force her to sleep with him. These are the double standards of the society. But Firdaus had already gone through a lot, so she refused but he took her arm with the force and took her to a room and raped her. And the height of hypocrisy is that he didn't even pay her as he promised to do so. This is the real face of society. Even if the girl wants to come out of this prostitution, the society will drag the girls deep inside it. Now Firdaus was completely dejected. She had no place to go and she doesn't know what to do with her life. All her dreams were crushed again. As she was walking down the street feeling dejected with the life, rain. She took the shelter at the bus stand standing all wet because of rain. While waiting for the car, another man came to her in a car and asked her to get in. Firdaus was shivering with cold and almost all her body was visible as she was all wet. At this time, Firdaus was all numb. She had just experienced a man forcibly taking her to develop a sexual intercourse with her even though her resisting him. This was the second incident of sexual harassment to her and she was so traumatized with her situation that this time she didn't even resist and went with him to his house all passive. He helped her to take a bath with warm water and soap. He did the same thing to her which the policeman had done but somehow with less brutality. Firdaus was so tired that she just slept and when she woke up it was the morning. As she was going from that place, he lifted his hand and gave him

10 pounds note. Firdaus was shocked not only because he paid her but also she had seen that note for the first time. It is quite shocking that until this time in her life she didn't see a 10 pounds note. When she was a child her father once gave her one paistre, when she shifted to her uncle's place even he didn't give her any money, when she got married still she didn't see any money as her husband never gave her any and the worst part was that when she was a prostitute then also she didn't see that note even though working for the money only. This is the harsh reality of life. Most of the women are dependent on the male counterparts and so was with Firdaus, so she never felt the need of money in her own hands.

But for the first time, Firdaus had money and that too was 10 pounds which were all hers. "It was the first time I had held such a big note in my hand. As a matter of a fact, it was the first time my fingers had even touched a note of that kind" (Saadawi 70). She didn't understand what to do with that note and as she was hungry so she decided to eat something. She went to a restaurant and ordered a fat brown chicken and started eating. As it was the first time that she bought something for her and that too was for eating so she ate it very slowly chewing every morsel and keeping it in her mouth for a long time. This was the first time that there were no eyes gazing at her food to see how much she ate and so she just ate like a baby stuffing itself with candies. This was the time when she first realized the importance of money. She was amazed to see how a piece of paper can make such a big change. And she started thinking that why didn't she realize the importance of money before. When she paid the bill, she was quite happy and felt very respectful of herself. So, she went into prostitution on her own. This incident made her very confident and she started believing that money is the only respectable thing. She got so confident that

she would choose men whom she wanted to sleep with. She rejected men whom she does not like and even rejected the men if their finger nails were dirty. She demanded more money from the men.

She started thinking that she wasted all her life to do what men in her life wanted to do. But this time she felt free and independent. She could eat what she wanted to, lived in a big and nice apartment; refuse the man whom she didn't like. Now she was 25 and was living in an apartment and made friends also. One of her close friends was Di'aa. He was a journalist and Firdaus liked him as he was more cultured than other people she knew. In her apartment, she hung her secondary school certificate surrounded in an expensive frame. When Di'aa first came for sexual intercourse with her, he asked her to talk instead of anything else. He told her that he felt like it was a clinic and asked her why she didn't hang her price list on the wall. Firdaus was shocked that why was he comparing her profession to medical profession. When she asked him about this comparison then he replied that these two professions are same only with just one difference and that is of respect. He told her that he was not a respectable woman. Then she asked him that if her work was not worthy of respect then why he joined her and she asked him to leave. The hypocrisy of Di'aa reflected when he tried to forcibly hold her to develop a sexual intercourse with her. If he was so sick of her profession then why did he come to her? Even though Di'aa left but his words were still revolving in the mind of Firdaus. These words pinched her so much that she started to think about this only. "Before that moment my mind had been calm, tranquil, undisturbed . . . But now my head vibrated with an incessant movement that kept on without respite, throughout the day, and throughout the night, like the ebb and flow of waves on a shore, seething

and foaming and bubbling like boiling water (Saadawi 77).” One sentence that she was not a respectable woman changed her life. She was in a complete ambiguity that why didn't she realize this fact prior.

So, she decided to leave all this and enter into a normal life. She would search for a job and finally got the job as well. Now her only aim was to be a respectable woman. She had to leave her apartment as she could not afford it anymore and moreover, she had to leave her luxurious life style. She started living in a small room with a bathroom outside the home. She had to live a very hard life but she didn't give up. During her job tenure, she realized that the plight of female employees was very bad. But she tried to maintain her decorum and focused only on her aim. It was at this time only, when she fell in love with Ibrahim. He was not like other office people. He used to respect Firdaus a lot and loved her. Firdaus narrated her whole past life story to him and he was completely fine with that. He told Firdaus that whatever happened to her was not her mistake. She finally thought the aim of being a respectable woman was coming true and soon she will marry Ibrahim. She even developed a sexual relation with Ibrahim who loved her dearly. But Ibrahim also turned out to be like other men. He crushed all her dreams and got engaged to the chairman's daughter for promotions. This broke her completely. She felt dejected and disgusted with her life. This was the worst feeling for her. She stated:

I had never experienced suffering such as this, never felt a deeper pain. When I was selling my body to men the pain had been much less . . . But when I was prostitute I protected my myself, fought back at every moment, was never off guard . . . In other words, I was

telling the man he could have my body, he could have a dead body, but he would never be able to make me react, or tremble, or feel either pleasure or pain. (Saadawi 93)

This statement shows the distress of Firdaus towards her life. This is how the women are treated in the society. When she wanted to be a respectable woman and wanted to lead a normal and happy married life, she is made to realize that she can't live according to her wish. She always has to depend on a man for her happiness. She then realized that when she was a prostitute, at least she was free to choose her life and decide what she wanted in her life. But to have a respectable life, she just demanded one thing and that was to be saved from the quagmire of prostitution through love. But now all her sacrifices, dreams and desires were crushed and the worst part was that she was not even asked about that. It was like the veil in front of her eyes was removed and now she could see the harsh reality of life. She had overcome all the illusions of life that to be happy one needs to be respectable. She got the realization that "A successful prostitute is better than a mislead saint" (Saadawi 94). She felt that all the women in the world are deceived by the men but the least deceptive women were the prostitute. And she even realized that the marriage was the system on which women are made to suffer because after marriage there is no going back for women and she has to suffer without opposing it. At this point, she decided that she won't live in any illusion of love, marriage and divorce which are all based on certain rules and laws. She felt an independent woman and hoped for nothing or desired nothing. She no longer felt any fear. She sang a song which she heard once in her childhood:

I hope for nothing

I want for nothing

I fear nothing

I am free (Saadawi 95).

This song was the song of her emancipation from all the restrictions and rules made by the society which was completely male dominated. In a way, she was making herself free from the males who according to her only know how to dominate women and the weapon they use for this was the sexual intercourse. So, she stepped again into the profession of prostitution which according to her gave her freedom to live her life according to her own wish. And the irony is that when she became prostitute she met Ibrahim after four years of his marriage. He wanted to go with her to her flat. Initially, she resisted but later she said yes. He came to her flat and made a sexual intercourse with her. When he was done with this, he started to go from there and at once, Firdaus asked him to pay her. He was shocked and while shivering took a ten pounds note and gave her but Firdaus told her that her price was not less than twenty pounds. This was the time when Firdaus realized that Ibrahim had never loved him. It was just he could not pay to prostitutes to sleep with him, so he tricked Firdaus in this fake love relationship so that he can enjoy sexual pleasure every day and that too for free only.

This was the time which made Firdaus realized that she hated all men. The men whom she hated most were those who tried to advise her that they will help to rescue her from prostitution. Because of doing this they were trying to show her that how kind hearted they were, and how pitiable the situation of Firdaus was. But Firdaus refused to give them any chance which made them feel that they were

superior. She convinced herself that the lives of all women were miserable but a prostitute is somewhat leading a free life. She was happy to live this life as she has chosen it and it made her feel free. She became a very successful prostitute and was paid the highest price and even men of high ranks wanted her. One day a very important person from a foreign state heard about her and demanded to sleep with her. One of the politicians arranged things for him but Firdaus refused to sleep with him. This was a slap on the ego of that person. They offered her more money but still, she refused it. Next day they even threatened her with prison but again she refused the proposal. Then on the third day, they the Head of the State told her that her resisting shows her insult towards him and it would lead to the bad relationships between the two countries. "He added that if I really loved my country, if I was a patriot, I would go to him at once" (Saadawi 98). This is how the society works. Basically, they were trying to persuade her at any cost because her refusal was not only a simple refusal but it was a matter of respect and honor to them now. But Firdaus until this time have become stubborn and didn't want to be subjugated again. So, she simply replied that she knows nothing about this patriotism. He laughed at her and told her that what kind of girl she was who was devoid of the feeling of patriotism. Firdaus stated, "He wanted to take a prostitute to this important personality's bed, like any common pimp would do, and yet talk in dignified tones of patriotism and moral principles" (Saadawi 98). But still, Firdaus refused to the proposal and had to go to prison for this refusal. But as Firdaus was a successful prostitute and had enough money, so she hired a very big lawyer and shortly she was released from jail without any charges. Basically, Firdaus had learned all the tactics of the world. She had realized that with money, she can buy or do anything. As the

court has also decided that the charge on Firdaus was false and she was an honourable woman. So, Firdaus learned that it was the money which buys the honor as well. One thing which she came to know was that that man can't stand rejection as it would hurt their ego, so she would reject many men and as a result, her price kept going up.

