WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY THROUGH SELECT AUTO-NARRATIVES IN ENGLISH AND IN TRANSLATION

THESIS

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by

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CERTIFICATE

As required under the University Ordinance, OB-9A.9 (viii), I hereby certify that the thesis entitled, ***Women Empowerment in India: A Critical Study through Select Auto-narratives in English and in Translation***, submitted by Ms. Svetlana Fernandes for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English has been completed under my guidance. The thesis is the record of the research work conducted by the candidate during the period of her study and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar titles to her by this or any other University.

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DECLARATION

As required under the University Ordinance, OB-9A.9 (v), I hereby declare that the thesis entitled, ***Women Empowerment in India: A Critical Study through Select Auto-narratives in English and in Translation***, is the outcome of my own research undertaken under the guidance of Dr. (Mrs.) K. J. Budkuley, Professor (since retd.), Department of English, Goa University. All the sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in this thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis of any award of Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar titles to me, by this or any other University.

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Svetlana Fernandes

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

In the modern era, with the active involvement of women in every sphere of life, it is often assumed that women in India are fully empowered. This point of view is framed on the basis of a large proportion of women seen taking the lead in several fields of activity, competing with men in diversely unconventional professions and holding their own in domains as varied as the services, politics, legislation, judiciary, astronomy, aviation, engineering, administration, entrepreneurship, business, cinema, and so on. In addition to such a public perception, the legal and constitutional provisions upholding women's rights as an equal citizen and ensuring that women shall no longer be dominated or marginalized, also bolster the perspective of women in India as an empowered lot.

Ironically, however, despite all these facts, the rate of crimes against women in India is seen to be soaring in the twenty-first century. Moreover, newer crimes planned and executed with the help of cyber technology are on the rise. Graver versions of age-old modes of atrocities occur in the contemporary society even though there is more contact and higher interaction across genders. As such, even today, women continue to suffer from grave gender-biased oppression in the form of eve-teasing, molestation, acid attack, rape, honour killing, harassment for dowry (resulting at times in bride burning), not to mention female foeticide, perpetual marginalization of the female child, domestic exploitation as unpaid workforce, marital violence/rape, exploitation of widows and single women, and so on. This contradictory state of affairs in India poses an intriguing question whether women in India are really empowered, and if so, to what extent.

To have an in-depth understanding of the empowerment of women in present-day India, it is significant to trace the efforts made to empower women in the past by individuals, institutions and women's movements. Albeit terms like feminism and women empowerment have come to be used only recently, efforts to empower women by subverting patriarchy have been made much earlier. In India there has been the indigenous Bhakti movement which became prominent during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.

It opened a new path of devotion without any caste, class or gender barriers, where women took to different activities and became bhakti poets. Similarly, many other reform movements attempted to better the condition of women in India.

However, in the present discussion, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are of greater significance than the earlier eras, for several reasons: for one, they represent the pre-independence and post-independence periods in India which are well-recorded, historically as well as socially; they also represent the periods of colonial rule and autonomous polity respectively, and so, offer much scope for comparison and contrast; thirdly, they are periods during which the trajectory of education and reform movements for and by women is available for analysis; and finally, these are periods of women's participation in political strife and social revolution, which are, interestingly, also depicted in women's own writings and critiqued with regard to the socio-political conditions, women's status, education, reform, opportunities and empowerment.

Thus, this study has tried to examine the Women's Empowerment Movements that took place in the two selected time-frames and their impact on women, their status and empowerment in India. Since fiction is based mainly on imagination, it was felt to be inadequate to capture the modes and markers of societal change vis-à-vis women, whereas autobiographies, memoirs and reminiscences, that are termed for convenience and for their subjectivity, as auto-narratives (by both male and female writers), are considered to be comparatively more reliable sources of factual accounts, and are treated as relatively valid sources of data on the condition of women in society.

Moreover, being based on personal experiences and observations, auto-narratives can be expected to provide an authorial viewpoint of their contemporary Indian society and its perception towards women. Hence, while auto-narratives by women have been mainly selected for this study, two significant male auto-narratives have also been selected, so that the male perception of women and their empowerment may also be taken into consideration. However, authentic historical and literary sources and critical perspectives on these writings, as also on the issues that these authors dwell on, have also been consulted for a better understanding of the matter at hand.

1.1.1 The Irony that is India

The India we know today, is a republic. It is the India which emerged post-independence as a result of a democratic process adopted by the nation and its polity. However, the nineteenth century India was significantly different from the present day India. British were not the only colonial power that colonized the Indian subcontinent; there were also the Portuguese and the French colonial empires that subjugated significant parts of present-day India. Therefore, along with British India, the French colonies and *Índia Portuguesa* were also a part of the nineteenth century India which preceded and has left an indelible impact on the social dynamics and political context of the post-independence India.

Interestingly, when we refer to British India, an image of an undivided India emerges, providing a fair picture of the life, culture and society prior to 1947. However, many of the communities and territories that were its erstwhile constituents are no longer a part of India, as they now constitute two different nations: Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ironically, other regions that were not a part of British India, and were thus excluded from the picture of 19th century India, amalgamate into the new post-independence (and post-Goa Liberation in 1961) India. These were the regions colonized by the Portuguese and the French, respectively: the Portuguese Goa, Daman and Diu, and the French establishments which included Pondichéry, Karikal and Yanaon on the Coromandel Coast, Mahé on the Malabar Coast and Chandernagor in Bengal.

1.1.1.1 Empowered Women in Non-British India

This study on women's empowerment largely focuses upon British India and the chosen texts belong to the authors who lived either in the parts of India which were colonized by the British or in Independent India. However, even in the other regions, colonized by either the French or the Portuguese, there are several examples of illustrious, enlightened and empowered women. Moreover, going by the social indices such as the gender-ratio, educational ratio, uniform civil code across genders, levels of women emancipation in some of these regions (particularly in the State of Goa) may today prove to be higher than the erstwhile British India, taken as a whole.

However, although the historic background of these regions may differ significantly as they have had diverse experiences of colonization, the general patriarchal society, its norms and ideologies were more or less the same down the ages, and women belonging to these regions shared similar experiences of oppression which needed to be resisted/subverted in order that the women be empowered.

Índia Portuguesa refers to the places in India that were colonized by the Portuguese, namely, Goa, Daman and Diu. Goa became a Portuguese colony way back in 1510, much earlier than the establishment of British India. Being under foreign rule from 1510 to 1961, the State of Goa is quite different from the rest of India, their struggle for liberation was different and so were the socio-political conditions in which Goans lived. Moreover, the Uniform Civil Code was introduced by the then colonial government.

Yet, there is still a hiatus in the rigorous adherence to its provisions because the Goan society too has been largely patriarchal. As such, issues related to patrilineal authority and inheritance, patriarchal myths and patriarchal ideologies were prevalent here as they were in British India. Hence, women shared similar struggles even in the non-British parts of India and strove to empower themselves.

An interesting illustration is found in the life and struggles of Propércia Correia-Afonso de Figueiredo, an eminent, empowered woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So much so, that she has been acknowledged as a mother-like figure and mentor by the literary stalwart, Bakibab Borkar, who was himself a multi-lingual poet of national repute and a scholar. Although there was no auto-narrative written by her, reliable sources have been used including an interview with a member of her family, to study her life and contributions to the Goan society in brief.

As a child, she received no formal education, but was trained in domestic skills at home. However, she did have an interest in learning and acquired knowledge in French and Portuguese literature from her highly learned father and grandfather. She was married at the age of seventeen to Dr. Montargon Pereira, who passed away within a year, leaving her with their six months old daughter.

Widowhood must have been difficult for her, just as it is for every woman. However, in a memorial tribute written by her nephew, Joaquim Correia-Afonso, on the occasion of her 50th death anniversary, he observes that, "[...] despite her early widowhood, she faced her adversity with admirable courage and determination and worked hard to develop the rich talents with which she was endowed" (4). Correia-Afonso rightly states that she was a courageous woman, as in those times women were not allowed entry into higher education. However, Propércia Correia-Afonso de Figueiredo, challenged all the patriarchal norms set for women, and completed her primary education. She further studied at the Teacher's Training College then known as Escola Normal, and entered the teaching profession. She swelled in her profession and became an inspectress of primary education, and later the director of Escola Normal.

She did not allow her status as a widow and a woman to stop her from reaching great heights. In fact, the most significant aspect of her life was her struggle and campaign for education for women and children. She believed in the power of education. She was also a well-admired public speaker, and spoke about the importance of education. In the words of J. Clement Vaz, who wrote an article on her, in his *Profiles of Eminent Goans, Past and Present* (1997), "[S]he pioneered the need for Goan women's education for Catholics as well as Hindus and at numerous conferences she delivered thought-provoking speeches in chaste Portuguese […] (120).

Interestingly, in a personal interview with Joaquim Correia-Afonso, he mentioned to this researcher that after her second marriage, her husband's house became a meeting place for several Hindu women of different caste and class; Propércia would try to educate them and empower them. Hence, her social work, and her writings addressing the need for education, points to her own empowerment, and at that time such an empowerment was very rare. According to J. Clement Vaz, "D. Propercia played an important part in the public life of Goa at a time when even educated women would not normally venture into it, but she had a mission to perform and possessed not only a masterly intellectual grasp of it but also the gift of eloquence that attracted a large number of admirers" (121). In her level of empowerment and attempt to empower others, she comes very close to another empowered

women in British India, Cornelia Sorabji, who belongs to a similar period and has been taken up for detailed study in the later Chapters.

1.2 Literature Survey

For a detailed study on the Indian society, the status of women in India and women empowerment movements that have impacted the condition of women and their empowerment in pre-independence and post-independence India, it was essential to refer to several books that were previously written in the field of Social Sciences, particularly, Sociology and History, and those written in the field of English Literature. This literature survey enlists some of the relevant and insightful books used for the present study.

The literature survey has been reported below on multiple levels: of books and articles dealing with Feminist Theoretic Approaches, in the West and in India; writings on Women's Empowerment in India; critical works on the genre of Auto-narrative; sociological and historical works on the socio-political movements in India; and, critical works on women's writing and women's auto-narratives in India available in English.

1.2.1 Books on Feminist Theoretical Perceptions

There is a large quantum of books and journals available on western perspectives and theories of feminism. The most significant books on feminism are those written by feminists themselves.

For instance, *The Second Sex* (1987) by Simone de Beauvoir, a seminal text originally written in French, is centred on the argument that only the biological differences in gender do not subjugate women. It is rather the social construction of the female as 'woman' that marginalizes her and makes her the 'other', whereby her identity is defined as against that of men. Beauvoir adopts the existentialist notion that existence precedes essence, and states that, therefore, "[O]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Significantly, she dwells on issues such as marriage, rape, motherhood, menstruation among others, which are central to women's oppression. The book provides a first-hand information on the workings of patriarchy, in positioning the women as the other.

The following volumes of critical essays on different issues and theories related to feminism and the marginalization of women by eminent feminists have been also consulted for this study. Of these, *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (1996) by Mary Eagleton, is one such work which has essays and excerpts from very seminal works such as: Virginia Wolf's *A Room of One's Own*; Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*; and Hélène Cixous' essays, namely "Castration or Decapitation" and "The Laugh of Medusa", among others. These are categorized by certain focal themes and issues such as finding a female tradition; women and literary production; gender and genre; towards definitions of feminist writing; writing, reading and difference; and, most importantly, locating the subject.

Another useful work has been *Contemporary Feminist Theories* (1998) by Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones. It is a collection of essays by different scholars dealing with various theories of feminism, particularly the contemporary ones, such as: Post-colonial Feminist Theory, Postmodern Feminist Theory, Black Feminism, Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory, Feminism and Anthropology, Lesbian Theory of Feminism, Feminist Linguistic Theories, Feminist Media and Film Theory, theories of Marxist Feminism focusing of the low wages of women and women's unpaid labour within the home, and so on.

This study has also benefitted from other books that try to explain significant theories of feminism and aim at a thorough understanding of the concept while offering diverse perspectives on it.

In *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Feminism* (2002) by Jane Freedman, an attempt is made to elucidate the concept of Feminism, tracing its etymological roots and to study several theories of feminism. The author argues that there is not *one* feminism but many feminisms, but that they all are founded on the same principle of women's emancipation and empowerment (1). The problematics of equality and difference has been discussed by Freedman at a greater length and issues regarding reproduction and ecofeminism among others have been addressed. The mode of categorization and classification of the different theories of feminism has also been critically discussed.

Likewise, *A Handbook of Literary Feminisms* (2002) by Shari Benstock et al has been a very insightful book, which not only makes a study of all the traces of feministic writings right from the early times to the modern critics in England, but also highlights the contribution of those works to feminism and the growth of different theories. It also dwells on issues of much contemporary relevance such as sexuality, lesbianism, pornography and the growing interests of feminists in the genre of auto-biography.

Although, books on Indian perspectives on Feminism are few, the significant ones consulted are: *Feminism in India* subtitled as *Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism* (2004 2nd ed.) edited by Maitrayee Chaudhuri. It is a collection of different essays on feminism in India by a wide range of scholars like Madhu Kiswar, Suma Chitnis, Ilina Sen, Gail Omvedt, and so on. This work focuses upon the concept of feminism in India, the reactions to the western feminist framework, and the feminist movements in India.

Similarly, *Re-defining Feminisms* (2008) edited by Ranjana Harish and V. Bharathi Harishankar is a collection of research papers that focuses on the need to re-define the various approaches to feminism in order to suit the Indian context. The scholars attempt to re-design, re-think, re-view and re-mark feminism in India.

Another work which asserts the need to create and design an Indian framework of feminism, is *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity* (2002) edited by Chandrakala Padia. This work is a collection of several critical essays by eminent Indian scholars such as, Avadesh Kumar Singh, Kapil Kapoor, Malashri Lal, and several others, who emphasize the need to shift focus from the western paradigm of feminism and create a new framework of feminism in India which would be suitable to its historic background, culture and the psyche of Indian women.

1.2.2 Books and Critical Essays on Women Empowerment in India

Most of the books written on women empowerment belong to the domain of social sciences, and therefore, they focus upon demographic facts more than explaining the concept and discussing it. Very few works highlight the approaches to empowerment and the criteria of empowerment. Some of those works referred to by the present researcher have been listed below:

Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies (1998) by Sushama Sahay. This book undertakes a detailed study on women empowerment, its definitions, the levels of empowerment, approaches to empowerment and attempts to theorize the concept. Unlike several books on empowerment, this work is not based on demographic facts alone; rather it discusses women's empowerment and the ways in which this empowerment can be gained. It also highlights the criteria of empowerment.

Likewise, another significant work on the concept of women empowerment is *Empowering Women: Issues, Challenges and Strategies* (2009) edited by Mandakini Das and Pritirekha Daspattanayak. This work is a compilation of selected research papers on women empowerment. It provides a wide range of approaches and perspectives on the issue of women's empowerment, the concept, its problems and challenges. There are significant discussions made on empowerment in India, the problems of empowering women in India, and the strategic efforts that have been made towards women empowerment. There are research papers that analyse relevant issues such as importance of women's education, participation, the role of self-help groups and so on. Some papers also provide global perspectives on empowerment.

There are essays available on women's empowerment in online archives such as JSTOR. One such critical essay is "Empowerment of Indian Women" (2006) by Jugal Kishore Misra. In this essay, Misra provides a detailed study on the need for empowerment in India, the condition of women in India, definitions of and critical perspectives on women's empowerment by several Indian scholars. Misra examines the different dimensions of empowerment such as economic empowerment, social empowerment, political empowerment and familial empowerment.

1.2.3 Books on the Auto-narrative Genre

There are several books that study the genre of auto-narratives, some of which focus on autobiography alone, and others that study the whole genre of self-life writing. Some of the most relevant works consulted for this study are listed below:

Autobiography-New Critical Idiom series (2007) by Linda Anderson is a book that provides a detailed study of the genre of autobiography, from definitions and etymology of

the term to several critical perspectives on autobiography by Freud, Barths and Derrida. Different issues such as modernism and autobiography, feminism and autobiography, poststructuralist interventions, among others, are discussed by the author.

Another work, that tries to elucidate the genre in depth and dwells on the recent criticism and perspectives on it, is *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative: Reading Autobiography* (2010) by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. This is an extensive work on different elements of auto-narratives, from its historic roots and practices to modern challenges and criticism on this genre. It examines issues such as remembering, memory, collective memory and so on. It also tries to distinguish between biography, autobiography and autobiographic fiction while also discussing about the modern trend of blurring generic boundaries and the universal approach to life writing and life narrative. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998) by the same authors is a thorough study on women's autobiography and recent theories by feminists and other scholars on women's autobiographies. New issues and concepts such as relationality in female auto-narratives have also been discussed here in detail.

Another interesting work on this genre is *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the art of Self Invention* (1985) by Paul John Eakin. This book tries to challenge the traditional notion of truth in autobiographies. Eakin argues that this genre is not completely left untouched by fiction. As the act of writing an autobiography is in itself a re-invention of that self that is no more the same and is constantly changing.

1.2.4 Sociological and Historical Works Consulted

Several sociological and historical books have also been used to study the social and political movements in India which had an impact on women and their empowerment. Some of the relevant books consulted in this domain are mentioned below:

Women's Movements (2009) by B. Suguna throws light on women-centric movements in India. It focuses on the social reform movement, discussing in detail the social ills such as: child marriage, *sati*, widowhood, dowry system and so on. Suguna analyses the role of women in the national freedom struggle, and highlights the mass participation of women

in it. She also discusses the role of International women's conferences in the progress and advancement of women in general.

Another similar book is *Changing Status of Women in India* (1994) by Kiran Devendra. This book focuses on the social reform movement in nineteenth century India, and the fight against social ills such as child-marriage, sati and widowhood among others. Devendra tries to understand the repercussions of these social ills on women and examines the efforts put in to bring about reform.

The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India (1998) by Geraldine Forbes is a comprehensive historical study of Indian Women from the nineteenth century to the Independence of India. Forbes mainly focuses on the reform movement, the education provided to women through both traditional means and the English schools established for girls, the organizations formed by women, women and their role in the freedom struggle, and the struggle for women's rights. This book is the outcome of an extensive research conducted by the foreign author and thus her work provides a third person (or an outsider's) view on the status on women in India.

Several books on the political movement of national freedom struggle and women's participation in it also formed a part of this study. One of the most significant works on this issue is *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42* (2006) by Suruchi Thapar-Björkert. This work is a huge attempt at unearthing the contributions of women in the Indian national freedom struggle. The author analyses in depth various socio-political factors that led to the sudden upsurge of women on the political scene in the 1930s. She critically examines the political movement to understand the sudden change in the scenario which created an impetus for women to be able to come out of seclusion without much opposition from their male counterparts.

Some historical works were also found very insightful and relevant. Of these, *The History of Doing: an Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (1993) by Radha Kumar is a detailed historical work on women's movements and campaigns in India right from the nineteenth century to the post-independence movements and the campaigns against Dowry and Rape. This book also traces the

workings of each and every women's organization, regional and national, which has struggled towards women's empowerment. It also provides a chronological study of all women-centric events and movements in India.

Another significant book consulted has been *A History of Indian Literature* (1991) by Sisir Kumar Das. This book is in two volumes: volume one looks at the period from 1800-1910; whereas volume two concerns the period from 1911-1956. This work is a detailed history of Indian literature. It also traces the earliest practices of autobiography in India, as a complete book. The two volumes provide insightful information on regional and English literature in India, and the impact of changing socio-political factors on literature in India.

For a comparative study of the status of women in India and in the West, particularly to understand how and when women were given equality in England, *A Shortened History of England* (1977) by G.M Trevelyan was found to be both interesting and relevant. This book provides a brief history of England emphasizing on the society and the socio-political changes in the country from time to time.

1.2.5 Critical Works on Women's Writing and Women's Auto-narratives

Some of the important critical works on women's writing and women's auto-narratives are: *Women's Writing: Text and Context* (2014) edited by Jasbir Jain is a collection of thirty-four essays on women's writing. These are essays studying different works written by women with a feminist approach. An important essay found in this book is "Autobiography: A Literary Genre" by Sarojini. This essay analyses the genre of autobiography, the differences between autobiography and other similar genres such as: biography, memoir, confessions and so on. Sarojini also discusses the role of memory in this genre.

Another interesting work is *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory* (1986) by Moira Monteith wherein various approaches to feminism have been studied. It has a very interesting chapter on women's autobiography and Freudian perspectives, and other view points on women's autobiography.

However, the most significant literary work consulted in the context of the present study, has been is *Women Writing in India* (1991) by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. This anthology of women's writings, including auto-narratives written by women from earliest times to the twentieth century, runs in two volumes. It is not only a compilation of excerpts of literature written by women both in English and in regional languages that are translated into English, but also has excerpts of regional autobiographies that have not been translated yet. However, the parts chosen for inclusion in the volume have been specially translated. It is an extensive work undertaken by the editors as they not only write about several women and their works but also provide notes on the context, times and society when each of these works were written.

The books surveyed provide critical discussions and much relevant information on a wide range of issues from theories to genre studies and socio-political movements. Although these works do not give direct information about the impact of women empowerment movements in the pre-independence and post-independence periods on Indian women and their empowerment, it forms the basis on which this study is made.

The works surveyed give vital knowledge about the Indian society, the condition of women in India and the movements which sought to uplift them. Most of the books surveyed are those available either in the libraries or in online archives such as JSTOR and Google Books.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The Aims of this research are the following:

- To study the status of women in India in the pre-independence and the post-independence eras.
- To examine the efforts made by individuals, institutions as well as women empowerment movements during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to elevate the conditions of women and empower them.

The Objectives of the study are:

- To analyse the primary texts for corroborative evidence, if any, to ascertain the manner and extent in which reform and empowerment movements contributed to Women's Empowerment in the respective eras under study.
- To identify the criteria of empowerment and apply them to select primary texts, in order to examine whether over the last two centuries women in India have been empowered, and if so, to what extent.

1.4 Scope of the Study:

There have been studies undertaken on Feminism through literature (mainly, but not solely through fiction) even earlier, but the study of the social movement and its impact on the status of women in India and their empowerment has seldom been undertaken. More importantly, such a study focusing on Indian *autobiographical* texts in English, and in English translation, using them as the basis for understanding the development and nature of social reform movements, and also as the evidence of the impact of the movements that strove to empower women during the pre-independence and post-independence eras, has not been undertaken so far, as far as it is known to the present researcher. This makes the scope of this study wide-ranging, innovative and open-ended to promote further research in future.

1.5 Primary Texts

The Primary texts selected for the study have been the auto-narratives of women and men in India, which belong to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since this researcher attempted to study women's empowerment and trace the empowerment movements with corroborative evidence found in the texts, it was essential that the primary texts be more factual and realistic than fictional. Since fiction is largely based on imagination, the non-fictional genre of auto-narratives has been selected for the study. In understanding women's empowerment, the male perception of women is also a vital consideration. Hence, auto-narratives written by women as well as by men have been employed for this study. The selected primary texts are auto-narratives in English and those written in regional languages, but translated into English. They have been indicated below:

- Abbas, K. A. *I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1977. Print.
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1.5.1 Authors of the Primary Texts

In choosing the primary texts for this study a few criteria were kept in mind. Since the study dealt with the 19th century British India and the Independent India post 1947, texts were selected from across regional and linguistic backgrounds, covering the length and breadth of India. The authors selected for the study represent the following states of present-day India: Maharashtra, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. However, most of the authors have either travelled or migrated to several places in India and abroad, thus providing an overview of the whole country in their works.

Secondly, it was thought that a balance between creative minds and pragmatic intellectuals would be beneficial to this study. Therefore, just as the auto-narratives of creative writers like Kamala Das, Padma Sachdev and Indira Goswami were selected as primary texts, so were those of rational intellectuals such as Cornelia Sorabji, Renuka Ray and Jawaharlal

Nehru. In fact, they provide more factual, objective and to an extent analytical information in their auto-narratives.

Since this study primarily focuses on women and their empowerment, it was essential that the majority of the primary texts should be women's auto-narratives. However, to provide a complementary and alternative perspective, two male auto-narratives have also been selected. The male auto-narratives selected are of recognized intellectuals with sharply observant and analytical minds. One is an intellectual and political stalwart of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, whose autobiography is much less a record of his life, and more of a document on the years of struggle and political upheavals which changed the face of India, finally leading to Independence. The other is of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, a critical observer of the Indian society, a journalist, writer, and filmmaker who has worked across media. His auto-narrative, unlike many others, is not only about his career or his public image, but about his objective opinions upon the society, politics and major events such as the partition. While Nehru's auto-narrative falls under the pre-independence era, Abbas' auto-narratives falls under the post-independence era. Hence, both these male auto-narratives provide, between them, either a corroborative or an alternate view of the period undertaken for the study.

The present researcher has freely accessed other auto-narratives as and when the need for the same was felt. Likewise, interesting and useful material on the lives of other outstanding and enlightened women, such as the great Goan intellectual of her time Propércia Correia-Afonso de Figueiredo, have also been used as secondary sources for illustrations, corroboration or evidence for or against any relevant argument. Discussed below, in brief, are the authors of the auto-narratives used as primary texts for this research work.

1.5.1.1 Cornelia Sorabji's *India Calling* (1934)

Sorabji belonged to the period when the social reform movement in India had just about taken roots. Her story begins from the mid-nineteenth century (1866) wherein the campaign for the education for women had already started, but had hardly had any significantly notable effect on the lives of common Indian women. She came from an upper class,

educated and enlightened family. Her parents were quite ahead of their times in that they were educated, liberal individuals. In fact, hers was a unique background in her age wherein sons and daughters were treated equally, and education (for both boys and girls) was given utmost importance.

Sorabji's mother was an educated and empowered women in her own right. Her way of bringing up the children was very unconventional for the times in which she lived. She trained her children (both sons and daughters) to be of service to the country and take up a profession by way of which they could be of help to the Indian masses. The advantage of belonging to such a family, played a great role in Sorabji's empowerment; because of this support she was able to fight against all gender based discriminations, enter the field of law which was until then monopolized by men, and provide legal aid to the marginalized women, particularly the *Purdahnashins* (women in purdah).

Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to graduate from Bombay University. She was also the first woman to study law at Oxford University in 1889 and was the first female advocate from India. Moreover, she was perhaps the first woman lawyer even in Britain, since in the age when she studied law, even British women had not entered the field.

India Calling is the story of her life. It uncovers her vocation, the call to serve her country, and particularly, the Purdahnashin women and widows. The auto-narrative also speaks of her struggle against all odds and obstacles to be a lawyer and provide legal justice to the Indian women. In this memoir, Sorabji narrates her attempts to uproot the very cause of the oppression faced by the Purdahnashins, and to educate them by using and subverting the very superstitions that caused the suffering of these women. Her selfless passion to serve the people and empower women is prominently visible in her narrative.