Firdaus was now confident about her profession. She no longer felt any embarrassment about it because she has seen both the worlds; one prostitution and the other of a normal girl. She knew that this prostitution profession was also invented by the men only as they force women to sell their bodies, "and that the lowest paid body is that of a wife" (Saadawi 99). So, in a way according to Firdaus, all the women were prostitutes only. According to her, all the wives have to serve the husband as sex partners and fulfil the desires of their husband with almost no money at all. But Firdaus considered herself to be intelligent as she would charge a large amount of money from the men and she was not dependent on the men and the most important thing for her was that she was free and could do whatever she wishes to do. This time she started being clever and used to donate money to a charitable association and as a result, her picture used to come on newspaper. "But male noses have an uncanny way of sniffing out money" (Saadawi100). The world in which she was living was only fantasy. When she thought that she was free from all the males, there only a man suddenly poked her life. He was no ordinary man but a pimp. He forced her to keep him as her pimp and share her earnings with her. According to him, every prostitute needs a pimp to protect her from others pimps and police. And when Firdaus refused to his proposal as she does not need any protection, he said, "There isn't a woman on earth who can protect herself" (Saadawi100). This is the

main question that why can't women protect themselves. Moreover, from whom the men are protecting the women? The answer is the other men. Women have always been considered to be weak and secondary and Men never allow women to be independent because an independent woman is not easily dominated. The same was now happening with Firdaus. The society mostly could not accept a woman to earn and not share her money. So, this man Marzouk came and threatened her and when she went to police station, she came to know that he had more contacts than her. She also wanted to go for legal proceeding but she realized that it was of no use. "I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do" (Saadawi 101). Why are the laws also biased and male oriented? Why isn't the same punishment given to both men and women for the same crime? If the crime is same, then why are such double standards prevalent in the society? The answer is simple, all the laws and rules are formed by the males only and most of the laws are according to the convenience of the males. But still Firdaus tried to keep him away from her but one day he just came to her house and threatened her with a knife. He forced her to take him and for that, he was even ready to marry him. But Firdaus didn't want to marry and become a slave again and finally she had to appoint him as her pimp. He worked like a successful businessman. "I'm in business. My capital is women's bodies and I don't mix work and love together" (Saadawi 101). This is the height of hypocrisy. He is earning because of women only but still, he regards them nothing less than a commodity. He forced Firdaus to have sexual intercourse with him. Firdaus resisted a lot and as man can't bear rejection, he started beating her and finally raped her.

Later Firdaus realized that he was really a dangerous pimp as he was controlling many other prostitutes as well and he had contacts almost everywhere. That was the point when Firdaus realized that she was not free anymore. "I was nothing but a body machine working day and night so that a number of men belonging to different professions could become immensely rich at my expense. I was no longer even the mistress of the house for which I had paid with my efforts and sweat" (Saadawi 103). But as Firdaus was not that weak and have faced many problems before also, so she decided to leave and packed her certificate as she again wanted to find a job. This was the second time when Firdaus wanted to stop this profession but there is no going back from this profession. In fact, the males don't allow the woman to leave this profession so, at once, Marzouk appeared and asked her where she was going? When she told her that she wanted to quit this and start working then he replied that she was already working and she needs not to go anywhere. He was not letting her go but she said, "I don't want to be anybody's slave" (Saadawi103). For this statement, he responded that there are only two categories of people; one master and other slave and in their case he was the master and she was the slave. But who decided that he was the master? Who gave him that authority? The answer is simple, he gave himself that privilege. He didn't allow her to leave. When Firdaus resisted his advances, he slapped her and for the first time in her life, Firdaus too slapped him back. This was the first time Firdaus had slapped anybody especially a man. His ego got so hurt to be hit by the woman that he took a knife in his hand and before he could hurt her, she took that knife and buried it in his body. "I raised the knife and buried it deep in his neck, pulled it out of his neck and

then thrust it deep into his chest, pulled it out of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly. I stuck the knife into almost every part of his body” (Saadawi 104).

Firdaus killed him and she gave him a very painful death. It was because the frustration she was carrying all these years for men came in this form. This was the aggression and the hatred she had for all the men who came in her life and used her only for their sexual desire without caring about her feelings and emotions. So Firdaus just killed him as if she was taking revenge from all the men she came to know in her life. By killing him she was emancipating herself from the men who subjugated her.

After killing him, she just came out to the street and started walking. She felt very light as if some burden has been removed from her body. She felt free and independent. As she was trying to think what just happened to her who made her so light, suddenly a luxurious car stopped in front of her. He tried to persuade her to go with her. She resisted his advances but he said that he can pay anything to her as he was an Arab Prince. To this, she replied that she was a princess as she was full of confidence and had made herself free. He said that he can even pay her 2000 but she said 3000 and the deal was done. He took her to his home and had sex with her. Firdaus was all numb with no feelings of pleasure or pain. When he was done with it, he gave her money. Firdaus just took the money and tore it into pieces. "The movement of my hands as I tore the money to pieces, tore off the veil, the last, remaining veil from my eyes, to reveal the whole enigma which had puzzled me throughout, the true enigma of my life" (107). She had realized that it was the money only which brought her to this hell. So, by tearing these notes she was trying to destroy all the money she had in her life.

It was as though I was destroying all the money I had ever held, my father's piastre, my uncle's piastres, all the piastres I had ever known, and at the same time destroying all the men I had ever known, one after the other in a row: my uncle, my husband, my father, Marzouk and Bayoumi, Di'aa, Ibrahim, and tearing them all to pieces one after the other . . . ensuring that not a single vestige of these men would remain at all (Saadawi 108).

Firdaus was feeling as if she was relieved from all the sufferings and pain which different men of her life gave her. Firdaus's meaning is Heaven but unfortunately she lived a life complete opposite to her name. Her life was no better than hell and she only suffered and was oppressed throughout her life.

Thus to conclude it can be stated that this book is definitely one of the most important books to study about the plight of Arab women. This book portrays the suffering of Firdaus which is true not only to Arab world but almost all parts of the world. Women in Arab world are usually manipulated and brainwashed that they are the inferior sex but the evidences were provided from the religious texts and hadiths on the situation of Firdaus and proved that even religion is in favour of women emancipation. Riffat Hussain, a Pakistani-American Islamic scholar and activist in her article, *Feminism in Islam* argues that Islam has always given equality to both the sexes. She further argues that Qur'an cannot suppress the women and is always in favor of the rights of women. She talks about ten fundamental rights of women according to Qur'an:

a)the right to be respected for one's humanity; b) the right to be treated with justice and equality; c) the right to be free of traditionalism, authoritarianism, tribalism, classicism, or caste system, sexism and slavery; d) the right to privacy and protection from slander, backbiting, and ridicule; e) the right to acquire knowledge; f) the right to work, to earn, to own property; g) the right to have a secure place of residence in an environment in which one's possessions and covenants are protected and in which one can move freely; h) the right to leave one's place of origin under oppressive conditions; i) the right to develop one's aesthetic sensibilities and enjoy the bounties created by God; and j) the right not only to life but "the good life," which is possible-according to Qur'an perspective-only is a just society because justice is a pre-requisite for peace and peace is a pre-requisite for self actualization.(271)

Firdaus was devoid from all these fundamental rights which are according to the Islam only. She was never given respect, honor or treated justly. Equality is a word which was never ever present in her life. All her life she faced discrimination and suppression. Protection was a thing which was ruined for the first time only when her uncle used to sexually assault her. Later this responsibility was of her husband but he too turned out to be like other men and assaulted her instead of protecting her. Right to acquire knowledge was one of the aims of Firdaus in her life. But she was not allowed to study after her secondary school. Job to Firdaus came in different types. She worked very hard as she wanted to achieve something good with her life. Her first job was that of prostitution. She even tried for a reputed

job and was even appointed but she faced so many problems as a female employee that she went back to her old job of prostitution because she felt that prostitute is freer than the enslaved wife. To have a secure residence was also ruined when a pimp named Marzouk came in her life and disturbed it completely. The most important is right to leave a place under suppression and Firdaus somewhat achieved it many times in her life. Initially when her husband used to torture her, she left the house and when Bayoumi used to lock her and used to sell her every night to his friends, she escaped from that place also. Later when Sharifa was making money out of her and deceiving her, she ran away from her as well and at last when she Marzouk tried to suppress her she tried to run away from that place but when he stopped her from doing that she finally ran from that place by killing him. And finally the right to have a good life was only a fantasy for her. It was that dream which never came true to her. So she just stopped dreaming for a good life and accepted death penalty as emancipation from this male dominated world. Death was the only relief for her, so she accepted with her arms open in order to be free.