More importantly, her own intellectual prowess is seen in the manner in which she draws legal schemes to aid widows which stand evidence to her own empowerment. Notably, through the reading of this text one is able to see that the purpose behind narrating her own lived experiences is to share her life and struggle so that it may be an example for Indian women to fight against oppression and thereby empower themselves. In her auto-narrative, she makes it quite clear that she hopes that more women follow the path she has hewn.

1.5.1.2 Lakshmibai Tilak's *I Follow After* (1998)

Lakshmibai Tilak was born in a very conservative family, wherein the household was under the domination of the father. Her autobiography *I Follow After*, set in the mid-nineteenth century is the English translation of the Marathi original *Smriti Chitre*. It is the life-story of a simple woman who was trained to behave in a feminine way. Coming from such a conservative family, where wives worshipped their husbands and complied with their orders silently, Lakshmibai too learnt to become docile and submissive. However, as a child she was rebellious to the extent of attempting suicide so that her father may learn a lesson. In fact, she would never take her father's warnings and beatings seriously. But as she grew up, she was trained to be obedient and submissive.

In tune with the practice of her time, she did not receive any education as a child. At the age of 11 she was married off to an 18 year old educated boy named Narayan Wamanrao Tilak, who came from a similar background to hers. Both her mother and mother-in-law faced the same kind of oppression, and Lakshmibai just followed in their footsteps. A transformation can be seen only much later in her when she acquired a sense of empowerment and was free from the conservative ideologies which had trapped her for a long time.

As such, what is interesting is the trajectory of Lakshmibai's experiences and the degree of her growth towards empowerment. Born in a traditional patriarchal family, she must have witnessed male domination from her birth. Later as a child-bride, she was continually insulted and humiliated by her father-in-law over and over again and was left to cope up with an immature, irresponsible husband who would take rash and impulsive decisions, who would leave his wife alone without any money or sustenance for months, without even leaving word about his departure. As a wife and a woman she was torn between the decision of her husband to convert to Christianity and her own devotion to her religion and the loyalty towards her people.

However, towards the end the way in which she overcomes her weakness and powerlessness and learns to take decisions for herself, and empowers herself is very interesting. With her husband's help she struggles to find her own way. No doubt, she

continues to follow him in his service to people, but of her own will and without being unduly silent or submissive when it came to issues crucial to her beliefs and life.

1.5.1.3 Renuka Ray's *My Reminiscences: Social Development during the Gandhian Era and After* (2005)

Renuka Ray belonged to the early twentieth century. She came from a liberated open-minded family. Her maternal grandmother Sarala Ray was an empowered woman in her own right. She campaigned for widow remarriage, encouraging her own father to remarry a widow. She founded many *mahila samitis*, and fought for women's education even after facing harsh criticism from the conservative society. The work both her grandmother and her mother did in those hostile times is truly commendable. Renuka followed in their footsteps, but went to cover much more significant mileage in terms of women's emancipation and empowerment.

As the title of her auto-narrative – *My Reminiscences: Social Development during the Gandhian Era and After* – indicates, her reminiscences form invaluable document of a very significant period in the history of women's empowerment in India. It also shows the invaluable contribution of Gandhiji's political struggle in emancipating and empowering women. Renuka's own life took a significant turn when she came under the influence of Gandhiji and began to work under his guidance in order to spread awareness among women, so as to educate them and help them overcome their poor, disempowering conditions. Along with many others, she played an important role in awakening masses of women and motivating them to step out of the threshold and actively participate in the national freedom struggle.

She was an empowered woman who became an integral part of the female intelligentsia of her times. She also represented the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) in the central assembly and spoke in support of the Hindu Law Bills on Marriage and Intestate Succession. After Independence, she became a member of the Constituent Assembly. Later, she also contested for the Lok Sabha elections and won the 1957 elections from the Malda seat and became a member of Dr. Roy's cabinet. Ray contributed significantly to

the service of the country particularly for the betterment of Indian women and their empowerment.

My Reminiscences is her life story, which centres on her experiences and the socio-political events that she witnessed in her times. Ray dwells upon her personal and intellectual growth under the direction of Gandhiji and his ideals. However, her auto-narrative is not only about herself and her life, rather it serves as a story of generations of Indian women who strove to bring about a change in themselves and in the society, so as to contribute to the freedom movement on par with their male counterparts. Thus, Ray's auto-narrative becomes a window to the status and condition of women in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their struggle, not only against colonialism, but also against the forces of conservatism and patriarchy.

1.5.1.4 Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (2004)

Jawaharlal Nehru has undoubtedly been a great political leader in the forefront of the struggle for the Independence of India, and the moulder of her destiny after Independence as the first Prime Minister. Originally, his family hailed from Kashmir but later migrated to Allahabad. The time-span of Nehru's autobiography is from the late 19th century to the 1930s, and is centred on his life, his ideals, his growth as a person, his experiences and his keen desire to free his country from the clutches of the British.

In his narrative plainly titled as *An Autobiography*, he first attempts to trace his ancestral roots, and then he speaks about his journey of life and the important influences on him, such as that of his father. He also narrates relevant details about his childhood, education in England, and his career as a leader in the Congress. His work, being witness to all the social and particularly political upheavals that took place in the country, is an invaluable record of contemporary socio-political ethos and events. As such, it functions as a very useful corroborative source for other texts. It also provides a significant basis for the analysis of the socio-political conditions that impacted women empowerment in that era.

As an intellectual stalwart, he analyses every issue and event rationally in his own way and gives his insightful views on it. Most often he is an objective observer of the happenings in those times. He tries to understand Gandhiji's ways and strategies, while attempting to reason out the pros and cons of it. The mode of writing in his auto-narrative is clear, candid, matter-of-fact and free from glorification of individuals or fictionalization of events – the shortcomings caused by undue subjectivity.

1.5.1.5 Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008)

Baby Kamble belongs to the Mahar community. She grew up in a societal environment where the people were treated very badly, and they had to live in abject poverty, on the mercy of the so-called upper castes. In her own community, as well, women were like the slaves who had to be servile to the husband and the in-laws, and moreover received torture at their hands. Kamble's auto-narrative is aptly titled as *The Prisons We Broke*, because she speaks of the shackles of poverty, discrimination and oppression from which her community broke free. It is a translation of the original Marathi, *Jina Amucha*. It covers the period approximately from 1918 to the1940's.

The Mahars lived in ignorance and superstition till the time Babasaheb Ambedkar brought about a change in their thinking, enabled them to take education and reformed their ways of life. Kamble also received education and became a member of the women meetings held by Rani Lakshmibai to gain awareness and knowledge. She was married at the age of thirteen, and along with her husband, started a grocery shop in the Maharwada.

Unlike other auto-narratives, Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, is based on the community and not on her personal family life. She represents her community and highlights the customs, practices in the community and the generally oppressed conditions of the Mahars. She speaks of the superstitions that prevailed in their community and the 'beastly' lifestyle of the people in her community before the arrival of Babasaheb Ambedkar on the societal scene and his transformative philosophy, social dignity and reform. Kamble also emphasizes upon the double marginalization of the Mahar women and the inhuman treatment meted out to them by their husbands and in-laws.

Through her work, Kamble tries to re-orient the contemporary Mahars towards the egalitarian principles professed by Ambedkar. In her opinion, the community today is falling apart due to narrow selfish interests prevailing over social zeal. As such, Kamble reminds her community of their roots and the philosophy and principles of Ambedkar which had in the past united them and salvaged them from slavery to the high castes.

1.5.1.6 Padma Sachdev's *A Drop in the Ocean* (2011)

Padma Sachdev is a twentieth century writer in Dogri who hails from Purmandal village near Jammu. In that sense, her story represents womanhood in a lesser known region of India in comparison to its more predominant heart land. Besides, this narrative is significant in that it spans the volatile decades just before, and the crucial eras after, the Independence of India. As such, this auto-narrative helps to view women's empowerment during the transitional phase of Indian polity and society.

Sachdev belongs to the family of Pandits. Her father was one of the few well-educated individuals in the state of Jammu and Kashmir of his times. She and her siblings were encouraged to be educated. Sachdev comes through as a very liberated and empowered woman, although she had to go through a lot of problems like a problematic marriage at a very young age, subsequent divorce, continued ill-health (first Tuberculosis and then Meningitis) and so on. None the less, she gained economic independence, fought for her individual rights and withstood social pressure for going against social norms. Eventually, she married again and also pursued her dream of being a writer. She created a niche for herself by being recognized as an empowered woman, a much-celebrated author and an individual who lives life on her own terms.

Her auto-narrative, *A Drop in the Ocean*, originally written in Dogri, was translated into Hindi and then into English. It is the story of her life, her experiences of living in a society which still looks down upon women – particularly those who separate from their husbands. It also delineates her struggle for individual identity and economic empowerment. The narrative also reveals her perennial fight against diseases and the prolonged illnesses that plagued her for a long time.

Equally, her story is truly a kaleidoscope of the lives of people around her, her parents, siblings, aunts and uncles and the people who have always supported her even without having any blood relations. In fine, *A Drop in the Ocean*, is a veritable contribution to the age of the contemporary Indian women's empowerment based on courage and determination. It clearly underscores the fact that an individual needs to be empowered from within – not by extraneous agency alone.

1.5.1.7 Indira Goswami's *An Unfinished Autobiography* (2002)

Goswami belonged to the generation of celebrated post-independence twentieth century writers in India. *An Unfinished Autobiography*, is the story of her life and lived experiences, translated from original Assamese into English by P. Kotaky. The work is titled 'unfinished' perhaps because this auto-narrative covers her life till 1970. In the preface to her auto-narrative, Goswami says that from 1970 onwards she began a new life about which she did not write in this work. It is thus interesting to know her earlier life and temperament.

As a young girl she was haunted with the thought of separation from her loved ones, especially her father. She suffered greatly on the death her father. She also went through deep humiliation and mental torment as her widowed mother visited every possible saint for advice and solace, since she was unable to find a suitable husband for her daughter. This was partly because, Goswami had attempted suicide which put an inevitable 'stain' on her character within the societal ethos that place an unequal burden on women's 'character' implicitly, her chastity.

Her sufferings finally came to an end only when she married Madhavan (Madhu) Raisom Iyenger, who loved her. However, her happiness was short-lived as Madhu died in a tragic accident. Goswami was naturally shattered at this point of time, she lost all her verve and confidence. She came to depend on sleeping pills for some solace. What is worse, she faced discrimination and humiliation again for being a widow. Sadly, a product of a rigorous conservative society herself, even her mother attempted to train her to live the life of a widow. But unlike many others, Goswami chose the life of independence. So she took up teaching in a school and later went on to write a thesis on Ramayana and lived an

independent life in Vrindaban with the support of her guide and teacher Professor Lekharu and his wife.

Her autobiography not only records her life but also focuses on the issues of marriage and widowhood. The significance of marriage in a woman's life is shown in the struggles and taunts of her mother. Later when Goswami goes to Vrindaban, she describes the inhuman treatment meted out to widows who suffered and died without anyone to care for them. Goswami documents all that she witnessed in her life at Vrindaban.

However, the fact that she herself lived a very different life from the other widows who succumbed to their fate, and that even after being a widow she challenged patriarchal norms by writing her autobiography is evidence enough of her empowerment. An important aspect of this auto-narrative is also its ability to bridge two different regions in India – the much lesser known North East and the conventionally well-known imposing Vrindaban with its hordes of helpless widows. This helps to view and assess the status of women, mainly widows, across India, and gauge the degree of admirable empowerment attained by the author through her indomitable spirit.

1.5.1.8 Kamala Das' *My Story* (2009)

Kamala Das, a well-known poet and writer of the twentieth century, belonged to an orthodox Nair family in Kerala. At a young age she was married to an elder man, who she disliked. She had to marry him only because of the wishes of her parents, who were separated; she sensed that she was a burden on her broken family. But the love, understanding and care she wished for, were fulfilled neither by her parents nor her husband. In fact, the latter only presented her young, unsuspecting sensibility with the brutality of his carnal desires. Therefore, she was driven to look for love beyond the boundaries of marriage. Das is a bohemian woman who criticizes the patriarchal norms that 'feminize' and disempower women, reducing them merely to objects of male lust and domination.

Her autobiography *My Story* (2009) is a self-translated work which was first written in Malayalam as *Ente Katha* in 1973. The time-span of her auto-narrative is from 1928 to the 1970's. In this it coincides with that of her contemporaries Sachdev and Goswami. More

importantly, all three being strong, self-made women and creative writers, their views help to weave a fabric of the empowered female sensibility in modern India.

Her auto-narrative is a bold attempt to reveal her life. In fact every bit of it is frankly and openly discussed, without succumbing to social conventions and patriarchal taboos. She divulges even the nature of her private and intimate relationship with her husband, as well as the extra-marital relationships she ventured into, mainly in search of the love that her husband could not give her.

In this sense, hers is a very private book. Unlike other auto-narratives, she does not write about the times in which she lived or the events and occurrences that took place in her life time, but rather confines her focus to her life and to the expressions of her inner struggles. As such, notwithstanding the fact that she does write about the people around her, particularly, the women who were a part of her life, her autobiography is largely a reflection of her individuality, and an attempt to encounter her inner self. None the less, it is possible to perceive the societal ethos of her community and time. Moreover, her auto-narrative helps to understand the trauma and the desperation of a self-willed, free-spirited woman trapped by stifling social conventions and oppressive male dominance. It also reveals the extent of defiance that she can show.

1.5.1.9 K. A. Abbas' *I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (1977)

Khwaja Ahmed Abbas was a multi-faceted intellectual of his day. As a twentieth century writer, journalist and filmmaker, he is a critical observer and an objective analyst of the society and the times in which he lived and the life-altering events that occurred then. Abbas' autobiography is not just a record of his multiple careers and his public image; it is rather about his view and perspectives on the society, on Partition, political happenings of the time and so on.

Abbas writes about his ancestry, particularly his reformist father, his own childhood, about his day-to-day struggles in life, his fascination and intellectual attraction towards Nehru, who was like a hero and a role-model to him, his own marriage, and the ups and downs faced in his career, first as a journalist and later as a filmmaker.

In this sense, although *I Am Not an Island: An experiment in Autobiography* is the record of his life from 1914 to 1975, by implication it is a text that serves as a corroborative source and basis of evidence for some significant details and observations that emerge from other contemporary auto-narrative used as the primary texts for this study. Abbas mainly focuses on his individual self and growth of his personality, his experiences of life, and national events. He dwells in particular with his marriage, and experiences of married life, the death of his wife and so on.

Abbas has a different style of narration which becomes evident in his autobiography – even as he writes about the past he uses parenthesis to comment upon it in the present. Often, he uses a subtle humour in his narration that draws attention to issues but takes away the sting of harshness. He is generally a balanced observer of his times, especially of the political scenario in India.

Two significant features of this work with regard to this study are its rational objective approach and the male perspective on major issues, events and womanhood, that emerges inadvertently through the narration. Furthermore, this work unwittingly throws into relief the ethos, the thinking and the experiences of the Muslim community, household and a progressive individual in a strangely volatile period of Indian history.

1.6 De-limitations of the Study

The de-limitations of this study have been as follows:

- This study has been limited to the women empowerment movements belonging to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in British India and Independent India only; this period is representative of the pre-independence and post-independence eras.
- The texts short-listed for the study are select Indian auto-narratives written by female as well as male authors, and which are set in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only, and were easily available either in libraries or in bookstores.
- Other than the Auto-narrative genre, which includes autobiographies, memoirs and reminiscences, no other literary genre has been used as a primary text for the present study.

- Since the current researcher is not acquainted with some of the regional languages of the original versions of the primary texts, only translations of those texts into English, and the auto-narratives originally written in English, have been used for the study.

1.7 Methodology

- A detailed reading of the primary texts has been undertaken, and instances from the texts are used as evidence to corroborate the socio-political occurrences in the country during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which affected the empowerment of women in India. Moreover, primary texts have been used to examine the individual empowerment of women and the extent of women's empowerment in a given period of time. The primary texts have also been used as illustrations in the critical discussion of the Auto-narrative genre.
- The approaches to women's empowerment and the degree of their empowerment have been studied with the help of relevant theories of Feminism. Moreover, emerging critical perspectives have been utilized where necessary in discussing the primary texts.
- A critical study on the genre of Auto-narratives, and the contemporary discourses pertaining to the genre has been undertaken.
- A study on the women's empowerment movements in India in the pre-independence and post-independence eras has been conducted, and the influence of socio-political events, individuals, and institutions on women's empowerment has been studied.
- A Comparative approach to texts, issues and eras, where necessary has been introduced.
- Books, articles, essays, and interviews from online archives such as JSTOR, Google Books and others have been used.

1.8 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are:

- The empowerment of women in India is relative to the introduction and development of policy of Education, social reform, and attainment of political independence and autonomy by India. Extending the privilege of getting education to women and their mass participation in the freedom struggle might have acted as a catalyst to women's empowerment.

- There is a visibly marked change in the status and the degree of empowerment in women in the pre-independence and post-independence India, which can be explained rationally and illustrated factually through a study of this kind.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

This Chapter briefly introduces the study on Women Empowerment in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which represent the pre-independence and post-independence periods in India. The reasons for selecting the auto-narrative genre as primary texts for the study has also been spelt out. Additionally, this introductory Chapter delineates the aims and objectives of this study, as well as the scope, the delimitations, methodology, hypotheses, relevance, and the primary texts selected for it. A detailed literature survey of the available books on the theories of feminism and empowerment, the critical works on the auto-narrative genre and the literary works on women has been undertaken.

Chapter Two: Empowerment of Women: Context of Feminism

This Chapter studies the concept of Women Empowerment in the context of Feminism. The definitions, approaches and levels of women's empowerment, have been discussed here using the arguments of scholars on women's empowerment such as Sarah Longwe, Sushma Sahay, Ranju R. Dhamal and others. A comprehensive study on the definitions of Feminism along with the theories of Feminism has been undertaken. The brief study

undertaken on the works of a cross-section of eminent feminists right from the earlier feminists to the modern feminists, has been referred to in passing. The feminist movements that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries India have also been traced briefly to suitably locate the central problem of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Auto-narratives and Empowerment: A Critical Discussion

This Chapter focuses on the auto-narrative genre, its definition, critical discourses and its link with women's empowerment. The shifts in terminology based on the changing perceptions with regard to this self-life-writing genre has been traced. A historical overview of autobiographical writings from the earliest traceable point has been undertaken with further emphasis on the Indian autobiographical tradition. The contemporary discourses on the genre, with regard to the politics of memory and remembering, elements of fiction in the genre, the presence of present reflections on past events made by the author, and the distinctions between male and female auto-narratives, particularly those based on the emphasis on individuality or relationality, have been studied in detail with suitable illustrations from select primary texts, wherever possible. The two-fold connection between the auto-narrative genre and women's empowerment has also been critically discussed.

Chapter Four: Women Empowerment in India: The Pre-Independence Era

This Chapter examines the women's empowerment movements that took place in the pre-independence era, and also analyses the impact these movements had on the perception of women in the Indian society and the empowerment of women in India. These movements have been studied in detail by using, wherever possible, corroborative evidences from the primary texts belonging to this era. The individual and collective empowerment of women in this era has also been examined, whereby instances and evidences from the select primary texts have been taken to understand the impact that women's empowerment movements may have had on the condition of women in India.

The criteria of empowerment identified in Chapter Two are used as the yardstick to evaluate whether women in the pre-independence era were empowered at all, and if so, to what extent. The auto-narratives used in this Chapter are those which are set in the pre-

independence era: Cornelia Sorabji's *India Calling*, Lakshmibai Tilak's *I Follow After*, Renuka Ray's *My Reminiscences*, Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography*, and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke.*

Chapter Five: Women Empowerment in India: Independence and After

This Chapter studies the women's empowerment movements that took place after Independence and their impact on the status and degree of empowerment of women in India. The effects of Partition on women, the impact of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India as well as the personal laws established by the enactment of the Hindu Code Bill in 1955, have been studied using instances found in select primary texts. National and International events that took place in this era, such as the report *Towards Equality* (1974) on the status of women in India, the Internal Emergency in India and the International Women's Decade declared by the United Nations in 1975-85, have also been studied with reference to their influence on women's empowerment.

To understand the impact of all these efforts made by institutions and women's movements on women individually, certain criteria of empowerment identified in Chapter Two have been used to evaluate the level of empowerment of Indian women in the post-independence period. The auto-narratives examined in this Chapter are those set in the post-independence India, they are: Padma Sachdev's *A Drop in the Ocean*, Indira Goswami's *An Unfinished Autobiography*, Kamala Das' *My Story*, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas' *I Am Not an Island*, and also Renuka Ray's *My Reminiscences* since she writes about both the eras, her auto-narrative is used in this Chapter too.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This Chapter concludes the entire study. The chapter-wise observations of the study and the overall findings of this research are reported with adequate bases here. For the most part, they bear out the hypotheses of this study. This Chapter also spells out in brief the relevance of this study and directions for future research in this and allied areas. A detailed Bibliography is also appended to the thesis as a ready-reckoner for primary and secondary sources.

1.10 Relevance of the Study

This study is relevant because the mass of women particularly in India are not yet fully empowered. Even to this day, there are continuous efforts being made by various agencies – Governmental as well as non-Governmental – towards women empowerment. Moreover, although there has been a considerable body of work carried out on women empowerment, especially in the domain of Social Sciences, the assessment of women empowerment through literary works like auto-narratives, has not been undertaken by scholars of Literature, as per the information of the present researcher.

It is felt that, a research work of this nature, in its attempt to cross over from pure fiction to more fact-friendly writing, can open up newer avenues for blending self-confessed details with erudite critical analysis and corroborative evidences from contemporaries of the authors of the auto-narratives and subsequent scholars and writers alike. In its modest way, the present study has endeavoured to bring on board the collateral views on Women Empowerment in India across the broad spectrum of time, region, linguistic diversity, social dynamics, ideological moorings, religious backgrounds and above all Gender. It is expected that this broad-based study will provide for a more objective, balanced and inclusive basis for future research in this and allied areas of crucial significance. In that case, this study will have fulfilled its core objective of making a significant contribution to human knowledge and future research.

Chapter Two

Empowerment of Women: Context of Feminism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter mainly focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. The critical perceptions on women empowerment, and the approaches, levels and criteria of empowerment have been highlighted. The theories of feminism in the West, the Indian feminist movements and critical perspectives on Feminism in India have also been dealt with in detail.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Women Empowerment

Empowerment as a concept has gained popularity and significance very recently. According to Sumitra Kumari, women empowerment is, "[…] a state of being that reflects a certain level of critical consciousness about external realities and an awareness about their internal thought construction and belief system that affect their well-being in terms of gender justice and social justice, as well as the determination to use their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to perfect their lives" (2).

Empowerment can be seen at two levels, one as an individual or personal endeavour, whereby a person tries to empower oneself from a state of powerlessness, and secondly as a collective struggle, by a group or a section of society, which has been marginalized. In the present study, women and women's empowerment has been examined from both these angles. Although they constitute half of the whole humankind, women have been living in a state of subordination and powerlessness for a very long time.

Efforts to improve women's condition and status have been made in the past by women themselves opposing their subjugation, and by men striving to bring about reformation in the patriarchal perception that 'women are destined to be oppressed'. Yet women's empowerment as a concept was first introduced only in 1985 at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi where it was defined as "[…] a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women" (Das and Daspattanayak 39). The concept of

women's empowerment has evolved in time and has recently become the centre of attention for many scholars.

Jugal Kishore Misra, in his essay "Empowerment of Indian Women" (2006), deliberates on this concept and opines:

> [W]omen empowerment requires a realignment of power, decision making at the household, institutional and all levels of society. Participatory in nature, empowerment is a dynamic process aiming at transfer of power to women, dispriveleged and disadvantaged variously in any androcentric political construct. So it connotes development of skills and abilities for a better say in negotiation with existing 'development delivery systems'. (872)

Sometimes, empowerment is considered to be attained only through legal means, creating better laws and policies to further the goal of an equalitarian society. Although laws are essential in creating an environment suitable for empowerment, they cannot, by themselves, empower a person or a marginalized group. To be empowered, an individual or a group needs to be aware of the factors that cause her/their disempowerment, and the urge to end this subjection and empower herself/themselves, should emerge. Thus, in the article "Empowerment" Erika Feigenbaum asserts that:

> [T]he concept of empowerment deals with two elements of cultivating power: internally (as an individual) and collectively. These levels of recognizing, developing, and acting on goals work to advance both personal feelings of esteem and political activism to resist and counteract oppression and injustice in a larger structural sense. […] Empowerment includes basic personal and social aims, such as enhancing or cultivating an improved sense of self, which may involve developing pride in a particular group **identity** or affiliation; developing the skills for critical consciousness, which enables an understanding and knowledge of factors that impose powerlessness […] (114-115)

Hence, in the case of women, the focus is on bringing about empowerment not in a superficial and outward manner but from within, as Ranju R. Dhamala, a scholar on women's empowerment opines:

> [E]mpowerment may emerge either *from within or from without*. When the idea of empowerment flows from government decisions, as is the case in India it becomes

> superimposed and attainment of the goal remains partial. But when it emerges from within i.e. when the women themselves feel the need for recasting their position, which is not related to the power equation in society it leads to the development of self-reliant women, which, in fact is the essence of empowerment. (Emphasis added; Pramanik and Adhikary 109)

Many generations of women have tried to seek empowerment, and improve their status in society, but there is no singular approach to empowerment; the approach changes from time to time. This is because the notion of empowerment itself is dynamic in nature, its criteria continue to change and progress in time. Therefore, its meaning, context and approaches change in relation to the changing society and times.

In the Indian context, the social reformists of the nineteenth century were seeking a change in the perception of society towards women, who were considered to be inferior beings, destined to be oppressed and subordinated. Here, the approach to women's upliftment was based on two objectives: getting rid of the outdated practices and inhuman customs, such as sati, child marriage, and incarceration of widows which dehumanized women; and, supporting women's education. At this point of time, understanding the factors that led to women's complete subjugation, was not given as much importance as it is done in contemporary times.

Even later, when women began to form *mahila samitis* and organizations for their own empowerment, this was done under the vigilance of their male counterparts and within the restrictions of seclusion or *purdah*. Today, this approach to empowerment would be mocked at, but this was a significant step towards empowerment and a need of that time. However, of late, the focus has shifted and emphasis is laid on scrutinizing the patriarchal system, and on analysing femininity as a social construct. Thus, women are now encouraged to break the stereotypes, gain self-confidence and assert their rights.

Consequently, modern scholars on empowerment discuss the various approaches to empowerment. In her book, *Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies* Sushama Sahay proposes three approaches to women's empowerment; they are: integrated development, economic empowerment, and consciousness-raising.

The **integrated development approach**, perceives women's development as being beneficial to the progress of the whole family, thus, here the approach is not only towards women but the whole family, by trying to "[…] alleviate poverty, meet basic survival needs, reduce gender discrimination, and help women gain self-esteem" (Sahay 50). This approach aims at formulating women into collective groups and engaging them in development programs, to deal with various social problems.

The **economic empowerment approach** identifies the lack of economic power as the source of women's marginalization. Therefore, this approach emphasizes that "[…] improving women's control over material resources and strengthening women's economic security" (Sahay 51). This approach also formulates women into groups but here the focus is to educate women on savings, credit, income generation, and train them in new technologies and marketing. This approach also provides child care services, health services, literacy programs and legal education and aid to women (51).

The **consciousness-raising approach** affirms that in order for women to be empowered, they should first gain complete awareness of the complex, multiple factors that cause their oppression and subordination. Thus, this approach organizes women to deal with the sources of their disempowerment. In the consciousness-raising approach education plays a major role, as education leads to gaining a new consciousness and awareness about their own self and bodies, and the ability to control reproduction. This approach encourages and enables women "[…] to evolve from an aggregate of individuals into a cohesive-collective, wherein they can look at themselves and their environment in new ways, develop a positive self-image, recognize their strengths and deplore sexist misconceptions" (Sahay 51-52).

All three approaches underline the importance of collective efforts, and the organization of women into groups, the struggle for empowerment is not only an individual one but also a collective one, wherein women jointly fight against their powerlessness.

Women's empowerment has several dimensions, some of them are identified and discussed by scholars like Tripurari N. Pati and Jugal K. Misra as economic empowerment, political empowerment, social empowerment and familial empowerment.

Economic empowerment focuses on government schemes and policies which can aid women in gaining the much essential economic independence, as it would provide women with a sense of confidence, freedom, self- worth, and it will end their dependency on their oppressors, giving them scope for resistance.

Political empowerment refers to political participation of women. Encouraging a political consciousness among women and motivating them to take part in the democratic process is important. It does not only mean having reservations for women. In his essay, "Empowerment of Women: A Long Journey Ahead", T.N. Pati opines that many a times through reservation women get an entry into politics but these women are usually the wives of husbands involved in politics. Thus, these women only become puppets to their husbands' orders. He further argues that in such cases, "[T]hey [women] are neither politically independent in their thinking nor socially conscious about the condition of women of the countryside" (Das and Daspattanayak 90). Therefore, women should enter the political field by their own will and take active part in decision-making.

Social empowerment emphasizes change in social attitudes, and getting rid of taboos which cause a hindrance to women's empowerment. It also promotes gender equality, and gender sensitivity and gives importance to creation of women's self-help groups and other organizations.

Familial empowerment is empowerment within the family. Here, the focus is on a woman realizing her own potentials and boosting her self-esteem. A woman has familial empowerment when she has a role in deciding family matters, and has control over her own body, how many children she will have and when (Misra 877).

Empowerment is a gradual process it cannot be achieved all at once, thus there are levels of empowerment. Sarah Longwe, a scholar in the field of empowerment has developed a five-level framework for women's empowerment, published in 1990. It comprises of the following levels: Welfare, Access, Conscientization, Participation and Control. Sushma Sahay undertakes a detailed study of these levels (39).

The first level is **'Welfare'**, wherein women's basic needs are overtly met, "[…] without recognizing or attempting to solve the underlying structural causes, which necessitate

provision of welfare services" (39). This is a very superficial level which tries to empower women overtly. The second level is that of **'Access'** which involves, equal access to resources, such as education, employment opportunities and so on. In this level, women acknowledge that the lack of access to resources is an obstacle in the path of their empowerment and this realization is the first step towards empowerment.

The third level is of **'Conscientization'** wherein women must realize that their problems arise from "inherent structural and institutional discrimination" (39). They have to also be aware of the role they often play in reinforcing such patriarchal systems that hinder their own progress and growth (39). The fourth level is **'Participation' -** here women form groups and organizations to work collectively and take their own decisions. Women stand alongside men and participate as an equal, which will also lead to a greater representation of women on a public front and will result in empowering them. The final level of the empowerment framework is **'Control'** wherein women and men are equal and independent, devoid of any domination. At this stage women take control over their lives and actively take part in the development process. In this level the contributions of women to the society would be acknowledged and rewarded (Sahay 40).

Albeit all these levels are significant to women's empowerment, Conscientization is the most essential one as it forms the basis to the rest. To resist subjection and strive towards empowerment, women have to first be conscious and aware of their own marginalized and subordinated state. They should realize their rights, and recognize the various structures and agents of patriarchy which lead to their powerlessness. This conscientization can only be gained through education. Hence, education is a very significant aspect of women's empowerment and is therefore focused upon by scholars, world conferences and committees and legislations.

In the essay, "Education and Women Empowerment" Shailendra Kumar Verma, opines that, "[E]ducation and its contents are vital instruments in not only empowering the students to make the best of economic opportunities but can bring about far reaching changes in stereotype gender status and relations between sexes and social attitudes" (Singh and Garg 117). Similarly, another Indian scholar, Saraswati Mishra, considers the education system as the only medium through which one can "[…] uproot the deep roots

of inequality between the man and woman; which are settled in the minds of people through the process of socialization" (69).

However, the education required to attain these means, is the education in skills, and an awareness generation so that women may no longer believe in false myths (of male superiority and female subordination generated by vested interests) but realize their potentials and cross the thresholds of their homes. Education also plays a vital role in improving health standards and lowering the rate of female infanticide. Education can offer opportunities to transfer women's unpaid labour at home into paid work, creating economic independence that will in turn alter women's subordinate position and will put an end to the financial dependency on their male counterparts.

In contemporary times, thankfully education for women has been greatly encouraged and incentivized in India. Therefore in many states, the very high female literacy rate points towards signs of progress towards gender equality, but the country as a whole has not yet achieved desirable gender equality, and although some sections of the society are really moving towards women's empowerment, a larger section is still struggling to even acknowledge the significance of education and a change in perception towards the 'other' sex. In fact, the urban and privileged section of people can be seen to have an edge over their rural and underprivileged counterparts, although this may not be the rule.

In recent times, many professions that were once gender specific have opened their doors to women, and women have created a niche for themselves. The progress made by several women in various fields, has thus at times led to the assumption that women have already attained empowerment. Swarup Kumar Banerjee strongly opposes this and opines:

> [T]he visibility of a few women sometimes makes people forget the invisible mass of women whose concerns remain unaddressed. Inspite of tremendous attempts on the part of the government through constitutional and legislative measures or there [sic] upliftment, the profile of the Indian women is pitiable and blurred. It seems as if these laws were meant for the exclusive 'visible' women, while the sea of women have receded to the background. (Das and Daspattanayak 40)

Hence, it is important to highlight certain indicators of empowerment which can be used to analyse whether a section of women, or an individual woman, is empowered or not. Nilanchal Muni in her essay on "Women Empowerment: Dynamics and Dimensions" discusses about the indicators of women's empowerment, and articulates that "[I]ndicators of women empowerment are the measurable changes that occur in the position and status of women" (Panigrahy and Bhuyan 27). She also points out the difficulty in identifying these indicators as they are subject to who is examining them and at what point of time. Some of general examples of indicators given by her in the essay are: change in women's self-perception, increase in self-esteem, ability to speak out, assert and defend oneself, decision making capacity and so on (27).

In *Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies* (1998), Sushama Sahay discusses the indicators of women's empowerment and highlights The Draft Country Paper- India for the 4th World Conference on Women, in Beijing 1995 and its proposal of qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating the women's empowerment. She then lists the various qualitative indicators:

a) Increase in self esteem, individual and collective confidence.
b) Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large, and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, literacy etc., depending on the programme.
c) Increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care.
d) Increase or decrease in work loads of women as result of the new programme.
e) Changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in the community.
f) Visible increase or decrease in levels of domestic violence and other forms of violence perpetrated on the women and girl child.
g) Responses to, and changes, in social and other customs that are anti-women e.g. child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows etc.
h) Visible changes in women's participation levels e.g. are more women attending public meetings, training programmes; are women demanding participation in other events related to their lives?
i) Increase in bargaining/ negotiating power of the women as an individual in the home and community as well as in collectives of women.

j) Increased access to and ability to gather information and knowledge not only about the project, but about what affects their lives.
k) Formation of cohesive and articulate women's groups/collectives at the village level, district, block, state levels.
l) Positive changes in social attitudes amongst the community members towards discrimination against women and the girl child.
m) Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household.
n) Women's decision-making over the kind of work she is doing; is her income and expenditure in her control or is she still subservient to male member's in the family. (64-65)

These are the 14 qualitative indicators suggested, but at a closer look one could divide them into three sections. The first section could include indicators numbered a, b, h, j, k, m, and n, as all these are centred on increase in self-esteem by acquiring knowledge, not only on external subjects but also on women centric issues, gaining the decision making power and collective participation. The second section would include indicators numbered f, g and l since they all deal with a change in social attitudes, customs and practices which are discriminatory, and which oppress women, like domestic violence, child marriage, dowry, ill-treatment of widows and gender discrimination. The third section would have indicators numbered c, d, and e as these emphasize the change in women roles and responsibilities within the house and outside. It also deals with change in workload of women and the time for leisure and child care.

Along with qualitative indicators, quantitative indicators are also enlisted, they are: demographic trends such as maternal/mortality rates, fertility rates, sex ratio, average age of marriage, among others; number of women participating in various development programmes; changes in male/female literacy levels; political participation of women and so on (Sahay 65-66).

The goals set out for the overall empowerment of women have not yet been met, a vast majority of women are still unaware that being subjugated is not their destiny, and that they

have an equal right to have an individual identity. Therefore, the struggle for women's empowerment is relevant even in the contemporary era.

The awareness about the need for empowerment is an ideological awakening, as it brings to consciousness that women have been subordinated for a very long time and that it is not their fate or destiny, but the androcentric society which marginalizes them; it is an awakening towards women's rights for equal treatment, and this ideological awakening provides an impetus to feminist thinking, and the advent and development of feminism becomes a marker of women's empowerment in the social domain.

Feminism is a major struggle towards women's liberation and equality, and therefore, its aim ultimately is women's empowerment. Many scholars like Rathindra Nath Pramanik and Ashim Kumar Adhikary, find a close connection between empowerment and feminism, and in the introduction to their book *Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment* (2006), they affirm that:

> [E]mpowerment has strong links with feminism. The early feminist movements were concerned with gaining equal rights for women, particularly the right of suffrage. In the late 1960's and 1970's, the movements were also concerned with equality of rights but this time the emphasis was in areas of family, sexuality and work, which continues till today. In the subsequent feminist movements there is, however, noticed an emerging process of self-empowerment among women, in which women mobilize themselves against sexual violence, rapes, dowry, unemployment, low wages and other kinds of oppression. (3)

Thus, feminism and women's empowerment movements are intermingled in their vision and goal as both strive towards upliftment of women and liberating women from social bondages, thereby empowering them. Hence, it is pertinent to study feminism, the concept and the movement connected, to it in a detailed manner.

2.3 Defining Feminism

Years before the term 'Feminism' came to be used, denoting a struggle for women and their equal status against patriarchy, the movement against discrimination of women had already taken shape. The feminist consciousness had already taken roots.

In her book *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Feminism* (2002), Jane Freedman highlights the etymological roots of feminism, which was studied by G. Fraisse in his *Muse de la Raison: Democratie et exclusion des femmes en France* (1995). She states that:

> [T]he term 'feminist' seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients, who were perceived as thus suffering from 'feminization' of their bodies. The term was then picked up by Alexander Dumas *fils*, a French writer, republican and anti-feminist, who used it in a pamphlet published in 1872 entitled *l'homme-femme*, on the subject of adultery, to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine way. Thus, as Fraisse points out, although in medical terminology feminism was used to signify a feminization of men, in political terms it was first used to describe a virilization of women. (2)

The term entered the English Language much later. In the 1961 reprint of *The Oxford English Dictionary* first published in 1933, an entry on the term '*Fe'mininism*' is found, giving two definitions "1. The state of being feminine. 2. A feminine or woman's word or expression" (152). Indicating that feminism as a term was entered in the English dictionaries only in the twentieth century, although the feminist movement that sought to challenge the oppressive patriarchal forces, was well-received by this time in the west, as well as in India.

Critical dictionaries like, *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction* (1991), states that:

> [F]eminism asks why women have played a subordinate role to men in human societies. It is concerned with how women's lives have changed throughout history, and it asks what about women's experience is different from men's, either as a result of an essential ontological or psychological difference or as a result of historical imprinting and social construction. (Ryan 101)

In the twentieth century various definitions of feminism emerged, some saw it as a progressive movement, struggling for the rights of women, while others perceived it as a total reformation of ideologies, changing the way women were comprehended and treated by the society.

Sarah Gamble in the introduction of her edited work, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post Feminism* (2001), believes that feminism is a fight against patriarchal ideologies and social constructs that seek to marginalize, alienate or disempower women and undermine their concerns and priorities. According to her:

> [I]t is the belief that women, purely and simply because they are women, are treated inequitably within a society which is organised to prioritise male viewpoints and concerns. Within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not: where men are regarded as strong, women are weak; where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive; and so on. Under this rationale, which aligns them everywhere with negativity, women are denied equal access to the world of public concerns as well as of cultural representation. Put simply, feminism seeks to change this situation. (vii)

Maggi Humm in her essay "Feminist Literary Theory", illuminates upon the foundational ideas of feminism, she opines:

> [F]eminism incorporates diverse ideas which share three major perceptions: that gender is a social construction which oppresses women more than men; that patriarchy shapes this construction; and that women's experiential knowledge is a basis for a future non – sexiest society. These assumptions inform feminism's double agenda: the task of critique (attacking gender stereotypes) and the task of construction. Without this second task (sometimes called feminist praxis) feminism has no goal. (Jackson 194)

Feminism has no singular, universal definition, the definitions are ever changing. With the evolution of time, varied perspectives and theories of feminism are continuously being formed, giving it a dynamic nature.

In *Some Questions on Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia* (1986), Kamla Bhasin and Nighat S. Khan explain that there is no one definition of feminism as its meaning is bound to change at every point of time "[…] because feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions" (2). As the society changes and evolves, new ideologies and ways of thinking appear. Consequently, the meaning of feminism changes.

The scholars also elucidate that feminism can also be articulated differently in different parts of the world or even within the same country. It can be perceived differently by different women on the basis of class background, exposure to education, and also historical experiences. For example, the outlook of a woman from the colonized group will be different from that of the colonizers group (Bhasin and Khan 2).

However, the basic premise on which all kinds of feminisms are found is that women have been victimized in an Androcentric setting. Feminism seeks to amend this, thereby empowering women. In asserting this Nancy Adamson et al state:

> [A]t the core of *all feminisms* are certain commonalities in political perspective: All believe in equal rights and opportunities for women; all recognize that women are oppressed and exploited by virtue of being women; and all feminists organize to make change. But within these broad parameters of commonality are extensive differences: in political strategy, in vision about what constitutes women's liberation, in attitudes to men, in understanding the roots of women's oppression, in setting priorities, in identifying constituencies and allies. (Emphasis added; 9)

2.4 Feminism in the West: An Overview

The history of feminism is often explained by dividing it into the three waves suggested by Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker, while other theorists divide feminism on the grounds of the different approaches or groups of feminism that evolved.

Jane Freedman in *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Feminism* (2002) speaks about the attempt made towards classification of feminism. She states that:

> [I]n attempt at some kind of classification, histories of feminism have talked about the historical appearance of strong feminist movements at different moments as a series of 'waves' […] although it may be true that feminist movements have been more active […] at certain historical periods, it would perhaps be more accurate to see feminism not as emerging in 'waves' but as a continuum of thought and action. (4-5)

She further states that another way in which feminism has been classified is into different theoretical families. "[A] basic version of this categorization would divide feminisms and feminists into three loose groups: liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, and

radical feminism. […] More recent surveys have also added on the categories of psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, black feminism, and so on" (Freedman 5).

2.4.1 Early Stages of Feminism

The earliest known woman to have written about women's rights 'and duties' is Christine de Pisan (1364-1430), a French woman whose focus was on the roles played by women in society. Her two major works are *Le Livre de la cité des Dames*, and translated as *The Book of the City of Ladies* and its sequel *Le Livre des trois vertus* translated as *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, both these works were written in 1405.

In these books, Pisan presents a dream-vision of a utopian city for women inhabited by powerful, educated, and influential women both of antiquity and of her own times. In *A Handbook of Literary Feminisms* (2002), Shari Benstock et al. opines that "*City of Ladies* is perhaps the first popular feminist text, […] Christine's influence, including her arguments for women's education, continued into the print era as she became one of the earliest continental vernacular writers translated and published in England (in 1521)" (4).

In 1524 and 1526 a book titled *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (Lord's Prayer) written by Dr. Erasmus Roterdamus in Latin was printed. This work was then rendered into English by the nineteen year old, Margaret More Roper, one of the learned daughters of Sir Thomas More. Her work is of significance, not owing to its content, but due to the bravery and courage she displays in writing at a time, when women were not allowed to appear on a public platform like literature. "[T]hat Margaret More Roper's translation should be the first printed English work by a living woman suggests a great deal about cultural values and gender roles" (Benstock et al. 5).

In the sixteenth century, women were confined within the boundaries of the house, and a virtuous woman was defined by the patriarchal society as "chaste, silent, and obedient". But Roper by the fact that she translated the work and got it printed challenges these definitions (6).

The English Reformation period that took place in the sixteenth century was an impetus to many courageous women, who in these times of conflict, stood up for their beliefs. During this time, separate sects of Christianity were emerging which challenged the power of the church. Two such important women were Anne Askew (ca. 1521-46) and Anne Vaughan Lock (ca. 1532-90), these two Protestant women, opposed the church order and their writings are said to be the early beginnings of literary feminism in modern English (Benstock et al. 11).

Anne Askew was a very outspoken Protestant. Under King Henry's reign, all those who followed Protestantism were examined and condemned, but Askew did not fear death. She wrote a report of her examinations by the bishops, tilted *Examinations*, and arranged to get it printed, in the hands of John Bale. This report, in the words of Benstock, "[…] made clear her opposition to her expected role as silent and obedient wife" (11). Unlike other women of her times, Askew went by her own decisions; she refused to be bound by the norms set for women. What strikes the bishops of the church even more is her use of her maiden name, even after her marriage to Mr. Kime and her insistence on reading the Bible kept in the church, which was till then only the prerogative of the male priests. When interrogated, she refused to blurt out the names of the other Protestants, thus she was tortured. Because she refused to give up her beliefs "she was burnt as a heretic" (11).

Anne Vaughan Lock is said to be one of the essential writers to emerge in the early years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. She translated four sermons by John Calvin and published it in 1560, along with which she wrote a preface of a rhetorically sophisticated dedication to the Protestant Duchess of Suffolk, followed by an original 'sonnet sequence' based on Psalms 51, written by her (Benstock et al. 11). Thus these women laid the foundations for women's writing and the feminist works. Their protest against the church, which is a patriarchal institution, made them feminists (if they can be so termed) of this age. Illustrations of such kind show that even in the earlier times there were courageous women who stood up for their beliefs and did not succumb to male domination.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, women grew conscious of the importance of education although they saw it only as a means of increasing their usefulness within the boundaries of domesticity. Many progressive women, during this time, also argued that the

intelligence and rationality of women was on par with that of men. Bathsua Makin in her *Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) advocates women's education albeit she sees education only as a medium through which wives would grow more useful to their husbands. But what makes her work progressive in nature is her assertion that women are intellectually equal to men. Makin affirms that, "[S]eeing nature produces women of such excellent parts, that they do often equalize, sometimes excel, men, in whatever they attempt, what reason can be given why they should not be improved?" (Benstock et al. 32).

By 1697 the significance of education was further emphasized, one such work is *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1697) by Mary Astell, who like Makin claims that women are not devoid of rationality and thinking ability. In fact Astell uses a religious perspective to further her argument. She argues that since God has given everyone equal intelligence, then why only women should not make use of it. Astell further proposes the creation of an institution, where women would educate themselves. In proposing her idea of the institution, she states that:

> [O]ne great end of this institution shall be, to expel that cloud of ignorance which custom has involved us in, to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful knowledge, that the souls of women may no longer be the only unadorned and neglected things. […] [Women should] busy themselves in a serious inquiry after necessary and perfective truths, something which it concerns them to know, and which tends to their real interest and perfection. (33)

2.4.2 The Eighteenth and The Nineteenth Centuries

By the eighteenth century more women grew dissatisfied with their subordinate position in society and therefore out of such a dissatisfaction grew a sense of awareness across women in society that may be broadly termed as feminist consciousness. But at this point there was no political struggle for women's rights. Instead, these feminists, (if so, they should be called), believed that only through education and the exercise of reason, women could be made independent of men. This stream of thought evolved as a fallout of the two major liberalizing revolutions that took place in the western world at that time, namely, the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789). Enlightenment that had

gained significance by that time, also influenced this thinking. However, in that age there was a widespread belief that only men were capable of being rational, women were considered to be emotional beings, incapable of rationality.

This kind of prejudice was visible in the writings of Voltaire, Diderot and Montesquieu who were the intellectual spearheads of the French Revolution and especially Rousseau, who is associated with the advent of the movement called Romanticism.

As a result of this constricting intellectual climate, it is only towards the end of the eighteenth century that we witness feminists challenging these notions and attempting to prove that the ideas of enlightenment can be applied to women as well. The most prominent of these was Mary Wollstonecraft who was one of the earliest feminist who pointed out that femininity is only a social construct that distorts rather than reflects women's true nature.

Her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is a call for women to be 'rationally educated'; she wanted to raise women's overall moral and intellectual stature to make them into more rational citizens. Valerie Sanders in her article "First Wave Feminism" (2001) points out that Wollstonecraft is:

> [M]ainly concerned with the way society constructs femininity, especially through its inadequate, misdirected education of young girls. […] Although, she accepted that most middle – class women would marry and remain at home, she wanted girls' education to prepare them for the possibility of economic independence, to give them freedom and dignity, rather than the ability to fascinate potential husbands. (17)

Another woman who, during this time, wrote about female sexuality, was Mary Hays; in her *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) she portrayed "[…] a woman torn between her sexual passion and social restrictions against its expression" (Benstock et al. 53).

After Wollstonecraft, there followed a period of reaction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, many women writers criticized Wollstonecraft and Hays. Lady Morgan using the pseudo name 'Sydney Owenson' emphasized on the conventional way of looking at women as emotional, rather than rational; she argues that, "'[P]olitics can never be a woman's science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment'" (53).

This period was dominated by writers of 'Advice manuals' and 'Conduct books', such as Hannah More's writings on female education titled *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805) and *Practical Piety* (1811); and Mrs. Sarah Ellis' *Women of England* (1839), followed by *The Mothers of England* (1842) and *The Daughters of England* (1843). The main aim of these books was "[…] to inspirit women with a sense of mission […] which combined patriotism with dedication to their families" (Sanders18). Mrs. Ellis' conduct books, described women as "relative creatures", meaning that women had no significance on their own, and it was their connection to men that gave them importance in society (Sanders18). Similar manuals were written by many others to remind women of their duties and to show them their 'right' place i.e. below men.

But this is not to suggest that this period was devoid of feminist thought. Valerie Sanders (mentioned before) states that the best known feminist writing of this period was William Thompson's *Appeal of One - Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men* (1825), which came as a reply to James Mill's "Essay on Government" (1821) wherein Mill states that "[…] neither women nor the working classes needed to be enfranchised, because their interests were already being taken care of" (18). Thompson argues that "[…] it was wrong even to regard women themselves as a cohesive group" (Sanders 18).

Thompson further divides women into three separate categories "[…] wives, adult daughters living with their fathers, and women with neither husbands nor fathers" (19) and focuses on the problems faced by each. Valerie Sanders comments that:

> [T]hompson was thus one of the first to recognize that even women whom society treated as fortunate and settled were privately suffering from unacknowledged needs and repressive treatment from men. His work particularly emphasizes the differing and often conflicting needs of men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and daughters. (19)

Another important work in the nineteenth century was John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) which focuses "[…] on the way society has traditionally **oppressed** women and treated them as slaves" (20). He states that the chief obstacle that hinders the improvement of humans is the "legal subordination of one sex to the other" (Sanders 20).

This legal subordination, he says is wholly on the basis that, men are physically stronger, which in his opinion is an absurd reason for wanting to give one group of people power over another. In his opinion, the only way this could be corrected is through equal rights for both (20).

The feminists belonging to this period, from the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century were mainly liberal feminists, their aim was to create a new identity for women as equals rather than inferior to men. Mary Wollstonecraft felt that it is only through proper and rational or intellectual education that women's status could be uplifted. Whereas others thought that equal rights will bring women on the same level as men.

Another aspect that defines this period is that the early feminists accepted that women biologically and physically were lesser than men. Moreover, most of the feminists did not question or challenge the domestic role set for women. Feminism of this time focused mainly on creating a niche for women in the patriarchal society by attaining equality for women. Therefore, it is said that the approach of the early feminism was a liberal one.

Susan Hekman in her article "Feminism", comments that the basic foundation of this approach was, "[…] the assumption that the inferiority of women is solely a function of their political and legal status" (92). She further explains that liberalism believes that "[…] equal participation and equality before the law are sufficient to secure freedom" and that on achieving this equality, freedom would be achieved. Therefore, later on when women were given equality in terms of equal rights, the liberal feminists, in the words of Susan Hekman, "[…] had no way of explaining or rectifying the continued inequality of women under the conditions of political equality" (92).

Another approach to feminism that evolved during this time was Marxist feminism which arose on the basis of the political theory and opposed liberalism. While liberalism located power in the government, Marxism locates it in economy. Karl Marx believed that "[…] power resides with those who control the means of economic production", and therefore he argued that if the locus of that power is changed, the structure of society will also change (92).

Later, Friedrich Engels extended this argument and applied it to the patriarchal society. In his *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1845), Engels argued that men get hold of private property and therefore women have to work under him. He believed that the domination of women by men arose with the advent of private property in human society. Marx and Engels insist that exploitation of women can be ended only with the abolition and overthrow of private property and capitalism. Marxist feminism laid emphasis on the economic factor, and asserted that if women were given economic independence, i.e. they acquired ownership of property and got entry into industry, it would remove the economic determinants of gender imbalances (Hekman 92).