Chapter Six

Canada and Women Oppression: A Study of Alice Munro's *The Beggar Maid*

The Beggar Maid is written by the Canadian writer Alice Munro. Alice Ann Munro was born on 10th July, 1931 in Wingham, Ontario, Canada. She is often considered to write from the feminine perspective. In an article "Alice Munro's Stories and Feminism" Dr. M. Prabhakar and K Venkat Satish assert that Alice Munro is a writer who in on the women's side. They state that, "Her fiction has to be examined from the feminist view point. They deliver the feminist ideology of Munro" (Prabhakar and Satish 57). They explore that Munro's fiction talks about the barriers which women experience in their journey of autonomy and individuality.

She is the recipient of many awards and honours. She won Nobel Prize in literature in 2013. She also won a Man Booker Prize in 2003, and she is the winner of Canadian's Governor General Award for fiction three times. Other awards include Marian Engel Award in 1996 and Roger Writer's Trust Fiction Prize in 2014.

Some of her famous publications include *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You are?* (later published as *The Beggar Maid*), *Love Of a Good Woman* and *Runaway* .

Runaway is published in 2004 and it is considered to be one of the most important short story collections of Alice Munro. It consists of three different stories about three women and people related to them. The first story is about the journey of

Juliet who is a teacher and later becomes a mother. She has a normal life who would visit her elderly parents. In the final section, she is a middle-aged woman with a grown up daughter. Juliet all her life remained alone with her child which developed alienation in her child. Finally, her daughter leaves the house in search of spiritual things which she never got at home. The next story is about Robin, a young nurse who meets a man and spends a single day with him. They said bye to each other by exchanging hugs and kisses but decades later, she would wonder about what could have happened between them. The last story is about a woman named Clara who wants to leave her husband and finally escapes from her house but suddenly in the train, she changes her mind and calls her husband to pick her up.

The Love of a Good Woman is published in 1998 and is a story having multilayered plot. The story is about a secret in a small Canadian town. Three teenage boys go for swimming in the river where they find the body of the town's Optometrist Mr. D.M. Willens who is drowned in her car. Those three boys didn't tell anybody regarding the dead body till evening and finally narrates the story to a local constable who is too deaf to hear their story. Finally, a boy reveals the story to her mother who informs the police and finally the police find the body. The story then shifts to Mrs. Quin who is suffering from kidney failure and is being nursed by Enid. Mrs. Quin narrates her story to Enid and tells her that Mr. Willens would treat her eyes and one day when Mr. Quin came home, he saw Mrs. Quin and Mr. Willens in a compromising situation which he could not tolerate and finally knocked Mr. Willens down. The idea of drowning Mr. Willens was given by Mrs Quin herself in order to safe them.

The Lives of Girls and Women is published in 1971 and each short story in this collection can stand as an individual story. It revolves around the journey of Del, a young girl who experiences a lot from being a girl to a woman. Del's mother was a saleswoman of Encyclopedia which was a very honourable job and made her mother a free and independent woman. As Del grew older, she came to know that her parents are not happy together which she believed they were. This hit her mental setup and she started searching for true love. She even visited different Churches to attain mental peace. Finally, she started thinking about sexuality and went into relationships. But all failed and finally she realised that she was writing a novel, so dedicated her life in completing that novel.

The Beggar Maid revolves around Rose who is a small town girl but dreams of a successful and happy life. It depicts her journey full of struggle and sufferings who finally finds her emancipation. Rose through her journey realizes that the life of a single girl is very difficult in this world.

According to Nona Balakian in her review "Books of the Times", the character of Rose is a very enthusiastic girl who is always in a quest of life. She throughout the novel is trying to see what will come next. Nona comments that Rose childhood was a not a happy one but when she gets an opportunity to become scholar, the door opens for her new life. She was having a good life but, "she has her eye on the light at the end of the tunnel—the freedom from habit and disconnectedness that block curiosity "to see what will come next" (Balakian n.p.). Nona asserts that the whole story of the book revolves around what Rose wanted in a relationship and what she actually gets. These experiences with the men make her realise her importance and she decides to make her own destiny independent of men.

“The desire to better her lot and to arrive at a true sense of herself are ever at odds as she makes her way in the world”(Balakian, n.p.). Nona concludes her review by stating that Rose got her emancipation only by doing what she wanted in her life instead of having a life which was decided by the society she lives in.

J. B. Kilfeather in his Review “Canadian Gorky?” comments that *The Beggar Maid* is an amazing book which revolves around Rose and her mother Flo and become so popular that it was even shortlisted for the nominations for the Booker Prize. Kilfeather asserts that this book accounts the journey of Rose who always wanted to achieve something big in her life but after marriage got suppressed and became a typical housewife. But when she realises that she wants to achieve her dreams, leaves her husband and finally works in a broadcasting and eventually academic work. Kilfeather states that even after having a new life, she was not happy but still she was a free woman. “. . . Rose can never entirely satisfy herself that her new values are so patently better than those represented by Flo and the people she escaped from. . . (Kilfeather n.p.). Kilfeather in her review appreciates the writing of Alice Munro and calls her a Canadian Gorky who gave voice to the people who could not speak out of fear.

Another review “The Beggar Maid, Stories of Flo and Rose by Alice Munro” by Kirkus states that *The Beggar Maid*, “penetrates with bowsperic knowledge and irresponsible tenderness, the iced-in continent of the working class poor and the erotic course of those who get away” (Eisenstadt 224). Kirkus magazine asserts that Rose had adapted the new ways of city life and even accepted the proposal of Patrick who married her only because she was poor, submissive like a beggar maid. But soon Rose divorces him and opts for a job to start her new life. The magazine

explores that, “So Rose is now “adept at disguises”. In the last stories Rose returns to her childhood home, to a rapidly deteriorating, savage Flo and, in a reunion with an old classmate” (Eisenstadt 225). The magazine strongly holds the view that even after starting the new life, Rose didn’t forget her old life and especially her step mother Flo who she gets reunited at the end.

This book is set in Canada which is often considered to be liberal towards women. But Alice Munro has shown the plight of the Canadian women that is still oppressed and subjugated. Canada like other countries is also biased towards the women treatment and consider woman as secondary sex. A report “Status of women in Canada: Summary of Commission Recommendations” submitted by Benjamin Schlesinger consisted of 167 recommendations depicting the plight of Canadian women. This report focuses on the steps which the government should take to improve the condition of women in Canada. It demands equal status for women in Canada in all the fields. It talks about different issues where the women were left behind. It mainly focuses on the marriageable age of women that should not be less than 18 years. It also touched a very important point viz. education. The commission asks for the changes in the education at all the levels so that it should help in all round development of women. The report states, “Changes in education could bring dramatic improvements in the social and economic position of women in astonishingly short time” (Schlesinger 255).

Alice Munro is a very realistic writer who through this book focuses on certain issues that are prevalent in Canada that oppress the women and consider them as a secondary sex.

Domestic Violence is one of the curses prevalent across the world. Instead of so many steps taken to eradicate this evil practice, it is growing day by day. Munro through this book explains that this evil practice is still prevalent in the 21st century and especially in case of marriage, wife battering is mostly a matter of pride. Every day new rules are made to stop this practice and every day they are broken according to the convenience of man.

The very first chapter of this book is called “Royal Beatings”. The word is made to believe that beating is something very royal thing. Rose was a very active child right from her childhood only. She was a very curious girl who wanted to know almost everything. She lost her mother in the childhood and her father brought her a step mother who was having a very ambiguous relationship with her right from the beginning. Flo used to make fun of her real mother and there was no memory left of her mother in the house. She always threatened Rose that she was going to have a Royal Beating and as Rose was a girl of full imagination, she used to think that how can beating be royal. She would focus on this more instead of why was she was being beaten. “Her father was king of royal beatings” (Munro 3). Once, Flo had a fight with Rose and she provoked his father against Rose. But when she realised that he was getting too angry she stopped but now nothing could stop him. Rose got frightened with the look on his father’s face and tried to be innocent but her father instead of making the situation good made it worst by beating Rose and that too very cruelly. He loosened his belt and started to beat her with that:

She runs, she screams, she implores. Her father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his hands. Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her

head ringing. Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in the face again. He shakes her and hits her against the wall, he kicks her legs. She is incoherent, insane, shrieking. Forgive me! Oh please, forgive me! (Munro 19)

This incident shows how brutally her father used to beat her and she was helpless and had to take all this. Even Flo was scared of this beating and later she tried to make up for Rose by giving her the food of her choice. Basically, the relationship which Rose and Flo were sharing was quite interesting. Flo was a very important part of Rose's life.

So, in a way Rose had a very bitter childhood in regard to Domestic violence and this continued in her marital life as well.