2.4.3 The Twentieth Century

In the United States of America, the first ever Women's Rights Convention, known as the Seneca Falls Convention was held in 1848 where a declaration that 'all men and women are created equal' was signed by 68 women and 32 men. Eleven resolutions were passed for equality in education, employment, and favouring the law that provided suffrage for women. Later, after a lot of struggle, in 1918 the Representation of People Act 1918 was passed in Britain granting vote to women over thirty years, who owned houses, and in 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one.

The period from 1920 to 1960 is known as the period of intermission in the women's rights movement when a sense of complacency prevailed. This was because of the victory on the issue of suffrage for women. But it was soon realized that even after getting voting rights, women's status did not improve as expected. The education given to women attempted to reinforce traditional roles of women, stressing on domestic skills as the main qualification, rather than on opening new arenas of knowledge to them.

In the 1960's, a new feminist movement began, known as the Second Wave of Feminism. From here onwards feminism gained a new dimension. The nineteenth century feminists were convinced that women's biological inheritance included many feminine characteristics and that their natural instincts suited them primarily for home-making and childcare. However, they argued that these differences do not justify the unfair treatment

meted out to them by society, under the tutelage of patriarchy. In the course of the twentieth century, feminists began to unearth the ideologies of patriarchy that marginalized women.

The second wave feminist movement influenced by the works of some feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and her book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) which was translated in English as *the Second Sex* (1953). Within a decade, Betty Friedan in her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), saw the inferior status of women on biological basis as a social construct. The approach of the second wave feminism was a more radical one, and therefore, the feminists of this time were known as Radical Feminists.

In her work *The Second Sex* (1953), Simone de Beauvoir adopts the existentialist notion that existence precedes essence, and therefore states that "[O]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Her analysis focuses on the social construction of women as the other which according to her is fundamental to women's oppression. She also emphasizes the patriarchal myths created to ensure women's otherness and their subordinate position.

Similarly, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticized the idea that women are only capable of childrearing and home-making. She believed that women are victims of a false belief system that requires them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. She insists that women should be freed from the 'feminine mystique' and that women should be made to see that they could make a mark even outside the four walls of their homes. She further focused on images of women in the male writer's texts. Shari Benstock et al. states that Friedan "[…] urged women to 'raise their consciousness' through education and to recognize the stereotyped images on display in popular culture and literature" (154).

This consciousness which was aroused by Betty Friedan was also reflected in the literatures of Mary Ellmann in *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer in her *The Female Eunuch* (1971), who like Friedan, tried to analyse the female characters portrayed by male authors.

The ideas of these feminists influenced many other scholars in creating a new feminist movement. This movement in the 1970s, went beyond the economic, political, and legal

sectors of society and tried to excavate the deep rooted ideologies and practices in society that resulted in the 'inferiority' and 'marginality' imposed on women. According to Maggie Humm:

> Second–wave feminism is often characterised as 'the break with the fathers' because critics such as Kate Millett (1970), Germaine Greer (1971) and Mary Ellmann (1968) made revisionary readings of what Ellmann calls 'phallic' writing. Critics focused on sexist vocabulary and gender stereotypes in the work of male authors and highlighted the ways in which these writers commonly ascribe particular features, such as 'hysteria' and 'passivity' only to women. (Jackson et al. 196)

2.4.4 The 1970's and 1980's

Feminism attained new perspectives during this age. A new focus developed in this movement and that was to analyse women's role in 'reproduction'. The radical feminists laid emphasis on practices surrounding mothering, sexuality, and defining gender roles. There were two approaches that dominated this movement: on the one hand, feminists like Shulamith Fireston saw the role of mothering as furthering the subordination of women; and, on the other hand there were feminists like Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich who saw mothering as a positive, life-giving role.

In *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for a Feminist Revolution* (1970), radical feminist Shulamith Fireston stated that the role of women bearing children and being responsible for raising them, keeps women in a subordinate position. She claims that women have been oppressed throughout history through the role of reproduction imposed on her by biology and "[…] reinforced by men's development of social structures that keep women tied to their reproductive role" (Freedman 69). Firestone believes that women can be liberated from this through the development of new scientific reproductive technologies. Although some feminists were influenced by her ideas, they totally rejected the solution she proposed, which was to abandon the role of mothering (69).

In opposition to Firestone's claim, Mary O'Brien, in *The Politics of Reproduction* (1981), asserts that women should control and positively affirm the role of mothering. Adrienne

Rich in compliance with O'Brien, emphasizes the positive role of mothering and identifies it as the distinctive contribution of women.

Rich further argues against Firestone's proposal of using technology as a solution. She opines that new reproductive technologies "[…] will be used to further men's control over women and to take the function of reproduction away from women" (71). In her work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Rich affirms the need for women to reclaim motherhood, and observes that:

> [W]e need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence – a new relationship to the universe. (qtd. in Freedman 72)

Thus, these feminists argue that mothering is a uniquely feminine activity that women should uphold rather than deny, and try to redefine mothering as a positive, life-affirming activity rather than the source of women's oppression.

Susan Hekman in her article on feminism mentioned earlier, opines that this new movement of feminism shifted the focus to the production of meaning. She observes that, according to Radical feminists "[…] women's oppression is rooted not in objective structures, which can be and had been changed by the 1970s, but in how 'woman' is constructed in our society. The cause of women's subordination is not the political/economic legal structures or even biology, but the meaning conferred on the identity 'woman' in all aspects of cultural life" (94).

In the 1980's Feminists began to shift their focus and emphasize on exploring the female world and outlook, reconstructing lost and suppressed records of female experience. At this juncture, a need was also felt to construct a new canon of women's writing by rewriting history, wherein neglected women writers were given prominence.

In *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), Elaine Showalter emphasized on recovering "[…] buried or suppressed feminine tradition" (Benstock et al. 156). She also compiled English women's writing into three periods: Feminine, Feminist, and Female – "[…] divided not simply chronologically but in terms

of their subject matter and their authors' conscious awareness of women's position in society and culture" (156).

These early attempts made by Elaine Showalter and many others such as Patricia Meyer Spacks, Ellen Moers, among others, to develop a history of women's literature, highlighted the politics implicit in creating the western literary canon, arguing that it was a male-centred tradition. These scholars "[…] challenged the view of history as universal, convincingly demonstrating that literary history itself was influenced by the position and gender of its authors, that it was a sociocultural construction and not an unmediated reflection on the past" (Benstock et al. 156-157). Thus, during this time, Showalter's 'Gynocriticism' gained significance, focusing on women as a producer of knowledge, as a writer and laying emphasis on a women's canon or a Gynocritical canon of literature as against the Phallocentric or Androcentric canon of literature.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as a result of the eclectic nature gained by feminism, feminists evoked new theories taking inspiration from various fields of study such as Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, so on.

Some feminists re-looked at Marxism, and tried to go beyond the claim that women's oppression is only as a result of capitalism; instead, these Marxist feminists focus at the way in which ideology creates gender divisions. Michèle Barrett (1980), emphasizes upon "[…] the way in which ideology has a pivotal role in the construction of gender, particularly through the institution of the family and the ideology of familialism" (Freedman 49). Thus these new Marxist feminists developed a 'dual-systems' theory which was a new way of analysing women's oppression both in terms of capitalism as well as patriarchy (49).

Some feminists who have used this theory are: Juliet Mitchell, Heidi Hartmann and Sylvia Walby. Hartmann argues that the merging of two separate systems i.e. Capitalism and Patriarchy, creates "[…] interdependence and solidarity among men, which allows them to dominate women" (50). She further explains that women's subordination at the hands of men is greatly founded on their control over women's labour and that men, taking advantage of this, do not allow women to get better paid work, thus keeping women

financially dependent on men. This issue of women's paid employment has been one of the major concerns of these new Marxist feminists (Freedman 50).

Another issue focused on by these new Marxist feminists is that of women working at home, which they refer to as 'women's unpaid labour'. Feminists Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James dealt with this issue in their work *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (1972), wherein they argue that women's unpaid work is advantageous to capitalism. They explicate that women undertake all the domestic work, which is necessary for the continuation of capitalism. Thus they suggest that women should be given due recognition and appreciation for their toil, by paying them for their work. This payment in their opinion should be made by the state rather than individual men, as the state benefits most from capitalism.

However, Christine Delphy, a French materialist feminist holds a contrasting view, as she argues that, "[…] within families men systematically exploit and benefit from women's labour within a domestic mode of production. […] Women's domestic work is undertaken as a personal service to a male head of household. He effectively appropriates her whole person and the labour she embodies, so that the work she does is potentially limitless and depends on his requirements" (Jackson 17). Thus, she states that it is not the capitalist state, but men who profit from women's hard work.

In the 1980's, with the advent of the theory of Post-Structuralism, and its influence on feminism, new feminist theories began to emerge. France was among the first to be influenced by it. They were also influenced by Beauvoir's application of existentialism to women's subordination in her *Second Sex*, thus creating a group of new French feminists, among which Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva are of eminence.

Hélène Cixous borrows the deconstructive theory of Jacques Derrida, from the post-structualist thought, and applies it to women's position in society. Derrida argues that "[…] western thought is grounded in a series of binary oppositions: light/darkness, good/evil" (Benstock et al. 165). Cixous goes further and argues that women and their identity is defined in terms of its opposition to men; she explicates that "[B]inary oppositions are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system: each opposition can be analysed as a

hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance" (Moi Feminist 124). Therefore, she labels the tendency of using binary oppositions for identity formation as a "[D]eath-dealing binary thought" (124). She feels that one should transcend and go beyond these binary oppositions.

In "The Laugh of Medusa" (1976), Cixous reveals that it is through writing that the opposition between the male and the female has remained intact. She says that "[…] defined in opposition to man, woman has been relegated to a subordinate position within language" (Benstock et al. 167). Therefore, she advocates the destruction of binary opposition, and instead proposes "[…] an alternative discursive practice – a *new insurgent* writing – as a means of unsettling the opposition that devalues the feminine" (167). This 'new insurgent writing refers to her vision of *écriture feminine.* Elucidating further on this vision she claims that:

> [I]t is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (qtd. in Benstock et al. 169)

She emphasizes on the need to give the silence a voice. Cixous believes that through the practice of *écriture feminine*, women will create their own identity through their own writings and will no longer be considered as the 'Other' (169).

Luce Irigaray also focuses on language and the post-structuralism theory of deconstruction of binary opposition, but with a difference. She defines the female language in its equation to the body and the "multiplicity of female desire" (170). Like Cixous, Irigaray also speaks of *écriture feminine,* wherein she says that a woman's desire, "its rhythms and pulsations", finds representation in language, therefore she perceives *écriture feminine* to be "[…] nonlinear, characterized by repetition, incompletion, disruption, and resistance to reason" through her argument, she focuses on the need to deconstruct phallogocentrism (Benstock et al. 170).

Julia Kristeva takes a different stand from this when she traces feminist subversion not in the body but in the "semiotic". Semiotic according to her, is "[…] the pre-Oedipal system of drives and pulsions that exists between the mother and the child and is 'analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm'" (Benstock et al. 172-173). In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva argues that the semiotic is "[…] a preverbal signifying system that 'precedes and underlies' the symbolic order governed by the Law of the Father" (172-173). Thus, influenced by post-structuralism, many French feminists came up with novel theories.

Feminism was also moulded by the postmodern frame of thought. Postmodernism argue that "[…] the guiding assumptions of Western thought are not universal and unchanging but derive from a particular moment in intellectual history: the Enlightenment" (Benstock et al. 176). Therefore, Jean-François Lyotard a postmodern theorist, identifies the Enlightenment theories as 'metanarratives' (176). Patricia Waugh in her essay, "Postmodernism and Feminism" explains how Postmodernism and Feminism are linked in their critique of the enlightenment thinkers:

> [F]eminism has been drawn into that postmodern critique which accuses Enlightenment thinkers of setting up so-called 'universal' categories of knowledge and value which actually exclude entire communities or groups of people, and of claiming 'objectivity' for knowledge which actually reflects vested interests. Feminism has in fact always contributed its own critique of the Enlightenment, arguing that the notion of a universal rational Subject is implicitly masculine, as is its understanding of history as a grand narrative of progress. (Jackson and Jones 177)

Postmodernism challenges the idea of universality that there is one culture, instead they give importance to plurality which does not exclude other cultures. Linda Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) argues that the feminists have revealed that the Enlightenment thought "[…] privileges male interests and values, asserting that claims about 'humanity' have typically referred to men of a particular culture, class, and race" (Benstock et al. 177). She further claims that feminism has highlighted the significance of the awareness that "women" is not one universal category but belongs to diverse cultures

and histories, each woman is different with regards to her race, class and sexual preference (177).

However, unlike Hutcheon, there are other theorists who argue that feminism also sometimes creates generalized statements about 'women'. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson state that some feminist theories, "'[…] are insufficiently attentive to historical and cultural diversity, and they falsely universalize features of the theorist's own era, society, culture, class, sexual orientation, and ethnic, or racial group'" (177-178). Thus postmodernism and feminism influenced each other while challenging the set beliefs of modernism.

2.4.5 The 1990's

By the 1990s, the Third Wave feminism had begun to manifest itself, which continues to date. This wave of the Feminist movement rose as a response to the second wave feminism and what were perceived as its failures.

Third wave feminists broadened their goals, focusing on ideas like Queer theory, abolishing gender roles, expectations and stereotypes. Third wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females, thereby questioning the norms that try to restrain women.

It is during this time that Lesbian feminist theories emerge, in which theorists like Ti-Grace Atkinson and Charlotte Bunch asserted that Lesbianism was a revolutionary feminist practice. They believe that lesbianism is an extension of feminism. Adrienne Rich in her work "Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence" argues that, "[…] **heterosexuality** was not natural, but an institution that enforced 'women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men'" (Benstock et al. 180). Rich further argues against the narrow way in which lesbianism is looked at i.e. as only a sexual preference. She rather perceives it in a wider spectrum, using the term "lesbian continuum", she says:

> I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it

> to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support […] we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of 'lesbianism.' (qtd. in Freedman 62)

Lesbian continuum has its focus on shared female experience and not just sexual relations.

During this period, feminists were also drawn towards pornography, and raised questions regarding it. Some feminists like Catharine Mackinnon, Susan Griffin and Robin Morgan saw pornography as a manifestation of men's control over women. Morgan argued that "[P]ornography is the theory and rape is the practice" (64).

Many feminists are against pornography because in their opinion, it encourages sexual violence, it is a humiliation for women, and through the production of pornography, women are sexually and financially exploited. Holding a contrasting view are feminists who view pornography as a medium of women's sexual liberation wherein women can freely express their sexual desires which were repressed as a result of patriarchal norms. For instance, Martha Minow sees pornography as sexually liberating and the ordinance against it as a tool of oppression (Freedman 65).

Third Wave feminism also contains internal debates between feminists, who believe that there are important differences between the sexes and those that believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes, and that gender roles are due to social conditioning.

Caroline Ramazonoglu and Janet Holland highlight the change that occurred within a century, in the way feminism was perceived. They maintain that:

> [B]y the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'feminism' in the English speaking world generally indicated the advocacy of women's rights. […] by the end of the twentieth century, feminism referred both a more specifically and more generally to theories of male dominance that took relations between women and men to be political, and feminist struggles to be political activity on behalf of women in general. (5)

Debates, discussions, diversions, and the emergence of new theories, continuously shape feminism from time to time, thereby creating various strands of feminism. Jane Freedman

opines that there exists not one but many feminisms as "[…] many of the different strands of feminism seem to be not only divergent but sometimes forcefully opposed" (1).

Various feminists in the West have brought out and worked upon different theories of feminism. Hence, it is significant to study not only the Feminist Movement but also Feminist Literary Criticism.

2.5 Feminist Literary Criticism

Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones in the introduction to their edited work titled: *Contemporary Feminist Theories* (1998), observe that:

> [F]eminist theory seeks to analyse the conditions which shape women's lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman. […] Theory, for us, is not an abstract intellectual activity divorced from women's lives, but seeks to explain the conditions under which those lives are lived. […] Feminist modes of theorizing contest androcentric ways of knowing, calling into question the gendered hierarchy of society and culture. Feminist theory is about thinking for ourselves – women generating knowledge *about* women and gender *for* women. (1)

Feminist literary criticism is a criticism which aims at analysing literature and the arts and the representation of women in it. In the early 1960s, feminist criticism and theory established itself as a distinct form of literary and cultural analysis. During this time feminists realized the importance of gathering women's writings and thereby forming a separate women's literary canon. Many feminists tried to recover those texts written by women in the past which were not considered within the existing literary canon. One such attempt was made by Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977). By compiling all the works by women which were buried and ignored by the androcentric literary canon, Showalter and others like Patricia Meyer Spacks and Ellen Moers challenged the notion of universal history, and argued that the literary history was biased.

2.5.1 Showalter's Two Types of Criticism

Around 1979, Elaine Showalter came up with another work titled "Toward a Feminist Poetics" wherein she identified two types of feminist criticism. One was 'feminist critique' that focused on women as readers, women as consumers of the literature produced by the male. She says that a feminist critic must first learn to become a resisting reader rather than an assenting reader and by doing this "[…] begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us" (Benstock et al. 158). She affirms that by resisting or rejecting what is written by the patriarchal male, the feminist critic should try to eject, to uproot the patriarchal ideologies instilled in the minds of women. This is one important aspect of feminist criticism.

The second type focuses on women as writers, women as producers of literature. Where women write about themselves and their world that was for long kept aside and hidden. Showalter calls it 'Gynocriticism'. Many feminists concentrate on this type of criticism, and from late 1970 to the 1980s this 'woman as a writer' criticism predominated.

M.H. Abrams defines gynocriticism as "[…] a criticism which concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their production, motivation, analyses, and interpretation, in all literary forms, including journals and letters" (95). Gynocritics try to identify distinct female subject matter in women's literature; they also try to see whether the domestic experiences of women are brought out by the women writers.

2.5.2 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), offered not only a revisionist literary history that had its focus on the women authors of the nineteenth century, but also "[…] a theory of female literary creation derived from a feminist reinterpretation of the 'anxiety of influence'" (Benstock et al. 158). Anxiety of influence was a concept used by Harold Bloom wherein male authors suffer anxiety when confronted by the literary achievements of their predecessors. Gilbert and Gubar apply this to women authors saying that they faced double anxiety not only because of their male literary

predecessors but also due to the restrictions against feminine authorship. They also argue that for the female authors "[…] the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and her-self" (158).

They state that the patriarchal texts offer two contrasting visions of women one as the 'good women', the saintly women following every norm of society, who are passive, docile and selfless. And the other as the 'bad women', the vamp, the monstrous creature who refuses the submissive role and asserts herself. Gilbert and Gubar say that the women writers of the nineteenth century use a strategy by overtly conforming to the patriarchal conventions, but in reality subvert them in their texts. Gilbert and Gubar comment that the result of this strategy is a "female schizophrenia of authorship" (Benstock et al. 159). Their feminist literary criticism is one in which "[…] the reader is attentive to textual strategies, to subversions and parodies of traditional plots, images and characters as means of recuperating the female author and her text" (159).

2.5.3 Toril Moi's Female Criticism and Feminine Theory

Toril Moi in her essay, "Feminist, Female, Feminine" distinguishes between female criticism and feminine theory. In her opinion, anything written about a woman does not become feminist in nature. The foundation of her discussion lies in the way she defines the terms feminist, female, and feminine. Feminist or feminism, in the words of Toril Moi, "[…] are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s" (117). She further states that feminist criticism then is "[…] a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature" (117).

Female or femaleness she says is a matter of biology; one is born a female. She says every female is not a feminist as feminism is a political commitment. She explains that "[…] the very fact of being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. […] A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a feminist one" (120). She believes that just because female experience has been described or discussed in a literary text, it does not become feminist in nature, since feminism and femaleness is not the same.

Feminine or femininity according to Toril Moi is a set of culturally defined characteristics. She opines that when a female is culturally transformed or constructed she becomes feminine, and that femininity is a social construct. She further elucidates that the patriarchal society imposes "[…] certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*" (123).

Based on these definitions Toril Moi divides feminist criticism in two categories 'female' criticism and 'feminine' theory. Female criticism refers to criticism which in some way focuses on women; it may or may not be feminist. In a literary work one may speak about the life of a woman, but may not go further than that and take a political stand, thus it becomes only a female text not a feminist one.

Feminine theory, on the other hand, is concerned with the construction of femininity, wherein a feminist critic would try to analyse how social institutions construct and mould the female to become feminine and fit into stereotypes.

The preceded discussion is an overview of feminism and feminist theory particularly in the West, but a special study on the feminist movement in India is pertinent as this thesis focuses on women empowerment in India, analysing select Indian auto-narratives. Feminism aims at empowerment of women which can be achieved only when women rise above the imposed patriarchal ideologies which make them subservient and the 'other' to men. It is necessary to know how these issues are viewed in the Indian context, and therefore, it is essential to explore the nature of feminism in India.

2.6 Feminist movements in India: A Brief Overview

In India, women and their status in society have gone through numerous ups and downs. It is said that in the Vedic age women enjoyed freedom and were given equal opportunities. Women were educated, they participated in religious rituals, and there were also women philosophers. However, due to various factors in the medieval ages, like the hierarchy of caste, the threat to social ethos posed by Muslim invasions, made the social structure already shaken by the challenges of new religions like Buddhism and Jainism even more rigid and intolerant. Gradually, the imposition of exclusionist practices and customs in

Hinduism by rigid and discriminatory norms as laid down in the shastras like *Manusmriti*, increased with the advent of the East India Company.

What was earlier only a restriction not to cross the Indus, *Sindhu bandi* turned to an all time ban on crossing the high seas. As such, the society suffered due to lack of contact with the outside world and absence of any influence of the changing times. With cattle and other immovable property, women also came to be seen as possessions. Moreover, undue imposition of excessive norms of female chastity and loyalty further confined women to the home and hearth. This also curtailed their access to the outside world under the perceived threat of abductions or waywardness. In fine, society became very rigid and curbed the freedom enjoyed by the women in the hoary past. Consequently, women's status went lower down and they became near-chattels, confined to their homes.

In their book *Status, Education and Problems of Indian Women* (1986), Roopa Vohra and Arun K. Sen speak about the status of women and the effects of the Manu code on it. They state that according to Manu:

> […] a woman, when child, must be kept under the control of her father, when married under her husband and when widow under her son; thus a woman is never allowed to live independently. [...] It is said that women are faithless, ungrateful, treacherous, untrustworthy and strict control must be kept over them. It is noted that a village or a town in which women are strong is sure to come to grief. (14)

Thus, Indian women and their position suffered a great deal.

In India, feminism is not a recent phenomenon; although the term feminism came to be used in India only in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the struggle towards women's upliftment and equal status in society has existed for a long time and has sometimes been referred to as Indian women's movement. Women way back even in earlier times expressed themselves through literature particularly poems, some of these portrayed a sense of non-conformism towards the patriarchal society.

In the 6th century B.C., Buddhist *theris* or senior nuns composed songs, and a collection of these are known as Therigatha, "[T]he earliest known anthology of women's literature – in India certainly, but possibly anywhere in the world" (65) according to Susie Tharu and K.

Lalita the editors of *Women's Writing in India* (1991), a compilation wherein some of these songs have been translated into English from regional languages. Most of the poems deal with a sense of freedom from the routine life of a woman, the struggle of wives stifled with household duties and trapped within the house.

The editors elucidate that "[T]he focus of each lyric in the *Therigatha* is an epiphanic experience in which the painful constrictions of secular life fall away and the torment of feelings subsides as the peace and freedom of nirvana are attained" (67). In a society which upholds the institution of marriage, these women highlight upon the drudgery of marital life, where Buddhism to them is a path of freedom from their suffering. Hence a non-conformist approach is witnessed in these poems.

Later, during the period 100 B.C. to 250 A.D., there were the Sangam Poets in the southern part of India, these women would write on war and women's reaction to war. However, there were also some who wrote on themes like love and physical intimacy. Issues such as these were considered as taboos and women were not allowed even to think of it; but breaking all such taboos women even in this era have written poems on such themes. Thus, one observes that feminist consciousness in India has not emerged only in recent times. Although the term did not exist, an urge among womenfolk to express themselves and the ability to resist restrictive social norms was subtly present in women even in those times.

There were also movements in India which tried to support women and provide them with opportunities for their empowerment. The Bhakti Movement in India was one such illustration. The movement was not aimed towards women or their upliftment; it was rather a spiritual movement which originated in seventh century Tamil Nadu, and during the fourteenth - seventeenth centuries, it evolved as a great movement that swept through India. Bhakti movement was fundamentally a Hindu religious movement that promoted the belief that moksha was attainable by everyone. It advocates a personal connection with God as a form of devotion. This movement was initiated by a group of *sants* or teachers who preached that one could cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste and simply express their overwhelming love for god. Devotional literature also developed abundantly during this period.

The Bhakti movement was a new path of devotion wherein there were no caste or gender barriers, and women from various sections of society found entry and acceptance in this mode of worship. Many women actively participated in it; they joined in *kathas* and *kirtans* organized by various saints of the movement. Many became Bhakti poets and for the first time expressed themselves through literature specially poetry. They found a way of letting out their views and opinions that were never before given consideration. Through the middle ages, Muktabai, Janabai, Sakhubai, Mirabai, Akkamahadevi, Bahinabai and Janaki are some of the known poets from across the regional and linguistic spectrum of the India of those times.

2.6.1 The Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, after the exposure to western education and the new ideas of liberalism and equality, educated and enlightened Indians reflected on their own society, and realized the need for reform. Thus a new movement began, the Social Reform Movement which had its focus on the inhuman practices that victimized and oppressed women.

Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Pandita Ramabai, Savitribai Phule, Ramabai Ranade and many others started this movement to uproot the customs and practices that were cruel and inhuman. They fought for the cause of women to put an end to sati and child marriage and encourage widow remarriage and education for women, which made them the main pioneers of feminism in India.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy denounced polygamy and sati through his Amitya Sabha in 1815 and Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar petitioned to legalize widow remarriage in Bengal in the 1850s. The Prarthana Samaj in 1867 and the Vedic Hindu revivalist Arya Samaj in 1875 promoted women's education and criticized misogynistic marriage customs as injurious to female health. In 1896, Justice M.G. Ranade and his wife Ramabai Ranade started the ladies social conference, a secular forum within the Indian National Congress (*Encyclopedia of India*).

Women also played an important role in the social reform movement. Although the nineteenth century reform movement was known mainly for its male reformers, there were

eminent women too who contributed to the reform movement. Tarabai Shinde, an activist of Phule's Satyasodhak Samaj wrote a revolutionary article in 1882 namely "Stri-Purush Tulana", wherein she "[…] refused to consider home and family as some sacrosanct domains and she positively demanded state intervention to make it easier for women to live and marry independently, and to punish men who corrupted the innocent". (Ghosal 796)

Savitribai Phule worked to abolish discrimination; she was the youngest teacher in India at the age of 17. Along with her husband, she founded the first women's school in Pune in 1848. They also organized a strike against the barbers to persuade them to stop shaving the heads of widows.

Pandita Ramabai was also one of the early reformers. She founded the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882 and also stood for the need for women's education before Lord Ripon's Education Commission and suggested that Indian women should get admission to medical colleges. In 1889 she formed the Sharada Sadan, an institute for widows in Mumbai. Although her contribution to the social reform movement in the nineteenth century was great, she was never accepted ungrudgingly within the reform movement because of her conversion to Christianity (Kumar 26).

Swarnakumari Debi, was also a reformer. In 1882 she founded the Ladies Theosophical society, and in 1886 she started the Sakhi Samiti, with the aim of bringing women together for the cause of social welfare. She also laid emphasis on women's education. Radha Kumar states that, "[S]warnakumari Debi was one of the first two delegates elected from Bengal to represent the state at the 1890 Congress Session" (38).

Ramabai Ranade was one of the first women's rights activists. She started the 'Hindu Ladies Social Club' in Mumbai to develop public speaking among women. She was also the founder and president of 'Seva Sadan Society' in Pune in 1915. She worked towards improvement in the lives of women and opened a girls' school in Pune called 'Hujurpaga'.

Many scholars try to understand the motives of the male social reformers. In their book, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (1991), Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah illuminate the attempt made to comprehend whether the objective behind the "male-initiated" women's upliftment campaign, was

"[…] the production of companionable wives and enlightened mothers, the strengthening of the family structure or simply humanitarian feelings for inhuman and unjust atrocities" (16). Gandhi and Shah then elucidate that though such analyses are necessary, one cannot overlook the significance of this reform movement as:

> […] it was the first public propagation of the belief that it is not the destiny or fate of women to be oppressed, illiterate and ignorant. … Secondly, the Social Reform Movement set in motion forces which encouraged the emergence of a number of women doctors, social workers, teachers and scholars, the first cadres of the women's movement who gradually took over from men the cause and the organization. (16-17)

English educated women, who benefited from the earlier campaigns, started their own organizations to empower more women. Women centered organizations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and Anjuman-e-Islam were formed, each with its own agenda, with a common aim to empower women by teaching them some skills and educating them. YWCA and AIWC women faced the world with some support of male family members while the Anjuman-e-Islam had to work within the matrix of purdah.

By the late nineteenth century, social reform movements were beginning to show effects. Women started entering various professions. Women novelists such as Nirupama Devi and Anurupa Devi were being referred to in Bengali literary circles and were members of literary clubs. Maharashtra's first woman novelist, Kashibai Kanitkar, started writing in the 1890s, and in the same year its first woman doctor, Anandibai Joshi was qualified. By then, her cousin and a great intellectual as well as social reformer, Pandita Ramabai had been well entrenched in reform activity for women.

Women progressed in many ways but it is important to note that these women who entered the public sphere, were incomparable in number to the multitude of women who were left in the darkness, as only the privileged and middle classes were benefitted by the reform movement in India. Women from the other sections were nowhere to be seen. In addition to that the society at this time was still hostile towards women who tried to challenge stereotypes. Radha Kumar in her book *The History of Doing* (1993), comments, "[D]espite

these signs of progress the milieu in which such women lived was often harsh and hostile one" (32).

2.6.2 Early Twentieth Century

The decade 1910-1920 was one in which first attempts for setting up all India women's organizations were made. There were many regional organizations already established during this time. Some of these were practical social reform organizations, others were discussion platforms for women. However, efforts were also being made to form women's organizations on a larger scale. These are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

It was at this time that some women formed a base for women's entry in the nationalist movement. Sarojini Naidu was one of such women who emphasized the sustenance women could and would give to the nationalist movement. Radha Kumar quotes a part of the address that Sarojini Naidu gave in the 1917 Calcutta Congress on the subject of women's activism: "[…] when your hour strikes, when you need torch bearers in the darkness to lead you, when you need standard bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holders of your banner, and sustainers of your strength" (5).

Thus the Calcutta Congress signalled a new consciousness that arose in women. It was here that for the first time the role of women in the nationalist movement was confidently emphasized in such a forum and in such unambiguous, concrete terms.

2.6.3 Towards Independence

Feminism was at its peak in India when for the first time thousands of women stepped out of their household concerns and entered the socio-political front to take part in India's freedom struggle. In his essay, "Nineteenth Century Social Reform and the 'Women's Question'" (2008), Balaji Ranganathan states that: "[T]he nationalistic movement actually becomes the stage where public life for women in India actually cut across castes, religion and work biases" (Harish et al. 174).

Some women like Sarojini Naidu were already involved in the movement, but now through the awareness gained by women and the constant encouragement given by Mahatma Gandhi and others, women from various sections of society who never before crossed the threshold of their houses and lived in seclusion, came in huge numbers to participate in movements of non-co-operation and Satyagraha. Women's organizations such as Desh Sevika Sangh, Nari Satyagraha Samiti, Mahila Rashtriya Sangh, Ladies Picketing Board, Stri Swarajya Sangh and Swayam Sevika Sangh began mushrooming at this time to organize the mass boycott of foreign cloth and liquor.

The female family members of the Congress leaders gave up purdah and were even ready to face the lathi charge of the police or end up in jail. Jawaharlal Nehru in *An Autobiography* (2004) was proud to hear that his wife and sisters were actively participating in the non-co-operation movement, while he was in jail. When he got the news that his wife was to be imprisoned, he was happy that she would get to taste the pride of being imprisoned for the country (253).

Hence, during the Independence movement women on a large scale gained political experience and the confidence to stand up for their country and consequently for themselves.

2.6.4 Post-Independence

After the Independence of India, along with the end of the freedom struggle, the feminist movement slackened. It was not as active as before, for now women were already given their rights for which they had been fighting. In the words of Suma Chitnis, "[…] by the time the country obtained independence in 1947, they had already established themselves as equals in political life. Both as a tribute to the equality of their participation, and as a reaffirmation of Gandhi's commitment to equality of the sexes, the India constitution explicitly and categorically granted sex equality" (Chaudhuri 16).

After having been given equal status by the Constitution of India, the Indian women felt there was no need to further the struggle. Therefore, a lull in the feminist movement was witnessed. However, later the state of affairs changed, as poverty and unemployment became widespread and people grew disillusioned with the government's development

policies, the prevalent economic rights, land rights and the price rise. Therefore, a large number of organizations and movements emerged both on the regional and national level. The movements that took place post-1960 were of great significance in the light of Feminism in India, as they emphasized women-centric issues along with social welfare. A detailed study of these movements is included in Chapter Five, which deals with the post-Independence era.

During this time, on the international front, the United Nations declared 1975–1985 as the International Decade of Women and organized the World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. The World Plan of Action formulated during the Conference stressed the need for research, documentation and analyses into processes in society that create structures of gender inequalities. In India, the National Committee on the Status of Women had already been set up to examine the status of women in the country and to investigate into the extent to which the constitutional and legal provisions had impacted women's status including their employment and education. The Status of Women's Committee appointed by the Government of India, released a report in 1974 called *Towards Equality*. The findings of the committee revealed that the constitutional guarantee of equality between men and women had not been translated to reality.

In 1975, India was also going through a tough period under the Emergency rule which was lifted only in 1977. By the time the Emergency was lifted, several women's groups had taken up the issue of democratic rights, in tandem with other Human Rights' groups, including those of youth wings of political parties and University students, among others.

During the 1980s, the issue of women's oppression came to be seriously deliberated, not only in discussion forums, seminars and 'serious' articles but also in popular media. *Baija* in Marathi, *The Feminist Network* in English, and *Manushi* in Hindi and English were some of the first women's newsletters and magazines that appeared at this time (Gandhi and Shah 21). Women, who had on their own, identified the sources of their problems and indignity, began to acquire a language, an organizational platform, a collective identity and legitimacy which they did not have earlier. The later part of the seventies and the eighties witnessed a spurt in feminist writing because the feminist literary critics came to believe

that women need to create a literature of their own in which the feminine issues and experiences could be considered and confronted by the female sensibility.

The International Women's Decade gave Indian women the necessary boost to fight for an equal status, and to fight against patriarchal ideologies. These organizations formed at various points of time continue to fight for the rights of women and for gender equality.

Feminism has taken up various issues and challenges, debating on various aspects of a woman's life. One of the challenges that feminism faced in India was in the identity of 'women' itself being punctured by the divisions in terms of region, religion, caste, class, etc.

Indian women have been continuing with the feminist movements to date. But the nature of this struggle, as Suma Chitnis says, is very different from the Western feminist struggle because "[I]n India, legal and constitutional rights are already extensively available to women. The problem is that they are not adequately used" (Chaudhuri 20-21).

Hence, feminism in India is not a mirror image of the feminism in the West. Although the term 'feminism' may have been first used in the west, Indian feminism is not a mere borrowing of that variety of feminism. In fact, Indian feminism or women's movement in India is linked to Indian history, society, culture and practices; it is influenced by the experiences of Indian women. Therefore, various Indian scholars propose the creation of the Indian theory of Feminism as they assert that the Western model cannot be blindly used in the Indian context.

2.7 Indian Perspectives of Feminism

Many Indian scholars and critics are dissatisfied by the usage of the western notion of feminism in India. They state that a lot of the Indian feminist discourses take western paradigms as their model, attempting to fit in the Indian reality into that borrowed framework.

The question raised by many scholars is whether: Indian women's situation being different from that of the women in the West, can a foreign model of Feminism accommodate the Indian ethos? Kapil Kapoor in his essay "Hindu Women, Traditions and Modernity"

explains that, "[…] it is not that women in India have no problems the issue is whether these can be rightly understood in an alien social framework without reference to our own history of social practice and ideas" (Padia 28). In addition, there are scholars who argue that in blindly accepting the western model of Feminism, we also accept its views and assumptions that are most likely to be culture-specific, which do not fit into the Indian culture and situation.

Indian women scholars like Madhu Kishwar put forward their opinions regarding the usage of the western concept of 'feminism' in the Indian scenario. Kishwar in her essay "A Horror Of Ism's: Why I Do Not Call Myself a Feminist" comments, "[…] the word feminism means nothing to most Indians, except a microscopic number of highly westernized, elite people […] if anything, the term has acquired many negative connotations in recent years. It inevitably evokes associations with the women's simplistic stereotypes" (Chaudhuri 31-32).

In her essay, Madhu Kishwar affirms that feminism is a western term which comes with its own connotations that do not fit into the Indian context and therefore most Indian women do not identify with it. An example of this difference between the Western and Indian context is that in the West, feminism is a fight for women's rights, and this fight is predominantly a fight by women and many a time against men. Feminism in the west has been exclusively a women's movement where even today men are not completely accepted, but in India it is different.

In India, from the very beginning empowering women was not only a woman's prerogative; men also equally contributed to the women's movement. Therefore, the social reform movement in India was inclusive of men; in fact it was pioneered by men. In India, the fight was never against men but rather against the patriarchal ideologies that were instilled in men as well as in women. As such, it is a fight between the progressive and conservative elements of society. It is a fight, as Kishwar declares, to ensure that women's rights "[…] are respected and acknowledged by their family. Women prefer to avoid asserting their rights in a way that isolates them from those they consider their own" (32).

Another important difference in India is that, for a large period of time Indian women were doubly victimized, they faced not only sexist oppression but also colonial oppression. Consequently a Western framework of feminism does not touch upon this aspect.

One can say that due to this kind of criticism against the usage of the western framework of feminism in India, a need to construct an Indian theory of feminism has been upheld by many Indian scholars. Avadhesh Kumar Singh in his essay "Constructing an Indian Theory of Feminism" opines that, "[…] the construction of an Indian theory of feminism is a means of knowing others, and thereby oneself. It is one of the ways of resisting oppression and suppression, of emancipation and empowerment" (Padia 67). In his essay, Singh enlists some significant aspects that should be emphasized, while creating an Indian theory of feminism. He asserts that, this Indian theory should be inclusive, and not exclusive in nature. He observes that:

> [A]n Indian feminist theory cannot afford to be exclusive. As an attitude, exclusiveness is un-Indian. In accordance with the Indian situation it has to be pluralist, un-homogenizing and inclusive of position and problems of women of all regions, religions, castes, classes and communities, be they bureaucrats or workers, scientists or social workers, farm-workers or factory-workers, and particularly the *dalit* women. (Padia 55)

He also focuses on the importance of reading ancient Indian texts, as there is a need to understand and take into account the customs and traditions of India.

Singh further proposes that the Indian theory of Feminism should be positive and pro-active, receiving and responding to theoretic positions. Indian women, he opines, should read and write vigorously, and examine the given discourses. Singh states that this Indian theory of Feminism should create awareness against oppressive forces such as the neo-capitalist, neo-colonial and market forces that use women's bodies for commercialized purposes in advertisements, to sell products. It should help women to counter patriarchy and realize their own capacities (67).

Maya Pandit, another Indian scholar speaks of the Indian feminist literary criticism, in her essay "Towards Indian Feminist Literary Criticism" and claims that in the last twenty years the Indian feminist literary criticism "has established itself as a critical inquiry" (307). This

inquiry, according to her, is "[…] different from the dominant traditions in Western feminist criticism, particularly of the liberal and radical kind, in several ways" (Pandit 307). She further elucidates this difference and asserts that:

> [I]n the first place, the liberal and radical feminists have simply neglected writing in the (so-called) third world countries which, for them, is peripheral, occupying a remote place on their agenda. […] But more important are their implicit assumptions about the homogeneity of canon and about universal sisterhood which is a euphemistic way of saying that the experiences of white middle class women represent those of all women. There is often a tendency in this criticism to celebrate the essentialist notion of a 'real, natural, femaleness which the third world women find problematic because it legitimizes the same tendency reflected in notions of universal values rejected by them. (308)

Maya Pandit then explicates that Indian feminism is not just a singular expression of feminism, rather it is "[…] a plethora of voices; yet all of them have a central concern: to create a criticism that is neither universal, nor written only from the margins" (309). Indian feminist literary criticism, as a critical inquiry is a twofold endeavour. On the one hand, it attempts to uncover women's "invisible experiences" with regards to "[…] new images, representations, forms and styles and to evolve a critical language which expresses these systematically" (309). On the other, is the effort to "[…] establish a solid tradition of women's writing which dates back to sixth century before Christ in order to create a new historiography" (309).

A major attempt has been to recreate the history of female writing in India, which aims at transforming the established literary tradition and scrutinizing the way in which women have endeavoured to "articulate and respond" to various gender based ideologies that are believed to be "class and caste and race bound". The Indian Feminist criticism studied these women's writing to unearth "'[…] the embattled practices of self and agency' and to demonstrate how 'women's texts challenge the new authorities in various ways and help consolidate the protocols of power'" (Pandit 310).

Such a study has resulted in the creation of anthologies which sought to give representation and recognition to women writers of the past who were side-lined by their male counterparts. *Women Writing in India* (1991), volumes 1 and 2, edited by Susie Tharu and

K. Lalita, *In Other Worlds* by Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, and *The Inner Courtyard* are some examples of such anthologies. This endeavour of recording women's writings of the past is quite similar to the study undertaken in the West by feminists like Elaine Showalter, who unearthed the works of several British women novelists of the past.

In an attempt at giving a new perspective to Indian Feminist literary theory, Malashri Lal in the essay "Literary Feminism in India: In Search of Theory", proposes an aspect of Indian feminism that according to her may lead to beneficial research. This aspect is:

> […] the re-invention of secular mythology which, while drawing upon a continuous history of story-telling, nevertheless adapts cleverly – and critically – to the milieu and the moment. Being secular, rather than religious, they permeate the textual fabric to give it additional value without changing the essential pattern. (Padia 80)

She exemplifies this by analysing the image of Mirabai, whose determination and will to be true to her love against all social bondages, and consequently, her non-conformism and rebellion, draw her closer to the contemporary women. Thus Mirabai's character has been re-written with a feminist perspective. The main aim here is to "[…] demystify tradition so as to make it an operational apparatus for the new age Indians who cannot accept old deifications" (Padia 81).

In this manner, many scholars have tried to come up with various theories and approaches to create an Indian theory of feminism that focuses on women and the problems and challenges they face within India's socio-cultural and historic backdrop. It is poised to take into account issues that are more specific to India as against the so-called universal claim made by certain Western feminists.

This study attempts to examine women empowerment movements in the pre-independence and post-independence eras and their impact on women. Hence, the theories and critical perceptions highlighted here have been used as a framework for the subsequent analyses. Since this is a literary study, the genre of auto-narratives is used as primary texts. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the genre in an elaborate and on a wide-ranging scale. This discussion is undertaken in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three

Auto-narratives and Empowerment: A Critical Discussion

3.1. Introduction to Auto-narratives

Auto-narrative is a semi-neologism, coined by merging two existing words i.e. Auto and narrative. Auto- refers to self, that is "of or by oneself, independently" (Onions 63) and a narrative "is a story […] involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do" (Abrams 181). Therefore, auto-narrative is the story of oneself, an account of the real lived experiences of the writer of the narrative. It denotes the act of writing of, about and through self.

The term auto-narrative also refers to the genre of writing about one's own life, wherein the subject dealt with, by the author, is centred around his/her own life and experiences. This is a more recent term for self-writing, which was earlier known broadly as Autobiography.

Since the term autobiography has a direct bearing on the term auto-narratives, it is gainful to discuss it at some length here, tracing its origin and development. Autobiography is used not only to refer to a specific way of writing about oneself, but is also one of the earliest and most popularly used terms to refer to the whole genre of self-writing. In her book *Autobiography* (2007), Linda Anderson traces the first usage of the word in English and observes that:

> [T]he term 'autobiography' is commonly thought to have been coined by the nineteenth-century poet Robert Southey in 1809 when he was describing the work of a Portuguese poet, Francisco Vieura; however, there is evidence of slightly earlier usage, at the end of the eighteenth century, in a review attributed to William Taylor of Isaac D'Israeli's *Miscellanies*, where he ponders whether 'autobiography', though 'pedantic', might not have been a better term than the 'hybrid' word 'self-biography' employed by D'Israeli. (7)

The 'slightly earlier usage' indicates that it was put to use in 1797 (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 3). Be that as it may, Anderson's discussion of the terms draws attention to the likely generic ambiguity that could be shrouding over the two terms, auto-biography and self-biography. This is underscored by the findings of Helga Schwalm. In her article titled

"Autobiography", she claims an even earlier usage of the term 'self-biography' in German. "In German, the term *Selbstbiographie* first featured in the collective volume *Selbstbiographien berühmter Männer* (1796)" which meant, "'Self-Biographies by Famous Men'" (n.p.). Later in the early nineteenth century (1818–19), "[J]ean Paul called his unfinished and unpublished autobiography *Selberlebensbeschreibung*", that is, "'description of one's life by oneself'" (Schwalm n.p.).

However, further on, Schwalm traces the English usage of the two terms and thereby validates Anderson's clubbing of them under the common rubric of self-writing. She opines that neologisms such as self-biography, auto-biography

> […] reflect a concern with a mode of writing only just considered to be a distinct species of (factual) literature at the time; not until the mid-18th century did autobiography separate from historiography as well as from a general notion of biography. The latter, variously coined 'life', 'memoir' or 'history', had not distinguished between what Johnson then seminally parted as 'telling his own story' as opposed to 'recounting the life of another. (Schwalm n.p.)

Autobiography can be defined as a non-fictional narration centred on the contemplation and reflection of the author's self, by the author herself or himself. It has been defined by a French Theorist, Philippe Lejeune as, "[A] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person *concerning his own existence*, focusing on his individual life, in particular on *the development of his personality*" (Emphasis added; qtd. in Anderson 2). The two phrases emphasized in the definition are very significant because they help differentiate autobiography from biography and also from other forms of self-referential writing like memoirs, confessions, and reminiscences.

It will not be out of place to dwell on the basic difference between these genres and autobiography. Biography is a genre wherein the life of another person, usually a renowned popular person, is narrated by the author. Therefore, although it is similar to autobiography because of its focus on the life of a real, non-fictional person, it is also dissimilar to it since the subject and the author of the autobiography is the same person as the writer.

Smith and Watson (2010) elucidate that, "[I]n biography, scholars of other people's lives document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject." While in autobiography, "[…] subjects write about their own lives predominantly, even if they write about themselves in the second or third person, or as a member of a community. And they write simultaneously from externalized and internal points of view, taking themselves as both subject and object, or thematizing that distinction" (*A Guide* 5).

Sarojini elucidates that there is a close relation between autobiography and memoirs, but it is the difference in emphasis which separates the two. In her article on "Autobiography" she observes that:

> [T]he memoirist concentrates on recording public events and lays but little stress on the 'self'. Memoirs are usually written by a person who has either played a distinguished role in public life or has had the opportunity to observe, at close quarters, history in the making. He is, therefore primarily, concerned, with public men and matters – the political luminaries and social winds of change. It differs from pure autobiography in its focusing point. The illumination of the self is but incidental. […] In this respect, the art of the memoirist is not a self-conscious art, nor does it require any act of introspection. He is merely expected to give a running commentary on his life and times as he witnessed it, enriching his account by his personal reactions. (201)

Autobiography centres upon the growth and development of the central character, who is also the author. It involves self-introspection. It deals with the autobiographer's private life, ideologies and attitudes towards society and fellow human beings. Sarojini further asserts the distinction between memoirs, reminiscences and confessions. She enunciates:

> [T]he memoirist concentrates attention on public events, the writer of the reminiscences penetrates personal relationships. There is a light shift of emphasis. The focus is still on the outside world, not the inner self. It is an account of action and reaction of human relationships. The confession too, is an account of a man's private life, centering on his emotions, feelings, secrets and frustrations. The writer deals essentially with his private world. The memoir is more like a chronicle, relating the individual with history; the confession is meant to bare the inner thoughts and chronicle the history of the mind. Autobiography is a blend of both confession and memoir. (202)

What blurs these distinctions and brings together all these forms of writing about oneself under the proposed term 'auto-narratives', is their basis on an individual's life, the real lived experiences, which are portrayed through a narrative by the concerned individual alone. However, as per the changing times and notions the terminology used to refer to this whole genre has undergone many shifts and changes. They have been discussed in brief below.

3.2 Shifts in Terminology

As has been discussed earlier, besides autobiography, terms like memoir, confessions etc. were used to refer to this genre. However, it was during the Enlightenment era in the west that the term 'Autobiography' was adopted as the term for this generic practice and it still continues to be widely used. Nonetheless, in the wake of postmodern and postcolonial criticism, autobiography was challenged as being exclusive and, therefore, inadequate to represent the large range of related but diverse genres used all over the world.

'Autobiography' was said to privilege "[…] the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing" thus in this canonization, the theorists highlighted the implicit assumption, "[…] that many other kinds of life writing produced at the same time have lesser value and were not 'true' autobiography" (Smith and Watson *A Guide* 3). Those which were sidelined by this aspect of autobiography were the slave narratives and narratives of women's domestic life (3).

Consequently, there were scholars like Julie Rak and Leigh Gilmore, who tried to address this problem of the exclusivity in autobiography, "[…] by shifting the term of reference to autobiographical *discourse*" (emphasis added; Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 3). According to these critics the shift to discourse would make it more inclusive. In this context Rak pertinently opines that:

> [T]his shift from genre to discourse opens to the scenes of autobiographical inscription beyond the printed life story. It also attends to the aspects of power inherent in acts of autobiographical inscription and recognizes that those whose identities, experiences, and histories remain marginal, invalidated, invisible, and partial negotiate and alter normative or traditional frames of identity in their differences. (qtd. in Smith and Watson 3)

During this postmodern era the term memoir regained its popularity and began to be used to describe various practices of "[S]elf life writing" (3). Historically, this term was used to specify a type of self-referential writing, which was considered to be different from autobiography, as the author emphasized only one period or section of his/her life.

In contemporary times, this categorization and classification has given way to a more universal approach. Therefore, the distinction between an autobiography and a memoir is less rigorously perceived. Smith and Watson affirm that "[I]n contemporary writing, the categorization of memoir often signals *autobiographical works* characterized by density of language and self-reflexivity about the writing process, yoking the author's standing as a professional writer with the work's status as an aesthetic object" (Emphasis added; *A Guide* 4).

Due to the multiple uses and at times shifting sense of terms such as autobiography and memoir, umbrella terms like self-narrative and auto-narrative which encompass various practices of writing about one's own life have come into currency. Although there may be some distinctions between autobiography and memoir, such all-encompassing terms like auto-narrative, blur the differences and make way for more fluid and flexible genres.

As G. Thomas Couser in his work "Genre Matters" says, the use of such inclusive terms "[…] does not deny generic distinctions but rather reflects an impulse toward catholicity and toward reconsideration of traditional definitions and distinctions" (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 4). However, some scholars such as Paul John Eakin and James Olney, still prefer to use the more conventional term 'autobiography' with reference to this genre. Thus, for the purpose of this study, henceforth, both the terms autobiography and auto-narratives, will be used to refer to the whole gamut of self-life writing in the printed form.

3.3 Historical Overview of Autobiographical Writings

The autobiographical practice has a long history, as the act of self-representation existed even before the beginning of written literature per se. According to scholars like Smith and Watson "[T]he oral performance of self-narrative has existed in many indigenous cultures prior to literacy" (*A Guide* 103). These critics also refer to, "[…] modes of written self-

inscription in China as early as two thousand years ago, in Japan […] a thousand years ago, in Islamic-Arabic literature as early as the twelfth century, in India during the medieval period (the *bhakti* poetry of devotional engagement with the sacred), and in North Africa in the fourteenth century (Ibn Khaldûn's *At-Ta'rîf*)" (104).

It is pertinent to recall, as stated by Helga Schwalm, that it was only in the 18th century when autobiography was separated from historiography and biography. Hence, the earlier auto-narratives are not strictly autobiographical, as per the modern notion.

Georg Misch a twentieth century German scholar in the history of autobiography analyses the traces of autobiographical elements in letters, travelogues, battle narratives and so on. In his book, which is partly translated as *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, he provides evidence of reference and autobiographical content in funerary inscriptions about battles and other early texts like funeral orations, familiar letters, and travel narratives (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 104). These early autobiographical writings were not necessarily in book form, they were written as letters, historical recordings and even poems.