The report "Family Violence-The Canadian Encyclopedia" explores the agony of domestic violence in Canada. The report asserts that since 1970's it has been known that the crime against women is not only done by the stranger but by a known person especially the husband at home. But these crimes never come out because it is mostly considered to be a personal issue and women in fear to maintain her so called dignity never say anything about it. The report asserts that the amount of spousal violence has been documented in a national survey conducted by Statistics Canada, The Violence Against women Survey (1993). The report expresses that the women facing this spousal violence struggle a lot from coming out of such abusive relationships. The report asserts, "Women are often constrained by lack of employment, the responsibility for children and the fear of social disapproval from

family and friends for not being able to make the best of a troubled marriage” (“Family Violence-The Canadian Encyclopedia”)

In another report produced by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics under the Federal Family Violence Initiative entitled “Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2014” explored that this curse is still prevalent in the Canadian society and at an alarming speed. This report explains that due to the increasing rate of spousal violence done to the women, many organisations such as United Nations and World Health Organisation made it a thing of priority to eradicate this curse from the society. Even though such big organisations have participated to stop this violence, still it is growing day by day. This report clearly shows that women are twice more subjected to this violence than the men.

In 2014, many victims of spousal violence reported the most severe types of abuse, with women reporting severe violence more often than men. A quarter of victims (25%) overall reported having been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or a knife. A similar proportion (24%) reported having been kicked, bit, hit or hit with something. (“Family Violence in Canada, a Statistical Profile, 2014” 7)

The report asserts that this spousal violence does not end with the physical harm but it has the emotional effect as well. It states that “the most common emotional response reported by spousal violence victims was feeling upset, confused or frustrated (37%). Many also reported feeling angry (30%), hurt or disappointed (22%), depressed (18%), fearful (17%) and shocked (17%)” (“Family Violence in

Canada, a Statistical Profile, 2014” 9). These statistics clearly show how women lose herself and finally go in a state of depression with this kind of treatment. This report also explains that for the first time in 2014, the General Social Survey on victimization was conducted and the victims were asked about the long term effects of this domestic violence. The result was that many of the victims reported that they experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which makes them feel detached from the world and they always live in a state of fear. They experience weird things like being constantly on guard, having nightmares and behaviour problems. This report also explains the adverse effects of the domestic violence and shows that it is still prevalent in the Canadian society as it gives the latest statistical data. This report even proves that women are more subjected to this violence than men.

An article “Exploring Gender Difference in the Patterns of Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: A Latent Class Approach”, Donna L Ansara and Michelle J Hindin also explores that domestic violence in Canada is more experienced by women than men. They assert:

This research finds that women are more likely than men to report severe violence, such as having been beaten, choked or strangle ; sexual assault or sexual coercion; ongoing physical violence, physical injury and more serious types of injuries. Women are also more likely than men to fear injury or death and to be killed be a partner. (Ansara, Hindin 849)

Another article “Measuring Violence against Women: Statistical Trends” edited by Sarah Sinha gives a detailed analysis of violence against women in

Canada. She explores that women are four times more vulnerable to spousal violence than men. She asserts that the domestic violence in Canada is at an increasing pace and it is creating a type of chaos among the women. She argues that the main cause of this domestic violence is the insecurity among their husband about their wives. She asserts:

Some risk factors are specific to spousal violence, such as spouse's psychologically abusive behaviour. These behaviours, which can be precursors to the commission of physical or sexual assault, can include limiting contact with others, put-downs and name calling, jealousy, harming or threatening to harm someone close, demanding to know whereabouts, damaging property, and preventing access to income. (Sinha 62)

Sinha has pointed out all the outcomes of spousal violence which can distort the lives of women and leave them with a fragmented self.

It is usually believed that domestic violence is done by illiterate people who live a life of savage only. But this is not at all true which is beautifully shown by Munro in the form of Patrick, Rose's husband who was a professor and still used to beat her. The irony is that he married Rose out of love and was crazy for her before marriage. Then the question arises that what happens after marriage that the person who is so loving and caring before marriage turns out to be a person who beats her wife like an animal. The answer to this question is the Patrick simply wanted to control Rose in every way but Rose wanted to lead a free and happy life. Patrick would beat her even though being educated and belonged to an aristocratic family.

“She had scars on her wrists and her body, which she had made (quite often in the most dangerous places) with a razor blade. Once in the kitchen of this house Patrick had tried to choke her. Once she had run outside and knelt in her nightgown, tearing up handfuls of grass” (Munro 139). This was getting on her nerves. She could not take it anymore. Initially, she kept quiet because of Anna, her daughter, whom she loved dearly. But she could not take all this and when she realised that she didn’t even love Patrick, she decided to leave him.

Education is an important source of emancipation. Feminists across the globe focus on this issue as they know that it will make women aware of their rights and become self-dependent. Education in many countries is still a barrier for girls but luckily Rose was not stopped from this. Rose who wanted to become an actress (girl full of glamour and fame) still continued with education just to achieve some class in her life.

Mary Wollstone Craft in her book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* explains the importance of education in women’s life. Craft holds the view that education is an important part of one’s life and both men and women should be given education so as to maintain a harmony. She is strongly against the notion of women being focused on marriage rather than education or her career. She holds the view the education is the right of both men and women so, they should not be denied of it. She states, “Girls who have been weakly educated, are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision” (Wollstonecraft 4.43). Craft argues that if the parents of the girl die who is not given any education and who is not married, will have no means left in the society to survive. She asserts that education is a means for women to survive an independent

life. Craft touches an important point that if mothers are educated then their children are brought up in a better way with proper reasoning and love.

Rose learned many things in her school life. She learned to be a strong and independent girl. But in schools usually a lot of bullying happens especially with the girls. There was a girl named Franny who was bullied to the core. There was a story circulated around the school of Franny having sex with her brother Shortie. "Even on the toilet, it was written, Shortie McGill is fucking Franny McGill! Brother and sister" (Munro 27). Franny was a piece of humour for everybody in the school. Mocking at girls in school is very common but sometimes, it hits the psychological step up of a girl and she loses all her confidence.

Rose completed her school with flying colours and was now a step forward towards her aim of joining university. But for the university, she has to step outside her town and go to the city which according to Flo was not a safe place for girls. But still she aimed towards her dream and finally went to the city to achieve her dream. But the question arises why a city is not safe for the girls who live alone? Rose finally got admitted to the university as a Ph.D. scholar and spent most of her time in the library. "The building and the books in the Library were what pleased Rose most about the place" (Munro 75). Even though she was pursuing her research, she always dreamt of being an actress but was too shy to face the stage or camera, so she always resisted towards her dream. She was never supported to become an actress. The society always holds a very low regard for the acting profession especially for the girls. So, she continued with her research.

Flo (Rose's mother) on the other hand had to struggle a lot for education. When her mother died, her father gave her to a wealthy family and the pact was that they will keep her in their house and even send her to school but she has to work for them. "But most of the time they did not send her. There was too much work to be done. They were hard people" (Munro 44). She used to work all day and if one apple would be left on the tree then she was sent back and made to pick over every tree in the whole orchid. But Flo was doing her work with full dedication. Flo was a great imitator. She used to do imitation in front of the mirror. One day, the owner asked why there was no pie for the dinner. "If you want any pie you can make it yourself," said Flo, in the exact words and tone of her mistress when they were packing the dinner" (Munro 45). The owner got really upset and asked his wife that was this the answer she was about to reply? The wife denied it and when the husband left, banged Flo's head and she got a cut in her scalp. The owner's wife didn't even call the doctor. The scar healed but the mark was there only. After that they never sent her to school. Flo felt very much dejected and ran away from there and got a job in the glove factory. And so, she could not study further in her life.

Sexual harassment exploits the girls not only physically but it leaves a scar on their minds. This particular crime is one of the most dangerous crimes prevalent in the world. Several measures have been taken by the state or countries or UNO or any other agencies but the rate of this crime is increasing day by day and that too at a very high rate.

In an article "How Prevalent is Sexual Harassment: A Research Note on Measuring Sexual Harassment in Canada", Sandy Welsh and Annette Nierobisz explore the prevalence of sexual harassment in Canada. They assert that sexual

harassment is considered to be a form of discrimination by the Human Rights Act in 1978. But still women experience this sort of harassment either at work places or at public places. They explore that 'The Violence against Women Survey' was conducted by Canada in which 12,300 women were interviewed to know about the rate of sexual harassment. They talk about the Canadian Human Rights Commission Survey (CHRC) conducted in 1981 and the Violence against Women Survey (VAWS) conducted in 1993, which analyse the effects of sexual harassment in Canada. As quoted by them:

According to the CHRC study, in 1981 approximately 49% of women interviewed said they had experienced at least one type of "unwanted sexual attention". Thirty percent of these women labelled this attention sexual harassment. Looking at results from the VAWS, 54 percent of the respondents experienced some forms of sexual harassment. (Welsh, Nierobisz 508)

In *The Beggar Maid*, Alice Munro has shown the incidents of sexual harassment a girl faces in Canada. The first and the most shocking incident from this book is when Rose goes to the city to achieve her dream of joining university is harassed in the bus only. This journey was the first step towards her aim but at the beginning only, she is reminded that life of a lonely girl is very dangerous. And the irony is that the person who tried to sexually exploit her called himself the man of a Church. "I'm a United Church Minister" (Munro 62). This is the hypocrisy of the society. The priest, who teaches the world to control their desire to attain salvation, is actually doing the complete opposite thing. As Rose was sitting next to him, something touched the corner of her leg. She initially thought that it was just a paper

which was in the hands of the priest. She shifted more towards the corner of her seat but again something touched her. "It was. It was a hand" (Munro 63). She tried saying not to touch her, but because of the embarrassment, she didn't say anything and moreover she thought that nobody will believe that a minister of church can do such thing. Slowly he took his hand between her legs and Rose kept her legs as tight as possible so that he can reach there. "The minister's hand was not, or yet not, at all welcome to her. It made her feel uncomfortable, resentful, slightly disgusted, trapped and wary" (Munro 64). But when the conductor came to inform passengers about the arrival, he with no shame folded his newspaper and asked her that if he could help her with her coat? To this Rose replied with a very rude reply, 'No'. This 'No' was for all that sexual advances which he had made to her. This is the hypocrisy of men who do the eve exploitation with pride and without any fear.