The first full length acknowledged autobiography in book form is *Confessions* of Saint Augustine written in 397 C.E, wherein Augustine writes of his life from the perspective of his conversion to Christianity. Mish mentions the autobiographical writings of medieval Christians, which were about the lives of Christian saints but written in a devotional vein. He also brings to light the use of self-reference into traditional poetry by Petrarch and Dante in the fourteenth century (105-106). Later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the focus of autobiographies changed from spirituality to self.

Interestingly, in the eighteenth century enlightenment era, there was suddenly an explosion of autobiographical writings throughout the world, this was as a result of "[…] a democratization of the institution of life writing. More and more people – merchants, criminals, middle-class women, ex-slaves – turned to life narratives as a means to know themselves and position themselves within the social world" (115). From then on, the practice of autobiographical writings has continued till date, altering with time and with

newer critical perceptions. Such a rise and growth of auto-narratives is witnessed in India too.

3.3.1 Indian Autobiographical Tradition

It has been long presumed by scholars like Pascal Roy, that the autobiographical practice in India began only after its contact with the west. It was earlier perceived that in the pre-colonized India, Indians did not bother to write about their lives because of certain beliefs, like the belief in fate or *karma*, according to which all that took place in one's life, was destined to happen. In order to write an autobiography, a sense of individualism was considered necessary, but individualism was not considered significant by the Indian mind-set, and this emerged as an obstacle to the autobiographical practice (Sinha).

However, in *The Indian Autobiographies in English* (1978), R.C.P. Sinha argues that even though such obstacles were present, there have been autobiographical writings in the pre-colonized India. Interestingly, Sinha unearths the Indian autobiographical tradition from the Vedic times. Albeit these writings do not have a definitive structure, it is still an evidence of self-representation.

One of the earliest works considered to be autobiographical is the *Danastuti* or *praise of gifts* in the *Rigveda*. These are verses centered on the gifts and donations received by the composer *rishi* from the king. Here the rishi also speaks about himself and his family. *The Lament of the Gambler*, another verse of the *Rigveda*, is considered to be a remarkable autobiographical piece according to Sinha, as this gambler rishi, confesses how his life was ruined by gambling. This work is considered autobiographical as the gambler reveals his life, and "the psychological waverings of an addict's mind" (14). The inscriptions of Ashoka's life on the rocks and stone pillars, that were written much later, are also considered autobiographical.

As explained before, these early autobiographical works were neither independent works, nor were they in book form. In India, for instance, there were the prologues of plays, wherein the dramatist would write about themselves and their lives, the Sanskrit dramatist, Sudraka, is one such person who wrote of his life in the prologue, which is considered

autobiographical (17). Later, in 735 A.D there was Bhavabhuti, who also gave an autobiographical account in the prologue of his plays.

Autobiographical practices were also found entwined within biographies of patron kings. Bana Bhatta's *Harsa-Carita* is a historical romance based on the life of his patron king Harsavardhana of Thanesar and Kanauj. However, in the first two chapters, Bhatta gives a detailed account of his own life and his family (17). Like Bhatta, another writer Bilhan, also provides a long account of his own life within the biography of his patron king, Vikramaditya VI of Kalyana, in the eleventh century A.D titled, *Vikramankadeva-Carita* (22).

There has also been an intermingling of autobiography and history. For instance, Kalhana in the twelfth century writes a historical survey on the surviving Sanskrit literature, titled *Rajatarangini,* wherein he has also spoken about himself (23). There have also been autobiographies in poetic form like those composed by Amir Khusrau (Sinha 27).

The first independent Indian autobiography is the twelfth century *Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi*, the thirty-page autobiography of Sultan Firoz Shah. In the fourteenth century, almost a hundred and fifty years after that, came the famous autobiography of Babur, in Chagtai Turki, titled, *Babur-nama or Tuzk-i-Baburi*. After Babur, his daughter Gul-Badan Begum wrote the reminiscences of her father and brother Humayun titled *Humayun-nama* in Persian. In this regard, Sinha claims, "[S]he is perhaps the first Indian woman to write her reminiscences. Though she writes mainly of her father and brother, she also provides a glimpse into aspects of her personality" (35). From this point onwards, there are many such autobiographical writings found in India.

By the eighteenth century, more and more autobiographies emerged, particularly those written in English, such as Raja Rammohan Roy's short sketch of his life in the form of a letter. Later, in the nineteenth century, there was Lutfullah's *Autobiography* (1857), the first full length Indian autobiography in English, followed by many others. During this time, Rassundari Devi's autobiography *Amar Jiban* was published in 1876. This Bengali work is considered to be the first full-fledged autobiography written by an Indian woman.

Later during the freedom struggle, this autobiographic practice increased manifold. Sinha affirms, "[W]hen the struggle for freedom became intensified and the whole nation was charged with new energy and inspiration, the time was ripe for a rich harvest of autobiographical writings. During this period of national resurgence the foundations of a truly great tradition of Indian autobiography were laid" (5).

3.4 Genre Matters: Contemporary Discourses

There have been several critical discourses on auto-narratives by scholars and critics, who have tried to gauge a greater understanding of this genre through various critical lenses. Contemporary scholars on this genre have brought in fresh perspectives, often questioning the prevailing notions on auto-narratives.

In recent years, as a result of the new universal approach towards auto-narratives, all life-centric works are collectively referred to as either 'life writing' or 'life narrative'. Life writing is understood by scholars like Smith and Watson, "[…] as a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical" (*A Guide* 4). These are all in the written form, whereas they understand the term life-narrative as, "[…] a general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital" (4). As a result of the newer perspectives that have thus developed in the contemporary age it is essential to analyse them in the context of this research work.

3.4.1 Politics of Memory and Remembering

The auto-narrative genre is founded on memories. As the term itself indicates, the objective of such writing is to narrate the life of the author. As such, the author's memories become the soul of the narrative which is then re-constructed in words by the writer. Hence, memory is a very significant element in the study of auto-narratives.

Here it is gainful to note that, memories are not fixed, bound records of events. Rather they are fluid and amorphous in nature. They alter and change according to the situations and the perceptional shifts of the author. As such, past memories can be reinterpreted and given

a new meaning by an author who looks back on them after a gap of temporal and experiential distance. Daniel L. Schacter, a scholar on this genre, pithily observes that "Memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 22).

Interestingly, a new angle to the perspective on memories has developed with more recent scholars and critics arguing that memories may not always be real; that is, an event may not have actually occurred in reality, but may have rather been imaginary. Sarojini in her afore-mentioned article titled "Autobiography", discusses the misleading elements of memory and points towards the selective and imaginary nature of memories. She articulates that memory "[…] may retain unimportant details and drop the all-important entirely. In some it smothers the unpleasant and in others gives them an undue dominance. Besides being forgetful and selective, memory is also creative. After some lapse of time, memory often fills in the gaps with imaginative addition" (205).

Often imaginary memories are those of suppressed wishes, unfulfilled dreams, and regrets for not being able to achieve goals due to personal or social obstacles. Freud's psychoanalytic study brings in a new perspective on memories, whereby certain memories are not perceived to be just simply imagined but are deeply studied as a reflection of one's repressed desires. Linda Anderson in her essay titled, "At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography" highlights the Freudian notion that "[…] memories were never memories of actual events but phantasies, constructed out of wishes and their repression; in other words that they did not have an existence in reality outside their psychic function" (Monteith 54).

For instance, unpleasant memories of being oppressed, or of violence, which convey very deep and private emotions may not be revealed in the narrative, either due to a sense of embarrassment, or social, communal pressures. These memories may also be redefined and presented in the autobiography in a different way through dreams, or by creatively rendering them and creating memories which are an amalgamation of reality and imagination.

Kamala Das in her auto-narrative speaks of her unfulfilled search for love, and at one point in the auto-narrative, Das describes an occurrence, where one night when her husband was away, a man was secretly brought into her room by the maid, who then left, leaving the man behind.

This man tried to molest her, but later fell at her feet and asked her to forgive him and to speak of it to no one. She tells him to go away, but he does not. She leaves him alone and sleeps next to her child in the same room. Next morning she searches for the man, but there was no one there and in a state of delirium she utters, "Was it only a nightmare, the stench of liquor and the tearing pain?" (101).

This memory which Das narrates in her auto-narrative may as well be a real memory that is creatively redesigned rather than just an imaginary memory. Being a fictional writer, imagination and the craft of storytelling comes naturally to Das, thus it would not be difficult for her to recreate and perhaps fictionalize a real memory, thereby not revealing the exact happening but using it as a base for a tentative memory.

Consequently, several critics on auto-narrative emphasize the politics of memory and remembering. The act of remembering is significant here as it not only means recalling the past, it also involves, "a reinterpretation of the past in the present" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 22). Hence, remembering ceases to be a passive process, as when the author tries to remember the past, the past acquires a new meaning and is redefined. In speaking about the politics of remembering, in *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative: Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson point out that, "[W]hat is remembered and what is forgotten, and why, change over time. Thus, remembering has a politics. There are struggles over *who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember*, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively" (Emphasis added; 24). They also assert that "[…] a culture's understanding of memory at a particular moment of its history shapes the life narrator's process of remembering" (23).

The politics of who is authorized to remember what, also points towards who is authorized to write about what. For example, in a patriarchal society for a long time only men were allowed to write upon certain matters, women were neither allowed nor expected to do so. Indira Goswami in the preface to her *An Unfinished Autobiography* (2002) mentions that, when the first part of her autobiography was published, she was discouraged by several Assamese readers "[…] who were critical about a young girl writing her autobiography, however turbulent her life may have been" (xv).

Similarly, with regard to remembering, women were discouraged from selectively voicing or expressing their remembrances. They were thus prevented from re-interpreting the nurtured atrocities they might have faced or even the desires they might have which were crushed by the patriarchal norms. In fine, writing about such matters in the auto-narrative was largely prohibited.

As a result of this politics of remembering, the desires and memories which cannot be freely written about, may be given an outlet by the author by creating an imaginary memory of its fulfilment and portraying it in the auto-narrative. Thus, the general belief of the lay person that autobiography is completely based on truth and devoid of fiction may be questionable. This brings up the issue of the presence and the role of possible fiction in a given auto-narrative.

3.4.2 Fiction in the Non-Fictional Genre

Traditionally, scholars seem to have been convinced about the pact of truth made between the autobiographer and the reader. As such, auto-narratives were perceived as founded on truth and factual reality and the genre was said to be devoid of any fictional or imaginary element. However, contemporary scholars have begun to enquire into such dubious convictions and argue that auto-narratives may not always be truthful and factually rooted. Such an argument made by scholars like Paul John Eakin, Barret John Mandel and others is grounded on the perception that memory, as discussed earlier, may be imaginary or fictionalized, and further that the creation of auto-narratives itself involves some degree of imaginative re-construction to build upon the fragments of the past.

Paul John Eakin, in his book *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985) argues that "[…] autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and, further, that the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure"(3). The events of the past on which the autobiography is based, may be real, but fiction emerges in the act of putting these memories together and constructing an auto-narrative. Eakin points out that some of the twentieth century autobiographers have acknowledged this; and, he concludes that:

> *[T]hus memory ceases to be for them merely a convenient repository in which the past is preserved inviolate, ready for the inspection of retrospect at any future date*. They no longer believe that autobiography can offer a faithful and unmediated reconstruction of a historically verifiable past; instead, it expresses the play of the autobiographical act itself, in which *the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness*. (Emphasis added; 5)

But this view towards auto-narratives has not gone unopposed. There are a few critics who affirm that although auto-narratives may have an element of fiction in them, that does not automatically negate the fact that an autobiographical writing is based on truth. This truth may not be the universal truth, but a personal truth. One such critic is Stanley Fish who argues that "[…] autobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not […] Any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, is a characterization of its writer" (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 15). This means that even if an event recorded in an auto-narrative seems to be more imaginary than real, it still reveals to the reader the inner thoughts of the author as even the things that one imagines are a part of oneself. This points towards the inner dilemmas that the autobiographer may be going through.

In this context, it is relevant to make a passing reference to Kamala Das' auto-narrative *My Story*. It is perceived by many to be imaginary and fictional. Das herself in an interview with P.P Raveendran, reveals that, "[I]f I feel that my life is inadequate in some areas, I try to fill that – I try to perfect my life by adding things which may not really have happened. But for me they are real – they have happened" (150). While she may use imagination to colour her autobiography, her imagination itself is based on her personal experiences and her outlook on life. As she says in the same interview in a different context, "I can only write about my personal experiences" (149). Therefore, this imagination is again a part of her thought process concerning her lived experiences, and it reveals her own subconscious mind. Perhaps, this occurs with her mainly because she is a poet, a creative writer whose faculty of imagination is sharply fine-tuned to her intellectual and mental processes.

3.4.3 Present Reflections on Past Events

Because of the debate on fiction and imagination in auto-narratives, recent scholars and critics have shifted the focus from the past events narrated in the auto-narrative to the 'comments and reflections' made on them by the author at the time of composing the narrative. To use James Olney's words, these critics affirm that "[…] in the act of remembering the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines into existence another person, another world, and surely it is *not* the same, in any real sense, as that past world that does not, under any circumstances, nor however much we may wish it, now exist" (qtd. in Anderson 59).

Hence, the contemporary critics shift their focus from the past events recorded in the auto-narrative to the comments and reflections made by the author while remembering and penning down those events. Thus, an auto-narrative not only reveals the author's life and past, but also points towards the intellectual awareness and empowerment of the author at the time of writing the work. In "Autobiography Today" K. Satchidanandan observes that:

> [A]utobiography is a point of view on the writer's past life; awareness of the nature of self-being is essential to the full autobiographic art: the autobiographer is aware of himself describing himself in the past and is aware that this awareness is his present view of reality – and is aware of this awareness too. He is the 'artificer of the Great Moment' to use Yeats's phrase, destined to live the life, embrace the wholeness of that life as his daimon and to embody it again in his creation. (111)

This argument challenges older observations which assigned greater importance to the past events as also to the responses and feelings of the autobiographer at that point of time rather than at the time of writing about them. Olney highlights the significance of the autobiographer's reflections on the past events and claims that these reflections help the reader to further understand the author. He asserts that:

> […] an autobiography is, 'intentionally or not, a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition.' Thus, if autobiographical texts do not tell us as much about the autobiographer's past history as earlier students of the genre wished to believe, they may nevertheless have a good deal to tell us about the autobiographer in the moment of his engagement in the act of composition. (Eakin 22)

An illustration of such present reflections of the author while re-writing the past occurrences and pondering over it with fresh insights, can be found in several autobiographies analysed in the course of this study. For instance, Padma Sachdev in *A Drop in the Ocean: An Autobiography* (2011) narrates an incident which occurred when she was about ten to eleven years old. An old lady who used to stay with Padma's mother at night, once took Padma to her village. In the village, Padma met a young girl in her late teens who was held captive in an outhouse. The adult Padma here reflects on the event which occurred in her childhood and says:

> I could not imagine that whenever there was a division of families or nations, or empires, it is always the women who are humiliated. Even on the roadside you can hear men who always single out mother and sisters for their abusive barbs. And then they become objects of willfull use. […] But having realised this I wondered if I would ever be able to make any difference! This pain of realisation of a woman's helplessness runs like a parallel stream in one's consciousness. I have begun to see how a woman can be an enemy to another. This is today's situation. But here I am, taking such a leap to the present! (95-96)

This reflection made by the author in her present, brings to light the author's perception of women's marginalization in the patriarchal society. The author is fully aware that whenever there may be any catastrophe, or communal disharmony, women are always at the receiving end, albeit they may actually have no hand in it.

Sachdev subtly points towards the Partition of India, which she has witnessed at close quarters as her father was a victim of the riots. This reflection also points to the inner longing of the author for empowerment as a woman, in order to make a difference, so that she may not be as helpless as other women in the face of oppression. Thus, her reflection on an occurrence in the past reveals a lot about the author's perception on the status of women in the patriarchal society and her vision for empowerment.

3.4.4 Male/Female Auto-narratives: A Comparative Study

With the rising emphasis on women's empowerment and on women's writing in the modern world, several contemporary critics and scholars of the genre have drawn attention towards women's auto-narratives and have tried to analyse the differences between male and female autobiographical writings.

Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck in the Introduction to their book titled *Life/Lines* (1988) ascertain that male autobiographical tradition emphasize "[…] the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as spokesman for the community" (Benstock et al. 175). This emphasis on oneself and one's individuality, is present in most of the male autobiographies. The autobiography of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *I Am Not An Island* (1977) focuses on his life, his ancestry, his education, the political influences on him, his career as a journalist, film critic, film director, producer etc. His narrative surrounds his life, his view and opinions and reveal his developing personality. He does mention other people or the influence of others like Nehru on him; others come only because of the role they play in his life as a colleague, employer, friend, and relatives.

Similarly, in *An Autobiography* (2004) Jawaharlal Nehru's focus is on the freedom struggle, and on his own individual opinions. He writes very little about his mother, sisters and his wife. Interestingly, in a chapter titled, "My Wedding and an Adventure in the Himalayas", Nehru devotes a single sentence to his marriage which reads as, "[M]y marriage took place in 1916 in the city of Delhi" (41). The rest of the Chapter is about an adventure with a cousin. However, throughout the auto-narrative he does refer to his relationship with his father.

Hence, the focus of the male auto-narratives is largely on the self, whereas female autobiographers do not concentrate on themselves alone, as for them it is a given fact that "[S]elfhood is mediated" (Benstock et al. 175). For women, there has always been someone else who trains them to be feminine, instructing them on what they should or should not do. Thus, in female autobiographies, the self is not emphasized, as here the self itself is a constructed one.

This focus on individuality also forms the ground on which for a long time women's auto-narratives were not acknowledged, because traditionally individuality in auto-narratives was emphasized upon by scholars and critics. Since women were denied such individuality, their auto-narratives were left in the lurch. Smith and Watson comment upon this in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998), and observe that, "[T]he emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism" (75).

Even some definitions of autobiography, like the one given by Philippe Lejeune, have a biased approach wherein only 'he' or 'his' is used, which refers only to male autobiographies. Lejeune defines autobiography as, "[A] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning *his* own existence, focusing on *his individual life*, in particular on the development of *his* personality" (Emphasis added; qtd. in Anderson 2). The definition itself highlights individuality as a fundamental element in autobiographies, which is absent in the socially constructed image of women.

Therefore, as against the individuality focused by male authors, contemporary feminists discuss relationality in terms of women's auto-narratives. This new concept is borrowed from psychologist Nancy Chodorow, who speaks of the relationality/individuality binary, and argues that women are more relational than individual. Susan Stanford Friedman applies Chodorow's argument to auto-narratives and affirms that while male authors use "individualistic models of the self" in their auto-narratives and emphasize on their individuality, women authors cannot do the same. Extending the ambit of her argument to include other marginal elements, besides women, she explains that:

> [F]undamental inapplicability of individualistic models of the self to women and minorities is twofold. First, the emphasis on individualism does not take into account the importance of group identity for women and minorities. Second, the emphasis on separateness ignores the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity. (Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography* 72)

Hence, while men disconnect themselves from their relations and create an individual identity for themselves even in their auto-narratives, women are always connected to their

relations and come to be identified in terms of her relationship with others, as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. This is also reflected in their auto-narratives.

Friedman clearly states that, "[M]asculine personality, then, comes to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection (and denial of femininity), whereas feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship" (Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography* 77). Thus, it needs to be re-iterated here that in the auto-narratives women hardly emphasize their selfhood, rather they foreground their relationships with others, such as their parents, in-laws, and husbands who for most of the time exert control over their lives.

This can be clearly observed in auto-narratives such as Lakshmibai Tilak's *I Follow After,* where for the major part of her auto-narrative, she speaks about her father and her father-in-law and their extremist religious and superstitious views, which are imposed upon the whole family. Interestingly, in the course of her writing, Lakshmibai's narrative focus shifts from her father to her father-in-law and then to her husband. Her auto-narratives largely serves as more of a biography of her husband rather than her (own) autobiography. She hardly expresses herself as an individual; consequently, just fragments of her 'self' can be observed only in terms of her relationship with others.

One also notes that throughout the auto-narrative, she refers to herself as Lakshmibai, which denotes her marital identity. Interestingly, it is only once in her narrative, and that in a miniscule, insignificant occurrence, that her maiden name, "Manu" is revealed (168). As such, there is no doubt that her auto-narrative focuses on relational aspects of self rather than the individual identity and its allied aspects.

Because of this relationality in women's auto-narratives, rather than centring on one's individual self, a woman's narrative transcends self and forms a window to the times and society she lived in. Her auto-narrative represents not only her life but even the lives of those who were a part of her life. Moreover, she is a witness to various historical or political events which may have occurred in her lifetime or during the lifespan covered by her auto-narrative. Hence, Padma Sachdev, for instance, appears convincing when she writes in the 'Introduction' to her autobiography, "[M]y memories are autobiographical but perhaps

more than me, they are an account of the world I lived in. Thus, they are as much my story as the tale of the times and the two are woven together so that one cannot be separated from the other" (ix-x).

Likewise, Baby Kamble in her auto-narrative *The Prisons we Broke* (1986), gives a glimpse of the treatment of women in the times in which she lived. She narrates, "[I]n those days, it was the custom to keep women at home, behind the threshold. The honor enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of the women thus confined within the four walls of the house, then this 'honour' became the talk of the town" (5). Thus, through their auto-narratives, women relationally portray the times and the society in which they lived.

This relationality, which is evident in many of the auto-narratives by women, unravels the silenced traumas and subjugation undergone by other women: those who may have played a significant role in their lives, or others who may not have been in any evident way connected to them. In fact, by writing auto-narratives women narrate not only their own story but also the stories of their mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters, daughters who had hitherto never been spoken about. Moreover, they also reveal willy-nilly the travails (and triumphs) of women of other class(es) or of women in their times in general.

For instance, Kamala Das in her auto-narrative *My Story* (1988) speaks about her mother's marriage and narrates that after marriage her father imposed his Gandhian beliefs of simplicity on her, but that she did not protest. Further Das reveals her mother's feeling about the marriage, "[S]he was mortally afraid of the dark stranger who had come forward to take her out of the village and its security. […] My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. But my mother's timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends" (4). This is not just the story of a single woman; it is rather the implicit saga of a whole generation of women of a certain elite, well-to-do class who could have been in the same shoes as Das' mother.

Similarly, in her autobiography Padma Sachdev reveals about her Tayi's marriage, which took place without her (Tayi's) knowledge. She shares with the reader what her Tayi once

disclosed to her, "'[H]ow did I know this was the home of my in-laws? I thought I was brought to visit relatives!' Tayi would tell me that she was only seven years old when she got married. 'He was thirteen. […] Your Tayaji knew that I was his bride, but I didn't' " (92). Tayi's story exposes the stories of many other women, as during that time child marriage was customary.

In her auto-narrative Baby Kamble also reveals the subjugation faced by her mother, "[M]y father locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage […] my aai must have felt so oppressed, so suffocated! And that must have made her so insensitive, so cruel towards the others" (5-6).

Unlike the focus on individuality in male auto-narratives, relationality in the female work leads to a kaleidoscopic view of the status of women in a society at a given point in time as each auto-narrative tells the story of not one but several women, whose silenced lives are revealed through the auto-narratives whether written by women of that era or of a subsequent one.

Such differences between male and female autobiographers have also been analysed in the essay aptly titled, "Authorizing the Autobiographical" (1988), wherein Shari Benstock argues that many of the male autobiographers attempt to seal or "cover over gaps in memory, dislocations in time and space, insecurities, hesitations, and blind spots" (Benstock et al. 175). In contrast, women autobiographers let open all such discrepancies and "emphasize[d] the instability of the subject" (Benstock et al. 175).

A similar opinion is held by K. Satchidanandan, who in his introductory essay on the autobiography of Kamala Das titled, "Relocating *My Story*", points out that, "[M]an enforces a unity and identity across time by reconstructing the ego as a bulwark against disintegration. He thus denies the effects of having internalized the alienating world order. Women are more aware of their otherness" (Das x).

However, the evidence in the auto-narrative of Jawaharlal Nehru seems to contradict this argument; it is almost like an exception. For instance, at several junctures in *An Autobiography* Nehru confides that the facts, particularly the dates, that he has stated are based on his fading memory and, therefore, it is possible that the order of events may be

mixed up. Hence, at one point he says that, "[…] I am not clear about dates and am rather mixed up about the order of events" (37). In another chapter he affirms that, "I write from memory, and I am likely to get mixed up about dates" (129). Thus Nehru stands as an exception to the argument that male autobiographers attempt to seal gaps in memory. This may be because of his intellectual openness and frank personality.

Auto-narratives are also seen as 'the text of the oppressed' by feminists such as Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith who argue that, "the marginalized subject, by 'deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain' can constitute 'an "I" that becomes a place of creative and, by implication, political intervention'" (Anderson 103). For instance, Julia Swindells goes a step further and highlights the use of the auto-narrative to assert oneself and be empowered. She says:

> [A]utobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness – women, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself. (qtd. in Anderson 103-104)

Likewise, Anderson reiterates the idea that autobiography can become 'the text of the oppressed' by "[…] articulating through one person's experience, experiences which may be representative of a particular marginalized group … autobiography becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition" (Anderson 104).

Therefore, in the recent years auto-narratives have been considered to be not just a powerful medium of expression, but also of empowerment. In her essay "At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography", Anderson explains that, "[…]the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged by the nature of the activity itself in re-writing the stories that already exist about her since by seeking to publicise herself she is violating an important cultural construction of her femininity as passive or hidden. She is resisting or changing what is known about her" (Monteith 59).

By writing about their lives and those of the other women around them, these female autobiographers deconstruct false patriarchal myths, resist patriarchal norms and thereby empower themselves. Thus, a close connection between auto-narratives and women's empowerment is observed. It is relevant to study this connection in a detailed manner in the course of this study.

3.5 Conundrum of Empowerment and Auto-narratives: The Case of Indian Women

The link between empowerment and auto-narratives is two sided: on the one hand, auto-narratives are perceived to be a medium through which women can empower themselves; and, on the other hand, auto-narratives are seen as an expression of a woman's empowered self. Consequently, this dual relation can be understood as a conundrum, "a confusing problem or question that is very difficult to solve" (Hornby 334).

Several feminists affirm that by writing about oneself, particularly, through auto-narratives, women undertake to resist patriarchal oppression and assert their own rights. Thereby, they take the first step towards empowerment. In "The Laugh of The Medusa" Hélène Cixous, a significant French feminist fervently asserts the need for women to write about themselves, and in writing, to combat their dis-empowered and marginalized state. She exclaims:

> [I]t is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (qtd. in Benstock et al. 169)

Cixous, like many other feminists such as Showalter, claims that by writing about one self, a woman primarily, breaks the norm of silence imposed on her, and re-writes the false myths created about women by patriarchy. This act of self-writing further exposes the oppression faced at the hands of the androcentric society and by voicing out against it, they resist the same.

Many scholars speak of the empowering process through resistance. By resisting the power structure of domination/ subordination, wherein women are forced into the latter position by patriarchy, women move towards empowerment. Karlene Faith, a scholar on power and resistance, provides a deeper understanding on resistance and how it leads to empowerment. She elucidates her argument thus:

> [R]esistance cannot simply defeat, overturn or suddenly transform disciplinary power. Such powers circulate independently of particular authorities who institutionalize and claim them for themselves. Resistance can, however, resituate the problematic of power abuse. That is, *resistance weakens processes of victimization, and generates personal and political empowerment through the acts of naming violations and refusing to collaborate with oppressors*. (Emphasis added; Radtke and Stam 39)

The phrase "naming violations" highlights the significance of voicing out or making the oppression known to the world outside. Therefore, by exposing the oppression/victimization of women and the patriarchal hierarchy of power through auto-narratives and thereby, resisting and rewriting the truth about their lives, women move towards empowerment.

In the first part of her autobiography *I Follow After*, Lakshmibai Tilak narrates her trials as a daughter-in-law. She relates how she was subjugated by her father-in-law, Wamanrao, who tortured her and treated her as a slave. Lakshmibai recounts an instance when her father-in-law insulted her because she was not proficient in cooking Konkan food. He sarcastically made a disparaging statement: "'[I]f you were a stone, you might have been used as a step into a latrine!'" As a response to this Lakshmibai says to herself, "'[W]ho knows? A step into the latrine perhaps – or an image of a god!' But this I said to myself" (36).

As a consequence of the conditioning she had received as a child, to be silent and docile, Lakshmibai does not reply to the demeaning comment passed by her father-in-law. Although she wanted to retort and express her views, she is bound by the patriarchal norm of silent suffering. Therefore, she meekly suppresses her urge to respond and silently swallows her opinion. Such repressed views are freely expressed through her autobiography. It can thus be argued that an Autobiography becomes a significant channel

of expression, through which women can express their opinions and subvert patriarchal domination, as Lakshmibai has attempted to do.

Likewise, Indira Goswami in *An Unfinished Autobiography* (2002) resists the rigor of conservative customs related to widowhood. In the androcentric setup, women have never been considered to have any worth as an individual. A woman's value is established only in terms of her relationship with men. Therefore, at the tragic demise of the husband, instead of finding sympathy and support, a wife loses her significance in the eyes of the patriarchal society and is thus further marginalized and subjugated.

Goswami has witnessed such cruelties towards widows in her life. She narrates the plight of her aunt who had lost her husband. Once when a Brahmin woman went to console her, Goswami overhears this woman instructing her daughters to keep away from the widow, "[T]ouch her not, no, you must not! Only recently she is widowed. She carries in her the pollution of sin" (56). Goswami recounts that her aunt, like most of the widows of her time, lived a miserable life: "[T]here was no end to her fasts. The practices she was required to observe during her periods were not only cruel, but also unhygienic. She was allowed only one meal a day … she was a terrible example of widowhood I had seen with my own eyes" (56).

At this stage in her life, Goswami is unable to voice out against such atrocities, but later when she herself becomes a widow, she shuns away from such practices, resists the patriarchal norms and creates a different path for herself by gaining economic independence and later pursuing research for her PhD degree. Thus by revealing and naming widowed women's victimization in her autobiography, Goswami empowers herself, as much as by resisting it herself during her own tragic widowhood.

This link between empowerment and auto-narratives has another side to it, where auto-narrative also becomes an expression of the already empowered women. This is so because a woman *is* empowered in some way or the other, therefore she is able to write an auto-narrative in such a way as to boldly express, and thereby resist or overcome the state of powerlessness into which she is forced by patriarchy.

Empowerment is the state of being fully aware of one's ability to recognize the factors that lead to one's oppression and subvert them. It is also a state of being in control of one's own life, recognizing and understanding fully, one's own potential and thus obtaining a sense of self-esteem. The empowering process, according to I.K. Chari, a scholar on empowerment, is:

> […] a multi-dimensional process which enables the individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life […] it consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief, and practice. (qtd in Misra 872)

It is only when a woman feels empowered, that she can boldly write about her personal experiences, the victimization she suffered, and express her private feelings and aspirations through her auto-narrative. Only an empowered woman will have the courage and ability to reveal the hidden truths about her life, concealed for so long under the wraps of silence imposed by patriarchy.

Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women" opines that women who take up writing, should aim towards a twofold initiative, that is, "Killing the 'Angel in the House' in her and 'telling the truth about (her) own experience as a body'" (qtd. in Jain 213). The phrase 'Angel in the house' refers to self-sacrificing, sympathetic women who live in conformity with the desires of others, and have no views or aspirations of their own. Woolf further says that the most difficult part is in telling the truth about one's experience as a body (Jain 213). Writing about such a truth is not an easy task, as such an endeavour would imply breaking away from the forbidding patriarchal norms, which only the intellectually empowered can undertake.

Kamala Das is one such non-conformist author who in her auto-narrative boldly speaks of issues that were considered as taboo. She narrates thus about the Nair women, "[…] the women of the best Nair families never mentioned sex. It was their principal phobia. […] It was customary for a Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it

was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night" (23-24).

Although she comes from such a conservative family, because of her empowered self she is able to critique this silence surrounding matters such as sex, and boldly reveal, even the intimate secrets about her sexual life with her husband. She discloses, "I let him take my body every night, hoping that the act would relax his nerves and make him tranquil. At night after all had slept, I sat in our tiny room, sobbing and trying hard to believe in a destiny that might change for the better" (97). Such matters are very sensitive, and often several autobiographers choose to avoid narrating about the intimacy between the spouses, but it is because of her sense of self-empowerment that she dares to break the silence and reveal her pain.

Women autobiographers, who have attained intellectual empowerment, are also able to generate a realistic and truthful view of Indian women in general, their condition and status during the times in which they lived. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* (2005) portrays the dilemma in women to choose between traditional, conservative values and modern, progressive ideals of freedom and empowerment. Ray observes, "[W]omen find that they are often torn between their need for self-expression and their attachment to old values" (73-74). Similarly, she divulges the internalization of patriarchal ideologies by women and their complicity as agents of patriarchy aptly thus: "[I]t was she who in her youth had been a victim of the authoritarian family and who herself later became the great upholder of conservatism and social customs which inhibited the development and growth of women" (73).

Moreover, in her auto-narrative, Renuka Ray offers a realistic opinion of the position of Indian women after independence. She claims that the position of women at this point of time was "paradoxical" (74), there were some highly educated women, who held good jobs and lived decent, independent lives, but a majority of women in India, still faced discrimination and were also "subjected to economic and social deprivation" (74). These observations and opinions indicate Ray's liberated mind, which can minutely examine the situation of Indian women and forthrightly render her analysis in the auto-narrative.

Likewise, Cornelia Sorabji in her auto-narrative, *India Calling* (1934) discusses the new progressive laws created to benefit women in India. Through her experience and intelligent observations, Sorabji affirms that it is not enough to establish laws for women for a genuine change to occur. She opines that first a desire for that change should be awakened within women. She explains that "[…] you cannot help, however great the need, unless your help is desired. You have first to create recognition of a need for help, next a desire for help, and for help from you" (238). Sorabji understands well, that if the desire for empowerment does not arise from within, then it is not true empowerment.

Because of her own empowered self, Sorabji's auto-narrative becomes a powerful mirror of her society. She is not only an objective observer of the society but also its analyser. She sharply critiques it and offers deep insights into the status of Indian women at that time. She is also able to express her own independent views and opinions freely without any hesitation.

Any woman who attempts to offer an honest image of the condition of women in India, and thus speak against patriarchy, would have to undergo the torment of patriarchal oppression. Women like Das, Ray and Sorabji alone can counter such domination without being submissive, on account of their empowered selves.

In her essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine" Toril Moi, a feminist, argues that simply by the fact of being a woman one cannot assume that the writings of a woman may critique and resist patriarchal norms. In the context of feminist criticism, Moi asserts, "[T]o believe that common female experience in itself gives rise to a feminist analysis of women's situation, is to be at once politically naive and theoretically unaware. The fact of having the same experience as somebody else in no way guarantees a common political front" (121).

The same can be applied to women's auto-narratives. One cannot presume that although they may share similar experiences, all women's auto-narratives challenge the patriarchal society. In her narrative, a woman may simply give an account of her life without revealing her inner suffering and the subjugation she went through, without showing any signs of resistance. One may choose to either avoid writing about the victimization she has

undergone, or write of it in a subtle manner or in a metaphoric style for fear of being criticized by the androcentric society.

Those women alone, who have a sense of empowerment – that is, they are not only aware of their own oppression, but also seek to resist it and assert their right to an equal status, being well aware of their individual potentials – are able to bluntly expose the patriarchal setup, write of their own marginalization, and thereby overturn or resist it.

Stephen Spender, a scholar on auto-narratives makes an interesting remark, when he speaks of the twin self within the author. He states that:

> [O]ne is the self that others see – the social, historical person, with achievements, personal appearances, social relationships. These are "real" attributes of a person living in the world. But there is also the self experienced only by that person, the self felt from the inside that the writer can never get "outside of." The "inside," or personally experienced, self has a history. While it may not be meaningful as an objective "history of the times," it is a record of self-observation, not a history observed by others. (Smith and Watson, *A Guide* 6)

Hence, every author has a public self, the self known to others, and a personal self, the inner self. To reveal the inner consciousness, a sense of empowerment is necessary. When a woman already has a sense of empowerment, her auto-narrative will be an expression of her inner self, wherein the views, opinions, and emotions of the author, hitherto suppressed by patriarchy, surface in the narration. Such an auto-narrative is a challenge to patriarchy and thereby, is again a medium of further empowerment. As a consequence of such interlinks between empowerment and auto-narratives, this connection can be referred to as a conundrum.

CHAPTER FOUR

Women Empowerment in India: The Pre-Independence Era

4.1 Introduction

Women's empowerment is a state of being wherein women are not only aware of the gender biases constructed in the patriarchal society, but are also in a position to resist and subvert them. Empowerment involves "[…] awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources. Empowerment should come from within; women empower themselves" (Misra 872). In the view of I.K. Chari, Empowerment "[…] consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over circumstances that influence their lives and free them from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief, and practice (qtd. in Misra 872).

For such an empowerment in women, it is first essential that the society in which they live is progressive, and pro-empowerment. Women cannot be empowered in a conservative society which is shrouded by intellectual darkness, wherein, women are confined within patriarchal restrictions. Therefore, an enlightened society, liberated from the debasing practices against women, is a prerequisite for women's empowerment.

In the early nineteenth century before the advent of the social reform movement, the social conditions in India were unconducive to women, particularly with regards to their position and status in society. Although it is said that in the Vedic age women enjoyed certain rights and privileges, such as the right to education, and to read the religious scriptures, it appears that in later ages women slowly lost their social stature and consequently their status began to decline. By the nineteenth century, the status of women in India had stooped to the lowest ebb; women were denied an equal right to education and self-expression. Moreover, as discussed earlier, women were bound with social restrictions with regard to free movement and interaction, and were forced into confinement behind the purdah. Gradually, customs and practices demeaned a woman and thrust her to the margins. As such, a kind of regressive thinking seems to have taken centre stage in the nineteenth century India.

In this Chapter, the empowerment of women in India has been dealt with at two levels: firstly, the women's empowerment movements that took place in the pre-independence India have been examined along with available corroborative evidences, to analyse the impact these movements might have had on women with regard to empowerment; secondly, the primary texts that fall under this period, have been analysed at length to trace the empowerment of women during this era, using the empowerment criteria delineated in Chapter Two.

4.1.1 Women's Empowerment Movements

In the pre-independence India, there were three major movements that sought to empower women collectively but which invariably led also to their individual empowerment to a lesser or greater degree, because the two are intertwined. As Erika Feigenbaum pertinently observes in the article "Empowerment", "[T]he concept of empowerment deals with two elements of cultivating power: *internally* (as an individual) and *collectively*. *These levels* of recognizing, developing, and acting on goals *work to advance both personal feelings of esteem* and *political activism to resist and counteract oppression and injustice* in a larger structural sense" (Emphasis added; 114).

This must have happened also in the case of the above-mentioned social movements in the pre-independence India. These were: (a) the social reform movement in the nineteenth century, whereby progressive men tried to uplift the status of women, and purge the society from the inhuman social evils practiced against women; (b) the emergence of women's organizations towards the end of the nineteenth century, whereby educated women began to assemble and establish organizations to strive towards empowerment; and, (c) the national freedom struggle in the early twentieth century, wherein women in large numbers participated in the fight for a national cause, as equal partners with men. Each of these movements has had an influence on women's empowerment, either directly or indirectly.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyse them carefully and assess the impact that these movements might have had on the status of women in India in particular and on women's empowerment in general.

4.2 The Nineteenth Century Social Reform Movement

The nineteenth century was a significant period in India. It was during this time, that the Indians, enlightened through education, came in contact with the western ideas of liberty and equality, and were convinced that changes had to be brought into the Indian society, for the creation of a modern India. For the advancement of India, it was essential that the society be freed from the conservative, and often obsolete, practices of the day which were then being blindly followed by the rank and file. In particular, the anti-women practices of sati, child marriage and purdah, which victimized women and forced them into a subservient position of the oppressed and the exploited, had to be obliterated.

These social ills were not just the result of conservative beliefs and practices. On a deeper level, they could be seen as patriarchal strategies to ensure that women continue to remain under the metaphoric thumb of their male counterparts. The sole purpose of such beliefs and practices was to trap a woman within the darkness of ignorance so that she may never be able to gain knowledge and understand her true potential. Thereby, she would remain always in a powerless position to be controlled, maneuvered and exploited at will. In fine, the said practices were so construed, that a woman should never develop her individual self.

Furthermore, the outdated beliefs supporting such inhuman practices were ingrained as traditions in the minds of women. This was done often through the patriarchal agency of the family as also through religious injunctions, based on oppressive provisions and/or convenient interpretations of medieval texts. Fear would be instilled in the minds of women, that if they break these 'traditions' they would have to face severe consequences. For instance, in *Status Education and Problems of Indian Women* (1986), Roopa Vohra and Arun K. Sen highlight such predictions made against women's progress in the *Manu Smriti*, which maintain that, "[…] a village or a town in which women are strong is sure to come to grief" (14). In a like vein, many of the brutal practices against women were claimed to be ordained by religion. Hence, women could in no way rebel against these social ills, as that would be considered a sin. Moreover, it is obvious that in the absence of any relief or redressal, over the centuries, they began to accept this oppression as a part of their destiny.

In fact, as a consequence of continuous and compulsive enforcement of these outdated beliefs and practices on themselves, the women internalized them to such an extent that in the long run ironically they became the custodians of these very practices themselves. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* (2005) makes a pertinent observation in this context, "[I]t was she who in her youth had been a victim of the authoritarian family and who herself later became the great upholder of conservatism and social customs which inhibited the development and growth of women" (73). Consequently, these social ills were the greatest hurdles to women's empowerment. Thus, in order to study the empowerment of women, it is also relevant to examine these social ills which disempowered women in the nineteenth century.

4.2.1 Child Marriage

For a long time, the practice of child marriage has been carried on in India. In her book *Women's Movements* (2009), B. Suguna dwells on the reason why child marriage was practiced in India, and also speaks of its effects on the girl child. She points out that:

> [E]arly marriages were celebrated because the young girl at the time of marriage could adjust herself to her husband and his relations as well as to the new setup. […] This system blocked all the channels of development – physical, mental and even spiritual. It resulted in crushing the individuality of the child wife. (15-16)

Even before, the realization of her 'self' would dawn upon a woman, she was married to a stranger and bound to the new roles and responsibilities given to her in her marital home. Lakshmibai Tilak corroborates the presence of this practice in her originally Marathi auto-narrative, translated into English as *I Follow After: An Autobiography* (1998).

She discloses that child marriage was prevalent in her times, and that it was customary to get a girl married even before her adolescence. In fact, she goes on to point out that even a girl of ten at a pre-puberty stage was considered overage for marriage. In her own words: "[A]ccording to the Hindu standards of those days, I was now quite a big girl, for I, was fully ten years old. In those days children were married to each other at the age of five and six or younger, and to have a girl of eleven years unmarried was an unheard-of thing" (8). Lakshmibai was married at the age of eleven, around the year 1882.

This provides an illustration of the predicament of pre-puberty girl-children in the Bombay province of British India. But things were not any the different in the rest of India, as the following example from the then province of Bengal illustrates. Rassundari Devi in her originally Bengali auto-narrative *Amar Jiban* (1876), translated in part by Enakshi Chatterjee in *Women Writing in India* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, gives a detailed account of her marriage at the age of twelve. Quite understandably, most often the girl would not even be aware of what marriage meant. Devi says that although she knew that she was getting married, she hardly knew what marriage entailed. She admits that she was happy with the music, festivity and the clothes and ornaments, but at the time of parting away from her mother, she suddenly realized that she was to be separated from her home. She then cries to her mother and pleads, "[D]on't give me over to them, Mother!" (192).

It is worth noting that Rassundari Devi is considered to be the first woman autobiographer in India, and this experience narrated in her auto-narrative can be seen as emblematic of every child-bride of the contemporary times in India. Devi reveals the pain of separation, felt by every girl child who had to live among utter strangers, after marriage. This anguish can be seen to reverberate in a much later work in the West, namely, Simon de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* where she elucidates that this separation is not a simple departure from the family. Through marriage, a woman is uprooted from her socio-cultural and familial surrounding and is forced into a completely different environment. De Beauvoir observes, "[T]hrough marriage woman is now no longer lent from one clan to another: she is torn up by the roots from the group into which she was born, and annexed by her husband's group; he buys her as one buys a farm animal or a slave […]" (113).

At such a young age these 'child-wives', did not even understand the implications of a marriage, and a husband. Often, a child-wife would be pregnant, when her body was not yet ready for it. This early motherhood was dangerous for both the mother and the child. Kiran Devendra in her book *Changing Status of Women in India* (1994), observes that, "[E]arly indulgence, which was forced on boy-husband and girl-wife by early marriage, obviously resulted in premature fatherhood and premature motherhood. Child marriage was directly responsible for the increasing number of widows among Hindus. Because of

early marriage the death rate of children too was very high" (5). The young mother being a child herself, was neither physically nor mentally prepared to be a mother.

An illustration of the same can be seen in the auto-narrative *I Follow After*. Lakshmibai Tilak gives birth to her first child at the age of 16. At that age, she was very neglectful of her duty as a mother. It was her elder sister, Bhiku, who would take care of the child, while Lakshmibai would be busy playing with dolls. In fact, Lakshmibai narrates how Bhiku once retorted in anger, "[O]thers have to take care of your baby while you play with dolls" (63). Here, it is significant to remember that Lakshmibai was a young adolescent herself at that time. Moreover, she had been too young to be taught about motherhood by her mother before marriage, and unfortunately for her, she did not have a mother-in-law who could have trained her in such matters. Lakshmibai's experience is a microscopic example to a macroscopic experience of women in those times.

The endless efforts put in by reformers, such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar among others, during the nineteenth century resulted in the prohibition of intercourse with a wife below the age of ten, under the Indian Penal Code in 1860 (Devendra 6). Although this was an important step towards reform, it hardly had an effect on the society. However, as late as in the 1880s the reformers continued their fight for the restraint against child marriage, though this was opposed by some quarters. Coincidently, an incident of marital rape leading to the death of an eleven year old child-wife stirred the people and a memorandum was sent to the Viceroy requesting the prohibition of child marriage of girls below fourteen years by law.

In 1891, a bill was passed which prohibited cohabitation with a wife below 12 years (Devendra 7). But in the nineteenth century the hold of conservative traditions upon society was such that if a girl who was married in childhood, disagreed to consummate the marriage later, she was punished and even imprisoned. At such a point, her parents too would force her to go to her marital house.

The example of such a case is presented in Cornelia Sorabji's auto-narrative *India Calling* (1934), wherein she narrates the case of a woman named Rukhmabai who through her actions shook the very ground of conservative traditions. Rukhmabai was a Maratha

woman who got married as a child according to the customs, but continued to live with her parents till the right age. Interestingly, she was given education in the native language and also in English. She dreamed of being a doctor. Hence, when her husband came to claim her, she refused to consummate the marriage and was ready to face the consequences of imprisonment.

Sorabji says that the reason for Rukhmabai's decision was not that she wanted to marry someone else. In fact, she did not want to marry at all. "[S]he wanted to study; to be a doctor: realization of the implications of a marriage in childhood, such as hers, had burst upon her with her husband's demand. She would resist, and maybe resistance would save others" (79). This case has also been referred to by Geraldine Forbes, in her book *Women in Modern India,* thus corroborating the existence of such a case in reality. Rukhmabai's court cases were held during 1884-1888 (Forbes 69).

In the case of Rukhmabai, it is pertinent to observe the role of education in liberating her mind, making her realize her individual self, and giving her an alternate way of life. She resists the enforcement of a marriage, which had no meaning for her. She aspired to be a doctor, and later with the help of an Englishwoman, she studied medicine in England and returned to India as a doctor to serve her people. Perhaps the lack of education for women and the absence of possibilities for them to have a career like men, left women with marriage as the sole aim and purpose of life. The Act prohibiting child marriage came only in the early twentieth century, through the Child marriage Restraint Act, also known as The Sarda Act of 1929, according to which the legal marriageable age of girls was 14 years (Devendra 7). Although this cannot be termed as a measure of empowerment of women per se, it certainly must have contained the disempowerment of women to a large extent.

4.2.2 Purdah or Seclusion of Women

Like child marriage, purdah is another patriarchal strategy which confined women within *zenanas*, and separated them from the rest of the world. Trapped within the walls of their quarters, these women gradually internalized the customs, traditions and superstitions which were imposed on them and they became more and more dependent on their menfolk.

Purdah was mostly maintained by married women who were not even allowed to meet their husbands in the presence of relatives.

Cornelia Sorabji's auto-narrative unveils the world of these women in purdah, whom she denotes by the popular native term, Purdahnashins (the term with the first letter capital will be maintained, as per the text). While describing the zenanas in which the Purdahnashins lived, she compares it to a prison and says, "[T]heir quarters were apart, with a courtyard attached into which they seldom entered. The outer walls were sometimes spiked like the walls of any gaol: and at the foot of the stairs an armed guard stood […] From this sanctuary they went not forth, except on pilgrimage" (67).

Isolated from the world, these women could not witness even the most basic experience of beholding a flower bloom. In fact, Sorabji describes a young Thakurani who presumed that roses were picked off the ground like stones. Sorabji writes: "[S]he had never seen growing things, never seen a garden. She had been married as a small child, her mother-in-law had been very strict indeed. She had never been in contact with growing life of any kind" (68). Child marriage leads to early seclusion, which puts an end to the little freedom the child had, and pushes her towards the lifelong despair.

The Purdahnashins were so accustomed to the practice of purdah, that they would not come out of it even if they were given a chance to do so. They became conservators of the same practice which left them in a state of powerlessness. An apt illustration of this can be seen when Sorabji takes permission from the Thakur to take the Thakuranis out, in a closed carriage, that they may see the gardens and buildings of the estate, through the slits of the wooden blinds of the carriage. The Thakur confidently replies that she may, if the Thakuranis would agree to it.

The Thakur knew well that the practice of purdah was internalized by the Thakuranis to such an extent, that they would never agree to her proposal. As expected by him, the Thakuranis opposed the idea and said, "Impossible! Would you like to run down the street in your skin? To run round the courtyard would seem to us, even clothed as we are, what running down the street in your skin would seem to you" (68). These women were young girls, still in their girlhood, yet their lives were spent in the gloom of the zenana.

Seclusion would also mean that these women would never be educated. Even if education were to be permitted, there were no women educators to educate them even about such basics as personal and family hygiene. As a result, there was a lot of ignorance and superstition among these women. Sorabji highlights the fear implanted within their minds with regard to writing that, "[…] if women learnt to write they would get themselves into trouble" (67).

Similarly, the Purdahnashins would also be denied their legal rights, since due to the seclusion imposed on them, they could not meet a lawyer, nor could they stand witness in the court. In some areas, women were allowed to bear witness but in purdah. As such, the judge could not be sure of the identity of the witness, as the witness could not be seen. "[T]hey could not tell who were shut in with her behind the purdah: or what fears and coercions assailed her. They might not even hear her voice – a third person being the medium of both question and answer" (Sorabji 103). Many a time, a man would go instead of a woman and give a statement against her interests, and because of the purdah it would be difficult to recognize the witness.

Interestingly, it appears that in India the practice of purdah perhaps became a symbol of social status. Jawaharlal Nehru in his *An Autobiography* (2004) says, that among the Kashmiri women there was no practice of purdah before, but when they descended to Allahabad, these women adopted the practice as it was considered a sign of social status (11).

However, efforts to the contrary were also visible. For example, bold and courageous women like Sarala Ray who were supported by their husbands and family, tried to step out of seclusion. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* (2005), relates about her maternal grandmother Sarala Ray who was an educated and an empowered woman of her times. Her grandmother once recounted to her the extremely disagreeable responses she received from the people around her, only because she accompanied her husband to a Calcutta University function at the Senate Hall. Ray narrates, "[S]he went in an open landau carriage (in those days women went about only in carriages with closed shutters) and as she walked up the Senate Hall steps, she was booed from all around and some young men even spat on the ground to express their extreme disapproval of a professor taking his wife openly to the

Senate Hall" (7). This incident shows that a change in the perception of society with regards to such social ills was essential, but it also demonstrates the bold steps being taken by progressive men and women to turn the applecart of the *status quo*.

In fine, many reformers agitated against this practice. Similarly, the socio-religious bodies such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Dev Samaj, which supported reform, tried to change the public opinion against this ill practice. Such efforts seem to have been crowned with success, for Nehru mentions that with the changes and flexibility in society, later the practice of purdah was discontinued, not only among Kashmiris but also in other Indian communities (14).

4.2.3 Sati and Cold Sati

Sati was the brutal practice of immolation of a wife on her husband's funeral pyre. In medieval India, it was perceived that a woman belongs to her husband alone, and after the demise of her husband, her life is deemed worthless. Therefore, a wife who dies before the husband is considered fortunate, as seen in Lakshmibai Tilak's auto-narrative, wherein referring to the death of her mother and mother-in-law, she says "[B]oth these sorrowful souls were fortunate enough to leave this world with their husbands alive" (46). When the husband died before the wife, she was considered to be inauspicious, and sinful. Therefore, the wife was driven and many a times coerced, to jump into the funeral pyre and put an end her life, along with her husband's corpse.