This made Rose realise that whatever Flo told her about the city life was true and she has to be very careful in future regarding her security. Flo has already warned her to stay away from the ministers as according to her, they are the worst people and it was proved to Rose. Flo had explained her many incidents in which girls in the city suffered a lot. One such incident was which she called to stay away from White Slavers. She narrated her that it was not only to stay protected from men but even women are included in their gangs. An old woman will just appear next to the seat of a young girl in a bus and then will give her a candy which is already drugged. Soon, the girl gets intoxicated and gets unconscious. The women will pretend to be her grandmother and take her out from the bus with the help of a gentleman who actually is the member of the gang.

They kept you a prisoner in the White Slave place (to which you had been transported drugged and bound so you wouldn't even know where you were), until such time as you were thoroughly degraded and in despair, your insides torn up by drunken men and invested with vile disease, your mind destroyed by drugs, your hair and teeth fallen out. It took about three years, for you to get to this state. You wouldn't want to go home, then, maybe couldn't remember home, or find your way if you did. So they let you out on streets. (Munro 57)

This is very scary on the part of women. This reflects that the girl is not free at all. If she is alone then something bad has to happen to her. She is not protected at all. This is one of the main reasons that many girls quit the idea of studying further. They are always reminded the consequences of going to city for studying further. This is how the society works to subjugate the women.

Finally, with Rose came to the city and got admitted to the university as a Ph.D. scholar. She also got a part time job in the library. But here again she was shocked by another incident. A man in the library grabbed her leg, "She had seen a man crouched down looking at the books on a low shelf, further along. As she reached up to push a book into place he passed behind her. He bent and grabbed her leg, all in one smooth startling motion, and then was gone" (Munro 76). This time she didn't keep quiet like the last time what happened to her on the bus. She ran after her even though she was in a shock. But he had gone very fast. This is what Munro wants to explain through this book. When Rose stood against this harassment, the boy ran away fearing from her. Munro through the character of Rose motivates the girls to overcome their fear and work for their dreams.

Marriage which is considered to be one of the most important things in life has actually become an institution of business these days. Marriage is regarded to be supreme in almost all parts of the world with special regards to religion. Marriage in terms of religion is also considered very pure and serene. According to Christianity also, marriage is considered to be pure and very important part of one's life in which both the partners share their pain, love, care and sufferings together. But, now-a-days, marriage has almost lost all its importance and is just a contract. In a book *The Role of Religion in Marriage and Family Counselling* edited by Jill Duba Onedera, marriage in Christianity has a very special status. She argues that Christ promised to support the couple throughout their lives and purify their love empower them. She states that as Christ was devoted to his church, so should husbands be devoted to their wives and love them and care for them. She asserts that the relationship between husband and wife is a commitment that holds a supreme position. She states, "A decision to marry includes a lasting commitment to join oneself with another in a way that supersedes all other connections" (Onedera 60). She explores that the nature of marriage is defined in term of alliance i.e. covenant as expressed in Genesis 2:24, as quoted by him, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Onedera 39). He focuses on the term holdfast which according to her is a bond of love, affection, care and loyalty.

The relationship between husband and wife is highly regarded and respected in Christianity. Both partners are considered to be equal and should respect and love each other. Christianity teaches that, "The husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual

submission and responsibility” (1 Cor 7.3-5; Eph 5.21; Pet 3.1; Gen 21.12). This verse clearly indicates that both husbands and wives are equal and should treat each other with equal love and care. But what happens in reality is a different picture and these are only the words with hollow meanings left. Wives are hardly shown any mutual love or care. They are treated like a thing or commodity. But the irony is that girls are still mentally prepared from their childhood that their own aim in life is to get married.

Harriet Martineau in her essay “On Marriage” rightly explains the plight of married girls. She explains that marriage is the only desire left for women and there are specific roles assigned to women after marriage. She explains that some women are confined to religion; others are confined to the household activities while others are made to believe that they are so fragile that they have to depend on men for everything. This is the false belief that the society makes women to believe due to which they develop inferiority complex all the time.

Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* also holds the view that marriage confines the role of women to the four walls of the house. Women are made to believe that their only role in life is home-making and producing children and nothing outside it. Betty Freidan is against this notion and encourages women to think about their lives otherwise they will lose all their identity.

In case of Rose, she married Patrick who loved her and used to chase her. Rose was always confused about her relationship with Patrick. Even when they were in a relationship before marriage, Rose always wanted to run away from it but Patrick held this relationship very tight which suffocated Rose more. The question is

why Rose didn't love Patrick who according to everybody was the perfect match for her. He was the most eligible bachelor that every girl dreamt about. Everybody around Rose was jealous of her to have Patrick on her side. "It is no small triumph to attract the attentions of the heir to a mercantile empire" (Munro 80). Patrick belonged to a very rich family even though he was not interested in his father's business. He was well educated, good looking and well-mannered in all the ways. In short he was having everything that a girl wants from her husband. Then what was wrong with Rose? Why didn't she love him? The answer to this mysterious question is that Rose always wanted to be an independent woman but Patrick's nature was to keep her under his control. He just wanted to possess her without caring about her. He gave her a title of 'Beggar Maid' from the very famous painting of King Cophetua and beggar maid made by Edward Brune Jones. The painting depicts the story of a king Cophetua who fell in love with a beggar Penelophon at the very first sight. Rose didn't know about the painting. She saw the painting in the library.

She studied the Beggar Maid, meek and voluptuous, with her shy white feet. The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude. Was that how Patrick saw Rose? Was that how she could be? She would need that king, sharp and swarthy as he looked, even in his trance of passion, clever and barbaric. He could make a puddle of her, with his fierce desire. There would be no apologizing with him, none of that flinching that lack of faith that seemed to be revealed in all transactions with Patrick. (Munro 88)

But why was Patrick relating their story with this? Because he considered himself to be the king Cophetua and Rose as the beggar maid and according to him

he didn't care about her background of belonging to a poor family and still loved her. This was a complete hypocrisy in his character. If he really loved her, he would appreciate the fact that how Rose has struggled in her life and attained a position in which she was a scholar at the university. But according to him, he would save Rose from the humiliation and the hardships of life. He always pretended that he was doing some sort of favour to her. This was taking Rose away from him and this relationship.

He used to do whatever he liked. But Rose was not able to end this relationship. She was just acting too helpless for this situation. When she went with him to his house in British Columbia, she was surprised to see how rich Patrick was and there she realised that they completely belong to different classes. Later Rose took him to Hanratty to meet her family. There she realised that everybody was speaking about her getting married to a rich person. "Customers in the butcher shop-formidable ladies, the dentist's wife, the veterinarian's wife-had said to Billy Pope that they heard Rose had picked herself up a millionaire" (Munro 89). But when Patrick came there, he felt uneasy to see such a place and soon after coming from there he told her that, "You must be glad to get away" (Munro 91). Rose felt really bad on listening to this. She thought that Patrick should not have said this. Later Patrick gave her a diamond ring. After this Rose again went to Hanratty but this time alone and there she saw that the behaviour of people towards her has changed drastically. And she was also feeling fantastic about this and was flaunting her ring in front of everybody. "When people said how happy she must be she did think herself happy. It was as simple as that. She dimpled and sparkled and turned herself

into a fiancée with no trouble at all. Where will you live, people said and she said, Oh, in British Columbia! That added more magic to the tale” (Munro 92).

But from inside Rose was not happy. Betty Friedan in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* calls the problem of women’s unhappiness ‘as the problem that has no name’. She explains that most of the housewives experience this problem as they become dissatisfied with this lives and wants something else in their lives. She explores that this problem arises when women are confined to household chores to be good housewives, forced to forsake all kinds of educational and career opportunities and sexual dissatisfaction. She strongly opposes those books, columns and newspapers that define the cult of womanhood is domesticity. She states that:

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women, but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man. (Friedan 2.45)

She later in her book also explains the consequence of this problem as leads to the loss of femininity. Same was happening with Rose. She was not happy with Rose and her life. But she was not going to take all this. So she finally got the courage and

decided to tell it to Patrick and went to his house to end this relationship. She said all those things what she wanted to express from a very long time. "Please let me not marry you" (Munro 93). But Patrick thought that Rose was just scared from the concept of marriage so, he tried to calm her. But Rose for the first time told him that they both don't fit well as they belong to complete different classes and Patrick didn't even like her family. "You despise my family and my background and you think you are doing me a great favour" (Munro 95). This time Rose felt more confident and expressed whatever was in her heart without any fear. She told him that she was never sure about this relationship and it was a mistake to love him:

"You don't even know how to make love right. I always wanted to get out of this from the very first. I felt sorry for you. You wont look where you're going, you're always knocking things over, just because you can't be bothered, you can't be bothered noticing anything, you're wrapped up in yourself, and you're always bragging, its stupid, you don't even know how to brag right, if you really want to impress people you'll never do it, the way you do it all they do is laugh at you!". (Munro 95)

This is what Rose felt about Patrick and their relationship. This outburst made Patrick leave her as he realised that Rose cannot be happy with him anymore. After this, she became free and lived life according to her wish. But only after few days she changed her mind and went back to Patrick. She got scared as the life of a lonely girl is very dangerous in the city. She saw Patrick in the library and hugged him and asked for the forgiveness. "This was a violent temptation for her; it was barely resistible. She had an impulse to hurl herself. Whether it was off a cliff or into

a warm bed of welcoming grass and flowers, she really could not tell. It was not resistible, after all. She did it” (Munro 97). This was her biggest mistake. She out of vanity or in a fear of living a lonely life surrendered to Patrick and they finally got married. But marriage done in such situations is always a disaster and same happened to them. Patrick used to beat her, she even had extra-marital affair with Clifford and finally they broke their marriage.

Extra marital relationship in every marriage is considered to be an evil thing and especially if it is done by women then the curse becomes double. In this case also, Rose fell in love with Clifford who was Jocelyn’s husband. As Rose was not happy with Patrick as he used to control Rose at every moment, so Rose got frustrated with her life. She was helpless as she started to believe that it is her fate and there is no rescue to it. She was now sure that she and Patrick are not made for each other. She tried hard to make this relationship work. She even tried to make efforts so that she can respect Patrick more by asking him questions so that he can show how intellectual he was and she should admire him for that. But all in vain as Patrick used to give the answer in a very harsh tone and the answer was usually in lectures. The women are dependent on husbands in many ways which include financial dependence also. Patrick used to give her money but at the same time used to ask about every detail where she spent the money. Moreover, they were living in a big house but that house belonged to Patrick only. There was no such thing which Rose liked and had decorated according to her wish. The house was all decorated according to the wish of Patrick. One important thing in marriage is sex which in Rose’s life was all decided by Patrick. Luce Irigaray in her book *The Sex Which is Not One* argues that men consider that only penis is meant to have pleasure. She

holds the view that men usually consider women only as an aid to achieve the pleasure. So, men hardly care about her feelings and think only about satisfying himself. She asserts that it is not only the fault of men, but women themselves don't know what they want in life. Patrick in *The Beggar Maid* never asked Rose what she wanted and liked. Patrick failed to give the warmth which Rose required in their marriage life. Patrick did sexual intercourse only to satisfy him and never asked Rose what she wanted from him. Once in a party when Rose saw a couple embracing each other with full passion and kissing like crazy, she felt shivering. "The sight of those wet open mouths made Rose shiver. She had never been embraced like that in her life, never had her mouth opened like that. Patrick thought French kissing was disgusting" (Munro 110). The inner feelings of Rose were always crushed and were never taken care of. She was just doing things how Patrick would like them. These all things made Rose sick of him. She has understood that Patrick doesn't respect her and especially her feelings. He was all into himself. And the thing which triggered the disturbance in their relationship was the domestic violence which Rose has to face. She finally got the realization that their relationship could not work longer:

Later she thought that she did respect Patrick, but not in the way he wanted to be respected, and she did love him, not in the way he wanted to be loved. She didn't know it then. She thought she knew something about him, she thought she knew that he didn't really want to be whatever he was zealously making himself into. The arrogance might be called respect; that high-handedness, love. It didn't do anything to make him happy. (Munro 108)

Marriage for Rose was not at all a fairy tale. It was full of compromises and sacrifices which Rose was making at her end. She was always made to believe that she was inferior. She was always treated like her opinion hardly matters. Marriages like that never last long and instead break really soon. In this case also, Rose was considered no more than an object and her desires and wishes were all suppressed. Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book entitled *The Second Sex* explains the secondary status given to women by the society. She argues that the society characterizes man as the 'Subject' (the self) and woman as the 'object' (the other). This characterization by the society develops an inferiority complex in them and gives women a sub-ordinate position. Same was happening to Rose's life. Patrick treated her as a commodity (object) and always considered her the other without caring about her feelings. She used to be a stranger in her own house. Nothing belonged to her and she belonged to nothing. She was leading a life with no meaning left.

But there came a hope in Rose's life in the form of Clifford. Initially, she was not attracted to him and has no high regards for him. Patrick in one party was behaving very strange which embarrassed Rose. He was sticking to her all the time even to the bathroom. "Rose made a trip to the bathroom to remove herself from Patrick, who seemed to want to stick close to her (she thought he was being a watchdog; she forgot that he might be shy)" (109). Rose was feeling suffocated with Patrick and this relationship. She didn't know what to do, so she went outside to take the fresh air. And somebody came after her and that was Clifford who made her believe that he understands her situation. "Oh Rose. Rose baby. Never mind. Rose" (Munro 112). He even kissed her for five minutes. This comforted her and all of a

sudden she felt protected and warm. She fell for her instantly as she thought he is the one who understands her and came out only for her. Her notion for Clifford changed and she started to appreciate him. But the question is why she fell in love with Clifford? And what about the love she had for Patrick?

If loving Patrick was recognising something good, and guileless, at the bottom of him, being in love with Clifford was something else altogether. Rose did not have to believe that Clifford was good, and certainly she knew he was not guileless. No revelation of his duplicity or heartlessness, towards people other than herself, could have mattered to her. What was she in love with, then, what did she want of him? She wanted tricks, a glittering secret, tender celebrations of lust, a regular conflagration of adultery. All this after five minutes in the rain. (Munro 115)

Clifford was an artist, a violinist and this attracted Rose more towards him. She always wanted to become an artist in her life but this was just her suppressed dream. She started relating to Clifford in all the ways like they both belonged to the same class and they both were artists by heart. She even developed physical relationship with him. She thought that Clifford loved her back which he always expressed and retaliated back. She decided to leave Patrick. "She meant that she had always been planning, at the back of her mind, to do what she was doing now. Even on her wedding day she had known this time would come, and that if it didn't she might as well be dead. The betrayal was hers" (Munro 138). She was aware that everybody would blame her for their broken marriage but she was a headstrong woman and had realised that a marriage which lacked love cannot last long.

She got the confidence of leaving Patrick with the coming of Clifford in her life. She told everything to Patrick and left him but to her misery, Clifford didn't leave his wife. Rose knew that Clifford won't leave his wife but still she didn't change her mind and finally left Patrick. And even after separating from Patrick, she still remained in contact with Clifford. And one day all of them viz. Rose, Clifford and Jocelyn went for a party and Rose was drunk. They came to their house and had a threesome sex. Rose was so drunk that she could not understand what was happening. The next morning she just went out of their house in anger. "She felt that they had made a fool of her, shown her glaring lack, that otherwise she would not have been aware of" (Munro 136). She decided not to see them again.

This betrayal in love was not only the thing which Rose suffers. This is the most common thing in the world. Clifford who showed that he loved her more than Jocelyn still considered Jocelyn over her and didn't divorce her. Another case of this love betrayal in *The Beggar Maid* was with Dorothy, a friend of Rose who loved a man more than her life. Dorothy had once an affair with the owner of the station who spent most of his time in California. He even gifted her necklace for Christmas which according to him was jade which he bought in Vancouver. She went to the jeweller to fix her clasp and when she asked him about this price, the jeweller told her that it was not jade at all. And after few days, the owner's wife also came and showed him the same necklace. "This was the last time I trusted a man" (Munro 141). Dorothy was even in present having a lover in Seattle but because of her first break up, she could not trust men any more.

Self quest is one of the most important facets of feminism. A woman needs to find herself and her identity. Rose was suppressed in her marriage and after

getting separated from Patrick, she lived a free life. Even though she missed her old life, but she was happy with her decision. She was doing whatever she wished to do. The very first thing was she got a job in a channel. And she bought a small apartment and decorated it according to her wish which she could never do in Patrick's house.

What she had, when all this was finished, was a place which belonged quite recognizably to a woman, living alone, probably no longer younger, who was connected, or hoped to be connected, with a college or the arts. Just as the house she had lived in before, Patrick's house, belonged recognizably to a successful business or professional man with inherited money and standards. (Munro 140)

After a divorce, her life was not going smoothly as she has to work hard to pay all the bills but still she was contented. She was also having an affair with a professor through the letters they share. He was already married. And every time they decide to meet, it would fail miserably. Slowly and slowly she became secluded. She wanted to be known but she missed her past life a lot even though she was not ready to go back.

Rose was now living a life which she always wanted but this life was taking her to a state of loneliness. She was trying to be strong by attending parties so that at least she can socialise. Her daughter who she wanted to be with her was also taken away. When she left Patrick, she asked Anna, her daughter who she wants to be, Anna simply replied that she wanted to be with both of them. She left Anna there only as at that time she was not sure of where she was going. Once she got a small

place for her, she got Anna there, but she found that it was very difficult for both Anna and her to survive alone like that. Anna always asked her if she loved his father anymore. Rose would always say that she liked him. But in reality it was the case. Even Anna knew it. "And actually the words love, don't love, like, don't like, even hate, had no meaning for Rose where Patrick was concerned" (Munro 144). Basically, Rose has gone very far in this relationship. She didn't even hold any grudge against him as she was having no feelings left for him. She wanted to tell Anna the truth; she even wanted to show her the scars which are on her wrist, but could not as she does not even want that Anna should hate his father. During this time, Anna fell very sick, and Rose has to cancel a very important meeting but she was not upset about the meeting but rather about the health of Anna. Once Anna recovered, she felt good and joined the office again. Finally Patrick wrote to Rose that he will come and take Anna along with her as he wanted to start with the process of divorce as he has found his love and he wants to get married soon. After Anna was gone, Rose was all alone. She felt isolated. She has been teaching drama for 2 years now.

Rose gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations. She goes out and walk the streets and looks in the lighted windows at all the Saturday-night parties, the Sunday-night family suppers. It's no good telling herself she wouldn't be long inside there, chattering and getting drunk, or spooning up the gravy, before she'd wish she was walking to streets. (Munro 156)

This was the plight of Rose now. She was alone and deliberately attending the parties so as to socialise and not go to depression. But in one party she got to

know a person named Simon who she got attracted to and they both got in a relationship soon. She was very happy with him. He was the kind of man who she always wanted in life. Simon decided to come to her place. She prepared well for him, brought groceries and other things and was very happy. This time she felt love. Simon came and Rose discussed her life with him. She told him how she felt when she came to a place like that. She was so innocent that she could not differentiate between certain things.

“Country life”, she said. “Its changed, or I’d forgotten. I came here with some ideas about how I would live. I thought I would go for long walks on deserted country roads. And the first time I did, I heard a car coming tearing along on the gravel behind me. I got well off. Then I heard shots. I was terrified . . . (165)

She was expressing her fears for the first time to a person. Simon respected it and listened to her very carefully. She was very happy as for the first time someone understood her feelings and at the same time respecting them. They spent all night together. Next morning, she has to go to her office but the whole day she thought about him and when she came back, she saw her there speaking the same thing which Rose was thinking in her mind. Rose was for the time in her life very happy. “Oh Simon, you idiot, you’re the man for my life!” (Munro 168). Rose got a feeling that finally she can be happy without compromising in her life. This was what she dreamed of all her life. Simon was a source of happiness in her life. He understood Rose and loved the way she was. He never tried to control her or change her. He respected her and Rose felt free and independent with him. But life again gave a twist to her life. Simon disappeared from her life.

One weekend she was waiting for Simon to come. She prepared everything again in a dream of him coming and doing the same stuff again. But he didn't come. She waited all night thinking about him why he turned up tonight. She was lonely and was getting stupid imagination of Simon not coming to her:

She would phone the Kingston Hospital, ask about his condition, be told that he was not a patient. After that would come the day she went into the library, picked up back copies of the Kingston paper, searched the obituaries to discover if he had by any chance dropped dead. Then, giving in utterly, cold and shaking, she would call him at the university. The girl in his office would say he was gone. Gone to Europe, gone to California; he had only been teaching there for a single term. Gone on a camping trip, gone to get married. (Munro 172)

These thoughts of Rose clearly show how desperate she was to know about Simon. How desperate she wanted to see him and ask him why he didn't come back to Rose. Simon was a ray of hope to Rose and Rose had felt immense pleasure with Simon. She was happy with the fact that finally she met Rose but this situation made her believe that he cannot be happy anymore. She was distressed and felt dejected. She could not concentrate on anything. She was curious all the time which made her feel restless. "She thought how love removes the world for you, and just as surely when its going well as when it's going badly" (Munro 175).

One day she went on for driving and never returned back to that place. She left her job and went to Vancouver. But with her luck, she met a man who cast her

for a television series. This was her dream. She right from her childhood wanted to become an actress and finally her dream was coming true. She continued to be an actress and was living her dream. After one year or more, she met a woman from Kingston and talked to her. This woman gave her one of the most important news of her life. She told him that Simon had died. "Poor Simon. You know he died" (Munro 176). Simon died of Cancer in the pancreas. This left Rose shocked. She knew that Simon can never betray him and she always knew that there was a reason why Simon didn't come at that time. But the news of his death paralysed her thoughts for some time. She was in a state of trauma. But somehow she came out of that and continued her life as an actress which was her dream.

The Beggar Maid by Alice Munro is definitely an inspirational book for those women who are struggling with their married lives. This book clarifies the notion that women in western countries are free. Munro through the character of Rose portrayed the plight of Canadian women and her struggle towards emancipation. Rose was a simple town girl who suffered a lot in her life especially in her married life by being passive but finally found her emancipation by strongly opposing to her oppression. Even after struggling so much in her life and finally getting emancipated but still her life was never a bed of roses, it was always full of thorns which she had to pull out and walk towards her dream.

Conclusion

This present study examines the plight of women irrespective of race, region, culture and religion. Gender discrimination has been one of the most important issues prevalent in the society since ages. And usually, women across the globe face this discrimination. Feminism in a layman's language can be defined as giving equality to women in every sphere of life i.e. political, social and economic. Women have been fighting for this equality from time immemorial but still the challenge persists. People across the globe especially women came forward to raise a voice against this curse. The struggle simply started with giving some sort of equality to women, then there came women's suffrage i.e. the right to vote and finally the age of self discovery came into being. It started with two important philosophers i.e. Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill with their works namely *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and "The Subjection of Women", respectively.

This research work has focussed on the struggle and emancipation of protagonists of the selected novels: *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul, *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro belonging to five different parts of the world i.e. Ireland, India, Nigeria, Egypt and Canada. This research work has observed that even though, different laws and rules have been formulated to eradicate this evil practice of subjugation of women, it is still prevalent in our society. Women are still facing the same problem everywhere. Michelle Obama gave a heart throbbing speech that discussed the prevalence of discrimination in society. She holds the view that most of the people believe that women harassment has become a myth these

days, which is not true. She strongly opposes this notion and remarks that it is still prevalent in the society. The newspapers are full of such cases. Emma Watson, a Hollywood star and a women goodwill ambassador at UN, started a campaign entitled “#HEFORSHE”. She holds the view that feminism is not anti-men and in fact, men should realize that it is the time that they should come forward to help in the struggle of women emancipation.

This research work focuses on different feministic theories and approaches with respect to the books, which has been taken into consideration. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* focused on women’s education. According to her, women education is important part of life as it makes women aware of their rights and status. She motivated women not to believe that marriage is their ultimate aim of life and holds the view that women are not commodities rather a companion to their other halves so they should be given equal importance and respect. John Stuart Mill on the other hand in his essay “The Subjection of Women” has also focused on women’s education. He states that women during the Victorian Era were denied many political rights and education. He strongly proposes the view that husband and wife should connect to each other at intellectual level to have a better understanding of their relationship. He denounces the notion which says that women should be attractive to husband and serve him devotionally without thinking about her personal desires and wishes.

Most of the societies hold the view of confining the women to the stereotypical role of wives within the four walls of a house. Simone De Beauvoir in her book entitled *The Second Sex* explores that women are restricted to the role of wives and devote their lives to their husbands. She asserts that women are

considered to be 'Object' (the other) and men are considered to be 'Subject' (Self) by the society. This makes women believe that they are the secondary sex which sows the seeds of inferiority complex. She motivates woman to focus on their lives by supporting it instead of giving their lives completely to marriage. The present research explored that Betty Freidan, an important French feminist in her work entitled *The Feminine Mystique* also highlights about a belief that the only role of women is to marry and produce children. She has to suppress all her dreams and desires to devote her life to her family. But she explains that if women are not happy themselves, they cannot raise their children well. So she strongly believes that women should be given opportunities to opt for their careers. She states, "The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own" (Freidan 334).

The present research further explores that all these writers talk about same issues which help women to emancipate themselves. These writers belong to different regions and it is found that women around the world mostly suffer the same pain which has been represented by the protagonists of the novels taken for this thesis. The research observes that woman suffers the same pain especially in the form of gender discrimination irrespective of race, region or religion. For this research work, five different novels depicting their own culture, religion, races, and regions were taken and it was found that the pain of gender discrimination was common which woman from these countries suffered either in the name of religion, race or region. The novels taken for this research are: *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride, *The Tiger Ladies: A Memoir of Kashmir* by Sudha Koul, *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi

and *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro. These books are the outcomes of the emotions felt by these writers. This research work is based on the textual and contextual analysis of five novels set in patriarchal society to observe the plight of women in five different regions of the world. The present study further observes how cultures and traditions are manipulated to dominate women and evidences from the religious scripture and already published papers on religion were taken into consideration to show that even religion favours women empowerment.

This present research first widened the background of feminism which discussed the subjugation of woman with respect to race, region and religion. Evidences from the religious texts and already published papers were provided to explore the real status of women in accordance with religion. It studies that a woman is given high regards and status in religion. The present study also discussed about different traditions and practices present in the society which dominate women and also focuses on the prominent personalities belonging to their respective regions, who participated in the process of women empowerment. Different feministic theories and ideologies were used for the interpretation of the present study. It explores that people especially women across the globe came forward and formulated different theories for women emancipation. The life-sketches of such writers and their works have also been considered in this research.

One of the objectives of this research has been to draw parallels between the Occidental and Oriental feminism to show that women are oppressed and subjugated irrespective of their nationalities. It is usually believed that women in the western countries are free and liberated in comparison to the third world countries. This

study examines this phenomenon by concentrating on the plight of both Western women and the Third World Women.

The western women are usually considered to be free and liberal as compared to the Third World Women but this research has proved this notion wrong by analysing the plight of western women in the novels viz. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride and *The Beggar Maid* by Alice Munro. Both these novels have portrayed the lives of two western women who are subjugated throughout their lives and become a source of objectification.

Eimear McBride with the publication of *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* became very famous who portrayed the character of an unnamed girl. It is believed that McBride has intentionally created the character unnamed so that she can universalise the pain of women. The narrator faced different types of discrimination and oppression in her life even though living in the so called free and liberal country. The girl faced male favouritism at home which was the stepping stone of her discrimination. She was ignored at home which led to her fractured identity. McBride has beautifully shown the prevalence of sexual violence in this book. The present study has focused on the plight of the Firdaus, the protagonist of the *Woman at Point Zero* who also sexual violence right from their childhood. Different factsheets and reports are provided which showed that sexual violence is prevalent in Ireland even though government is taking steps to eradicate it. McBride has created a very strong character that unfortunately gets confused and ruptured when her uncle raped her at the age of thirteen only. Sexual violence is shown at its peak in this novel and McBride has touched an important aspect that if a girl is indulged in this crime, then the society does not allow her to come out of this quagmire.

Death is the only relief for the girl in this novel and she finally embraces it with open arms so that she cannot be oppressed any more in her life.

The Beggar Maid by Alice Munro explores the plight of girls living in Canada. Alice Munro holds the view that the girls in western countries also face the discrimination based on gender. This research validated the point with references from various published papers and reports that violence against women is still prevalent in the western countries where women are considered to be free and independent. The present study observed that woman in Canada also suffer from the same basic problems which women in third world countries face like domestic violence, sexual harassment and sacrificing their own dreams and desires for the husband. Munro in *The Beggar Maid* depicts the oppression of women in almost all walks of life. Rose, the protagonist fought with her life to have a life of her own choice. She struggles a lot in her life. She experienced different things prevalent in the society that degrade or oppress women. The present research studies the prevalence of sexual harassment in Canada as Rose experienced it twice in her life. The most shocking incident of sexual harassment to Rose was done by a man who called himself a man of church. And the next incident happened to her at her workplace when a man pulled her leg and ran away when she was arranging the books. The present research asserts that girls living alone even in such liberal countries are also not free. And the next important issue which is common across the globe on which women are subjugated is the treatment given to them by their husbands. Patrick always considered himself superior to Rose and treated her as if he has done some favour to her by marrying her. She made many compromises and sacrifices for the marriage to work but all in vain. She found her real emancipation

when she started living alone without depending on anybody and living a free and better life. So, this chapter explored that Munro through the character of Rose portrayed the real picture of Canadian society and showed that women are still oppressed in western countries which appear to be very liberal towards women. Munro encourages women to lead a successful life without depending on men.

The present study has also explored that the Egyptian society like, other Middle Eastern countries, is patriarchal. This research asserts that *Woman at Point Zero* depicts the real plight of Egyptian girls through the character of Firdaus who hardly enjoy any freedom. It was explored that the religion is also manipulated according to the convenience of men, and women are subjugated especially on the misinterpretation of faith. Firdaus, the protagonist falls prey to the social evil under the guise of religion. This research work has keenly looked at the concept of FGM in relation to Islam. She suffered from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which has no roots in Islam. The present study provided evidence from the religion and the reports that prove that FGM has no connection with Islam. Firdaus was so innocent that she didn't know what was happening to her and struggled in pain all night. Women education is still a barrier in Egypt and girls have to struggle for it. Same was the case of Firdaus, who from her childhood wanted to do something big with her life but struggled a lot with it. She always dreamt of going to university but all her dreams were crushed as she was forced to get married to a person who was double to her age. Another important issue discussed in this book is Mehr (marriage gift) which is also mostly taken away by the parents or the guardians. The present research explored that sexual harassment is prevalent in Egypt and marital rape is a very common type of sexual harassment. The present study highlights that domestic

violence is a part of married life and the women have to suffer it without resistance. This chapter explores that all these issues oppress women at large and make a woman believe that she is a secondary sex.

The plight of Indian women was observed through *The Tiger Ladies* by Sudha Koul. This novel is full of motivation and inspiration for the women to fight against the ill-treatment given to them. This chapter explored that women in India are mostly dominated in the name of culture and tradition. Different evidences from certain research papers and religious texts have been provided, which establish that Hinduism supports women empowerment. This novel focuses on many themes prevalent in the society that suppress the women by putting barriers in women education, the struggle of a married woman, self-quest of women, and myths and folktales. This research focused on how difficult it was for women to dream to have education. This novel shows how women are told to prepare themselves for marriage. The writer's mother could not sleep at night as her daughter was not married. She was just waiting for the marriage to happen so that she can relax. But Sudha Koul was not like other girls. She was more focused on her career than her marriage. Because she knew that the plight of married women was pathetic. The newly wedded brides have to bear a lot at her in-laws and they are prepared for this from their childhood. They are treated as an outsider and not considered a part of the family. She is given some respect only after giving birth to a male child. This chapter also focuses on the myths and folktales being used to mock women to degrade them. Sudha Koul gave examples of so many folktales regarding women in this book and the noticeable thing is that these tales are enjoyed more by the women only. Sudha Koul was influenced by few people in her life who proved to be her

inspiration to become a successful person. The present research concludes that society often makes things difficult for women to survive but Sudha Koul through her story wants to inspire and motivate girls to live their dreams and should never give up in their lives.

The oppression of Nigerian women was also explored through *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa. In this chapter it was explored that the African women also suffer this gender discrimination. The African culture is marked by traditions and customs but is mostly manipulated to suppress the women. The present research asserted that there are so many practices prevalent in the African society that oppresses the women. African women are mostly taught to get married as early as possible and serve their husbands instead of engaging in other matters. Agnes was forced to get married and drop out her studies in order to be a perfect wife. Dora who always wanted to get married didn't live a good life as well. She was doing everything what is expected from a good wife but still her husband left and went abroad. The society has made African women believe that they are inferior to their male counterparts and if a woman wants to make her career then she is humiliated and considered to be of low standards and not a perfect wife. This was the reason that a woman so headstrong like Rose who focussed on her career was all alone in her life and spent her life in alienation. She had everything in her life except a partner and this left a void in her life.

Women are Different by Flora Nwapa is also an inspirational book which motivates its readers especially, the women to achieve their emancipation. The present study examined that Nwapa has created three different characters viz. Rose, Dora and Agnes who have their own unique features and struggled in their lives but

finally achieved emancipation in their own ways. This book highlights some issues like women's education, early marriage, plight of married women and women employment. All the three girls were admitted to school but after the completion of school, their lives took a U-turn. All these three women faced many problems which most of the women around the world encounter but all of them made their own decisions and made their own destinies instead of depending on fate. Nwapa's writing inspired many women especially in Nigeria to fight for their rights and stand for it. She focused on an important issue in this book i.e. self-dependency of women which according to her is the most important thing to get emancipated. She relies not only on education and employment but also focuses on women entrepreneurship also which makes women to have their own identity.

Thus, to reach a conclusion, it has been observed and analysed that women across the globe face the same pain of gender discrimination regardless of their religion, region, and race. The present study explored that even though the books depict five different regions with their respective cultures and traditions but what connects the women of different regions was the pain that they experienced due to gender discrimination. And one interesting thing was examined in this research that the women across the globe are struggling with almost the same issues viz. barrier to women's education, early marriage, domestic violence, sexual harassment, self-quest, women employment and much more. It has been observed that religion, region, and race, are the main things on the basis of which women are dominated and subjugated. But evidences are provided from different religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity which prove that religion is in favour of emancipation of women. The present work concludes that the discrimination based on gender is still

prevalent in the society and women suffer it across the globe. The present research explored that women across the globe need to focus on the concept of Feminism, especially Liberal feminism. The notion of Liberal feminism is essential to understand the emancipation of women as it enables women to stand on their own and fight for their rights.

The contribution of the present study is that it will help other researchers to have a better understanding related to feminism. The present research has drawn parallels between occidental and the oriental perspectives on feminism as five books depicting five different regions with their respective religion, culture, and traditions. So, this research work will help the upcoming researchers to have a better apprehension of the parallels between Third World Feminism and Western Feminism. The present study opens the gates for further research to be conducted in the field of Universal Feminism.

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