In the essay, "Whose Sati? Widow Burning in the Early-Nineteenth Century India" Anand A. Yang, discusses about the practice of sati and explains that the death of the husband before the wife was said to be a consequence of her own sinful life, and thus, she was considered to be inauspicious and polluted. Yang opines, that related to this idea was the belief that a widow "[…] constituted a grave danger to her community because of the supposedly irrepressible sexual powers she possesses, a capacity which always had the potential to disrupt her ritually prescribed life of austerity" (Sarkar and Sarkar 29).

This custom of sati was created by the patriarchal society, firstly, to inculcate fear in the minds of women, a fear which would make them more devout towards their husband, and as a result they would remain, forever in the clutches of their husbands. Whatever the

husband may do, however he may treat her, she would still worship him and perform prayers and fasts for his long life, partly because she was ideologically indoctrinated to believe that without him she had no value in the society. A minor instance is found in the auto-narrative, *I Follow After*, when accidently Lakshmibai falls from the stairs and her bangles break, the women around her tie their necklaces on her wrist so that the bare hand may not foreshadow widowhood. This goes to show the extreme psychological conditioning of the women during the nineteenth century. Such superstitions based on the fear of widowhood were inculcated in the minds of women to control them ideologically and exploit them psychologically.

Secondly, the practice of sati also ensured that no part of the husband's property would go to the wife. Many of the Vedic *shastras* and other scriptures of Hinduism allowed a share of the husband's property to the wife after his death, as highlighted by Ram Mohan Roy in "Brief remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindoo Law of Inheritance" (1822). In this essay, he quotes scriptures from *Yagnuvulkyu*, *Katyayunu*, *Vyasu,* and other such ancient texts, which speak about the right of a widow in her deceased husband's inheritance. This shows that in ancient times, women were not expected to commit sati after their husband's death, but rather that ancient lawmaker had provided for inheritance to widows. This indicates that sati was an aberration of the middle ages introduced by vested interests.

Likewise, in *India Calling*, Cornelia Sorabji writes about the property rights for women in India during the nineteenth century, wherein she states that in India even widows have a right in the property of her deceased husband, "[S]hould there be an heir, the widow enjoys the property till the child attains majority, when she gets a maintenance allowance proportionate to the capacity of the estate and to her social status. Generally speaking, all widows in a Joint Family have a right to residence and maintenance in the family house" (84-85). The practice of sati would directly put an end to any such claims in the future. This shows the presence of vested interests in the proponents or supporters of the practice of sati. The awakening against this helped considerably in social reforms in the favour of women empowerment.

The reformers in the nineteenth century fought against these customs and tried to abolish sati with the help of British legislators. The main difficulty in tackling this issue was its link with religion. Kiran Devendra affirms that "[T]he main difficulty in combating *sati* was the dominant idea that it was based on the first principle of religion, and this consideration prevented the British rulers from interfering in the socio-religious lives of the Hindus till 1829" (9). After facing a lot of opposition, sati was finally abolished in 1829.

This reform saved the lives of many women, particularly child-wives who were coerced into ending their lives on the funeral pyre of the husband by their own family and community. It also was a major step towards psychological empowerment as it shattered the ideology that a wife had no right to exist after her husband. Moreover, an awareness was spread by reformers that such practices were neither ordained by any religion nor commanded by God. While this reform brought a positive change in society, as sati was now considered criminal, it still did not bring an end to the atrocities faced by widows, as they had to now endure, what Yang calls 'cold sati'. Cold sati refers the life full of miseries offered to widows as an alternative to sati.

After sati was abolished, widows were permitted to live, but the life offered to them was one full of sufferings and pain. She was ill-treated by her in-laws who blamed her for the death of their son, she was stigmatized and called a witch. So much so, that the widow would prefer to die than withstand such oppression. Sorabji minutely observes, the norms and practices related to widows and states that:

> [W]idows may not eat out of the vessels of those whose husbands are still alive. When living therefore in a Joint Family house, separate pots and pans, and even separate kitchens (for neither may they cook at the fires of the fortunate), are provided for them.
>
> They eat only once a day – a meal often delayed till 2 p.m., as the service of gods and men and 'tables' must first be attended to.
>
> The widow also fasts meticulously, and from water as well as food, for twenty-four hours every fortnight. […] In all cases the fast is 'with intention' for her husband – never for herself. (74)

Hence, in many cases, it has been noticed that widows have preferred to die as a sati rather than live such a life of persecution. Yang elucidates that:

> [T]hus, viewed from the perspective of widows in early nineteenth century India, the 'option' of becoming a sati was not only conditioned by their economic and social circumstances but also by the 'virtue they earned in gaining long-term spiritual rewards for themselves and their families and by the deliverance they attained by closing out their lives as the 'symbolically dead,' a role to which they were consigned. As an alternative to life as a 'cold sati', a life of marginal existence and symbolic death […] self-immolation was an act of ritual suicide that terminated their 'after lives' of certain misery as widows. (45-46)

This preference to sati also arises from the psychological conditioning and training women received from a young age to be a sati. One of Sorabji's clients was a woman who waited for 50 years that she might be able to perform sati. Moreover, when her son tried to burn her alive for her money, she did not resist, nor resent it, because she hoped for the accomplishment of her dream of becoming a sati. The widow revealed to Sorabji, "'[E]ver since I was three years old I was taught to be Suttee. We stirred boiling rice with a bare finger, to learn how to bear fire when our time should come. But, when my Lord died, there was a law which said that I must not be Suttee. So I have waited. …'" (185).

This showed that although sati was legally abolished, it took more than just a law to change the mind-set of society. Therefore, later on, the reformers took further steps to encourage widow remarriage by which these widows could live a new life. The Widow Remarriage Bill was introduced in the Governor-General's council by J.P. Grant in 1856 and it was then made into an Act (Devendra 13). Albeit the act was introduced, it was not an easy task to convince women to remarry, as the idea that women belonged to their husbands was firmly rooted in their minds. In *India Calling,* Sorabji explains the belief that, "[A] woman belongs to her man, even if he predeceases her, till she dies. British-made Law for India permits the remarriage of widows, but no orthodox Hindu widow takes advantage of this: while infidelity in a wife is unthinkable" (78). Such everlasting devotion and faithfulness towards the husband was imbedded in the minds of all women. This made it almost

impossible for a woman to detach herself from her deceased husband and enter into a new marriage.

Lakshmibai Tilak, narrates the story of a young woman whose husband was blind. She served him and looked after him throughout her life. Later the husband died and this woman became a widow. Lakshmibai observes that in the community to which this woman belonged, remarriage was permitted. She also had many suitors willing to marry her, as she was still young and good-looking, but she refused to do so. "[S]he made a stone image of her husband and began to spend her days in worshipping it and singing hymns of praise to it" (64). Such deification of the husband revealed the 'internalization' of patriarchy by women who clogged their own path towards empowerment. It took a lot of time and effort to change this ideology and motivate women to think of themselves as individuals, each of whom has an identity and a life independent of her husband.

On this backdrop, widowhood and the customs surrounding it can be perceived as instruments of patriarchy, as each of the custom attached to it underscored the importance of a husband in a woman's life, without whom she had no right to exist. Even if she were permitted to live, due to the law against sati, it was considered almost mandatory to treat the widow as harshly and as inhumanly as possible, by way of punishment. Many a time, these widows were young girls, who had been married off to much older men and after their demise, they had to live the rest of their life facing such miseries and atrocities.

Another significant observation, in this context, is that the only alternate path offered to widows by the reformers of this time was to remarry. This again reaffirmed the belief that a woman cannot live, without being dependent on a man. The possibility of an independent life was hardly imagined in this era. Nevertheless, one cannot blame the reformers, as this was the general trend of thought or belief among people. It must be noted here that, what was primarily important was that the perception, with regard to the ruthless social ills, be first changed. Only then, would women realize the need for their own empowerment. After all, the society cannot be transformed completely at once, and empowerment is a slow and gradual process.

Therefore, the reforms undertaken in the nineteenth century were absolutely significant as without them, women would never have even realized the need for empowerment. Women can be truly empowered only when they recognize and acknowledge a need for the same. Underscoring this view, in *India Calling*, Cornelia Sorabji observes that, "[…] you cannot help, however great the need, unless your help is desired. You have first to create recognition of a need for help, next a desire for help, and for help from you" (238).

The reformers had to follow the same approach, as empowerment cannot be superimposed upon women, rather a desire for it should be felt within. However, this desire would arise only with the realization that the oppression they faced, was neither destined by fate nor decreed by religion, but rather imposed by the androcentric society. The reformers of the nineteenth century, while challenging these practices, proved that misfortune of widowhood and the oppression accompanying it had nothing to do with God or religion, and thereby they slowly but significantly helped in changing the perception of Indian women favourably towards their own empowerment.

4.2.4 Education for Women

The struggle regarding women's education was another essential contribution of the reform movement to women's empowerment. As late as the nineteenth century, educated women in India were considered to be a danger to the society. There were many superstitions related to education of women, wherein women were led to believe that their education would result in an early widowhood. It was considered a duty of a woman to devote her life to the service of her husband and family, and education was believed to lead her astray. Therefore, as corroborated by Sorabji, in 1813 the Pundits refused to advise the British Government to sanction women's education because they believed that, "'[…] if women are educated, they will no longer admire and worship men, as is their duty'" (1).

Hence, only boys were allowed education while girls were given away in marriage. In her auto-narrative, Lakshmibai Tilak refers to a neighbourhood friend, Sakhu, who later becomes her sister-in-law. Sakhu was a married girl of twelve or thirteen who had come to her natal home for holidays. Lakshmibai indicates that being the only woman in the house, at that time, all the household responsibilities fell on her shoulders as her two elder

brothers, Tilak and Sakharam were still studying in school (7). This description unravels the privilege given to men in having exclusive access to education without any domestic responsibility as long as a woman was available to step in and take charge. On the other hand, even a young girl on a holiday had no respite from domesticity in the absence of another female to undertake the domestic chores.

Nonetheless, even in such an androcentric setup, many women have felt the desire to be educated and have fought for it with determination, either secretly or openly. Rassundari Devi, in her autobiography narrates the pains she took to be educated and to conceal this act simultaneously. She had a deep-seated desire to be literate and to read books, but in the early nineteenth century, women's education was despised. Devi confesses: "I was angry with myself for wanting to read books. Girls did not read. How could I? […] People used to despise women of learning. How unfortunate those women were, they say" (Tharu and Lalita 199). She also says later that in the attempt to read *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, she tore a page from it and hid it in the kitchen so that no one would see it. She struggles hard just to be able to read and write, only because she was a woman. Rassundari Devi remarks, "[W]asn't it a matter to be regretted, that I had to go through all this humiliation just because I was a woman? Shut up like a thief, even trying to learn was considered an offense" (Tharu and Lalita 201).

Later, with the help of the reformers and the British government who financed the 'Female Education' department in 1859, women's education was focused upon (Sorabji 2). Cornelia Sorabji notes that in 1857, universities were established, and her father was instrumental in securing a resolution to the effect that women would get admissions to all the degrees, equally with men. She also mentions some early women's colleges that were set up, for instance, Bethune College of Calcutta (2).

Thus, in mid-nineteenth century, women's education was emphasized upon by several reformers. Earlier in the century there were Christian missionaries who tried to educate women, an evidence of which is found in Lakshmibai Tilak's *I Follow After*, wherein she relates an experience of her mother-in-law, Jankibai. She describes how her father-in-law was furiously angry with his wife, as, "[…] some missionary women used to come and

visit her, and taught her sewing, embroidery, and other things. It was they who gave my mother-in-law the Book of Proverbs out of the Bible" (16).

Later on the Brahmo Samaj also took up the task of educating women. In *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (1993) Radha Kumar opines that:

> [F]ears of the evangelical intentions of missionary schools were aired at the same time as Brahmo and Hindu schools for girls were opened in Bengal, and were partly responsible for their opening […] these new schools catered to girls of the upper castes. First forays into the *zenanas* (women's quarters), or *andarmahals* as they were known in Bengal, also began to be made at this time by campaigners for adult education for women. (14)

The education offered by the reformers brought a change in the women as they became less ignorant, and it also got rid of many superstitions that were prevalent in those times. But education in the nineteenth century was nothing like what it is today. The main aim of educating women was to make them better mothers and wives. Thus, the education received only enabled them to play the same traditional roles in a better way. They were taught about good health, cooking, stitching and skills of homemaking. According to Radha Kumar, the emergence of the women's education movement was grounded on the need "of a rising middle class to adapt its women to a Western milieu" (14). She explains that the rise of new opportunities for men led to the growth of the "public private dichotomy" – while on one side, there were new emerging ideas, on the other, the home began to represent age old conservative traditions, considered to be barbaric by the British (Kumar 14). This gave impetus to the need for reform.

The real view of the society with regard to women's education, held even by the élite segment of academics and educators of Law, is seen in Sorabji's auto-narrative. When Sorabji excelled in an examination and went to claim the scholarship she had won, the authorities did not allow her to hold the scholarship. Sorbaji comments, "[I]t was in fact impertinent of any woman to produce circumstances which were not in the mind of the Authorities as a possibility when they dandled a glided prize before eyes that should have been male eyes alone!" (20). Further, when she wishes to answer the B.C.L. examination, she was denied the permission to do so, as the London Examiner for the examination

refused to examine a woman. It is pertinent to observe in this context, that such opposition was faced by Cornelia Sorabji for studying law, at the time when the women's education movement was already gaining significance and the university had declared that both men and women were equally admissible to all degrees.

Women were actually given such privileges only much later, after the First World War. Therefore, although with the help of some friends she answers the exam separately in 1892, the convocation was much later in 1922. Thus, albeit women's education was encouraged at this time, this education was only for the overall 'welfare' of women as perceived by the agency of the patriarchy, whether in India or in Britain. It was not professional education, or education that helped women to realize their potential and individual self. In a way, the education imparted to average middle class Indian women appears to be aimed at tending to the 'feminine' in her at the cost of the 'female'.

In fact, several scholars speak of the negative effect of women's education, as it led to the creation of a new class of women called the *bhadramahila*, a section of *bhadralok*, which is a community in Bengal comprising mostly of high caste and class people. They had the advantage of education and also embraced some of the western values. These people began to look down upon traditions as well as folk songs, which were the only source of entertainment to the large mass of other women still secluded and confined to tradition. The cultural events which brought women from different castes and class together, were considered vulgar under the colonial influence (Kumar 15). Bhadramahila was the construction of the 'respectable' upper caste or middle class housewife. Radha Kumar argues that:

> [W]omen's education, thus, was a way of both detaching upper-caste women from any contact with 'the vulgar masses', and curing them of their latent vulgarity. One of the effects of the women's education movement, therefore, was also to marginalize popular forms of women's entertainment, pushing their performers into seeking new avenues of employment. Traditional spaces for the expression of 'a women's voice' were thus further curtailed. (15)

In a corroboration of such state of affairs, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita also speak of the plight of the female artists, like Binodini Dasi, who had to leave their only source of livelihood and were thus pushed into prostitution.

Although, there are many such arguments made for or against the reform pertaining to women's education, it must be borne in mind that this reform was the first step towards women's empowerment. The changing attitudes towards women's education opened up new avenues for women. Although in the beginning many women, like Cornelia Sorabji had to struggle for getting education, later more and more women began to get 'genuinely' educated. This led them to the realization of their own oppression and also provided them with the means of resisting such oppression.

Thus, the social reform movement was the first path-breaker, as it not only questioned the conventional traditions which were carried on from centuries without any rationale, but also tried to eradicate practices that demeaned women, and uplift the status of women in India. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences*, affirms that the reformers:

> […] not only fought against the degrading customs which had crept into the Indian society but also brought about a complete change in social attitudes among the members. […] The women of the early Brahmo families were given education on an equal level with the men and it was they who were notable among the women pioneers in the country. (7)

It is, however, significant to realise that these reforms did not cover or impact all the women of the country; only a few sections of society (and in certain regions) underwent such a change.

4.3 Emergence of Women's Organizations in India

At the close of the nineteenth century, as a consequence of the continuous struggle for reform and the campaign for abolishing social ills and promoting education, many women could avail of education and were now ready to step forward and strive to uplift the women's position in society.

As a natural fallout of this positive change, at this stage, a further step towards empowerment was taken. One can examine the women's empowerment movements in India vis-a-vis Sarah Longwe's (1998) 'five level framework' of women's empowerment, discussed in the Chapter Two. Longwe begins with 'welfare' which is seen at the start of the reform movement and then she moves to 'conscientization'. In the reform movement, women were also 'conscientized', through education – they were made aware of their own oppression.

Longwe then highlights 'participation' as an important element for empowerment, and this can be seen in the second movement at a preliminary level. In this movement, some women actively participate and work towards empowerment of self and of other women. The emergence of women's organizations by women themselves was a gradual process, as it first began by women participating in associations and organizations established by men, with the help and support of their spouses or other male relatives.

4.3.1 Women's Organizations Supported by Men

As mentioned earlier, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the first generation of educated women began to join the reformers and take active part in associations and organizations which aimed at bringing women together, educating them and helping in social work. Although the reformers of the nineteenth century were largely men, one cannot presume that there were only men in the campaign for women's emancipation. There were a few women too, those who belonged to enlightened and broad-minded families, where they were encouraged to join the social reform movement. Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade and Savitribai Phule were some of the women who strove towards the eradication of anti-women practices. Balaji Ranganathan in his essay, "Nineteenth Century Social Reform and the 'Women's Question' " opines that during this time, "Indian women were pushed into the public sphere […] women like Mrs. Ranade, Anandbai Joshi, Cornelia Sorebji, Pandita Ramabai, Madam Bhikaji Cama and others were encouraged to enter the public spheres by their families who had experienced the liberating effects of education" (Harish et al. 173-174).

Later, these women along with many others also joined the associations and organizations established by men. There were associations and organizations founded under the auspices of the Brahmo Samaj. Likewise, Justice Ranade, along with his wife Ramabai Ranade, helped Pandita Ramabai to set up her Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882. Muslim women also began to take part in the organizational activity, with the help of their male family members (Forbes 66). Anjuman-e-Khawatin -e- Islam was one such organization. Here, although women were allowed to meet and discuss upon female education, it was done within the matrix of the purdah and under the guidance of their male relatives.

These organizations became a medium through which women from different families would meet together, communicate and, for the first time, express their own opinion about women's emancipation and female education. But these organizations, set up by men or with the help of men, imposed certain restrictions upon women. In *Women in Modern India* (1998), Geraldine Forbes, who has studied the women's organizations established or guided by men, observes that these reformist men wanted their wives to be modernized women, "[…] who had imbibed scientific ideas about hygiene and child-rearing" (68). They wanted women to step out of their house and take part in social work. Forbes remarks that, "[T]he restrictions that accompanied male support and tutelage were revealed whenever women wanted to strike out on their own. The religious-reform and communal associations dealt with women's problems as defined by male leaders. But these patrons would not automatically extend their support to problems identified by women on their own" (68-69).

A significant illustration of the limitations of the male-established or supported organizations is the case of Rukhmabai, discussed earlier in context of child marriage. This case, which has been referred to by Sorabji in her auto-narrative, *India calling*, became an eye-opener for women like Pandita Ramabai. She was furious when Lokmanya Tilak, an opponent of the British rule in India and a reformer, supported the decision made by the British to imprison Rukhmabai, if she disagreed to go back to her husband, claiming that the "[B]ritish law was upholding *dharmasastras*" (Forbes 69). In response to this case, Pandita Ramabai made a pertinent observation commenting that, "[T]he government advocated education and emancipation but when a woman refused to 'be a slave' […] the

government 'comes to break her spirit allowing its law to become an instrument for riveting her chains'" (Forbes 69).

Thus, although these organizations worked towards women's education and tried to provide a better life to women, they did it with their own perception of modernized mothers and wives in mind. Thus, there was a need felt by women to establish their own organizations. However, these male supported organizations made pioneering attempts to organize women cross-culturally and train them in the skills of organization. Due to this initial training and experience, by the early twentieth century, women were gradually able to establish their own organizations and associations which were fully run by women and dealt not only with issues of female education, but also took up issues like violence against women, which were hardly dealt with by the male reformers' organizations for women.

4.3.2 Women's Organizations by Women

Renuka Ray's *My Reminiscences* brings to light several women's associations and samitis founded by her maternal grandmother, Sarala Ray, in the nineteenth century. Sarala Ray had established many small samitis for women; she was also an educationalist in her own right. Renuka says that, "[S]he was a pioneer in girls' education, and was one of the founders of the Brahmo Girls' School. The Gokhale Memorial School was her creation" (6). Later in 1911, when the family went to England, Renuka's maternal grandmother founded a Women's Society in London. This society funded scholarships for Indian women teachers to be trained in Britain.

At a much later stage, Sarala Ray also joined the dowager Maharani of Coochbihar and founded a society known as the Sisterhood of the East. In underlining the functioning of the society, Renuka Ray states that, "[T]he society was open to the Indian women and other Asian women who would hold discussions on common problems with progressive-minded British women" (9). A special feature of this society was its exclusiveness, as men were not welcomed so that the women who observed purdah may not be dissuaded from attending its deliberations.

Renuka Ray belonged to a family which was very progressive and therefore not only her grandmothers, but also her mother and later she herself worked towards women's

empowerment. She writes, "I can thus never claim to be a pioneer in social, educational, or even in public work. My grandmothers on both sides had led the way. My mother too was a pioneer in the districts where she founded schools and mahila samitis or women's groups and committees" (8). Her auto-narrative offers a glimpse of this new surge towards women's empowerment, wherein women themselves collectively strove towards empowerment, quite independent of their male counterparts.

Thus, towards the early twentieth century, a multitude of organizations, samitis, women's societies, ranging from small scale communities within the regional periphery to larger associations on the national front, began to make their appearance. New local or regional organizations, such as the Banga Mahila Samaj and the Aghorekamini Nari Samiti in Bengal, the Satara Abalonnati Sabha in Maharashtra, the Mahila Seva Samaj in Banglore, the Bharat Mahila Parishad in Benares and Prayas Mahila Samiti in Allahabad were formed around this time.

Some of these were practically-oriented social reform organizations, while others were discussion platforms for women. An illustration of this fact is given in Ray's *My Reminiscences* where she herself was involved in setting up mahila samitis. She writes, "[W]ith the help of other women, […] we had set up mahila samitis (women's group/societies) and had taken up programmes of work for the women and children of the poorer sections in such matters as maternity and child welfare, schooling for children and girls, and creches for the children of working women" (44). No doubt, these samitis and organizations must have created quite an impact in their own time by creating awareness about women's issues. However, despite their invaluable contribution to reform, educate and organize women in their own rights, these associations were confined to a city or at the most to a region with regard to their sphere of activity and influence.

But this was to change soon. As early as 1908, as Radha Kumar notes, one of the first attempts at coming together by women on a larger scale was made. This happened with the organization of the 'Mahila Parishad' or Ladies' Congress' at Madras, attended by women from all over South India. One of the highlights of this parishad was that altogether nineteen papers were presented by women in various languages. This is evidence enough of the intellectual ferment and social thinking that was taking place at this time with regard to

women's concern among women themselves. This sharing of ideas and social concerns must be seen as a great leap forward by women of Southern India collectively.

At the national level, one of the earliest organizations to be established was the Bharat Stree Mahamandal formed by Saraladevi Chaudhurani. It had its first meeting in Allahabad in 1910. It is relevant to note here, that Chaudhurani was sceptical of women's meetings organized by men. In fact, in her essay titled, "A Women's Movement" (1911), she criticizes some of the men, who take up the cause of women, affirming that they are hypocrites. She alleges that such men "advertise themselves as champions of the weaker sex", and speak about women's empowerment, are actually living in the "shade of Manu" (qtd. in Forbes 70).

Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi having surveyed women's organizations in India, aver in their book titled *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India* (1986) that, there were three major women's organizations at national level established in the early twentieth century, namely, the Women's Indian Association (1917) by Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarjadasa and Annie Besant; the National Council of Women in India in 1925 by Mehribai Tata and Lady Aberdeen; and The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927, by Margaret Cousins (21). The last organization seems to have been the most significant one in that it continued to live on, function and contribute to women's welfare and emancipation and empowerment even during the later twentieth century.

According to Khullar, the first All-India Conference on Women's Education was held in January 1927 at Poona, where women delegates from across the country converged to deliberate on the issue of education for women. Thereafter, every year such a conference was held, and these conferences, laid the foundation of The All-India Women's Conference, popularly referred to as AIWC (4).

Admittedly, an institution of its times, the AIWC did not envision a utopian world for women. Rather, almost in tune with the sentiments of its day, it advocated that women should be educated to be better wives and mothers. However, in addition to this objective it also asserted the need for women doctors, educators and lawyers, thereby indirectly paving the way to acknowledge professional training and status for women. Notably, this

organization appears to have been more of a dynamic and progressive institution, in that it underwent many changes widening its scope further each time, particularly during the freedom struggle.

During the Indian freedom struggle the AIWC became "[…] the single largest national voice of the divergent groups and political tendencies, infused all its old and new demands with an equal rights perspective" (Gandhi and Shah 17). Thus the demands changed from education to co-education, the reform of law now included marriage, divorce, and inheritance, economic equality comprised of a right to husband's income and pension for widows. Here, the right to abortion was also spoken about.

Therefore, in context of the growing graph of women's emancipation and empowerment through the twentieth century, the AIWC is recognized as one of the most relevant and influential of women's organizations in India.

In her auto-narrative Renuka Ray refers to such organization and observes that:

> […] organizing the women of India at the national level started when the Women's Indian Association was set up. Later in 1926 came the National Council of Women in India which started as a branch of the International Council of Women, which in those days were organized chiefly by British Women. But these were confined mostly to cities and big towns. In 1927 came the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) at the initiative of Mrs. Margaret Cousins and Kamaladevi Chattopadbyaya to meet the challenge of the Director of Public Instruction of Bengal who asked women in India to organize themselves on a national scale and give their considered suggestions on educational reform for girls. (77)

As such, AIWC was not the only institution working towards women-related reform and progress. Interestingly, Cornelia Sorabji in her auto-narrative *India Calling,* draws attention to the League of Social Service, a scheme created by her to spread awareness among women. Sorabji mentions the formation of two groups of women: (1) the forerunners; and, (2) the trained workers; and explains their role and functions thus:

> […] the *Forerunners*, i.e. the indigenous or other worker *acquainted with local superstitions* [who] would go to the villages […] demonstrating Infant welfare, Infant diet, giving talks about ante-natal care […] These visits were to be followed by the

> *establishment* in the villages *of our second battalion of fully trained workers, as specifically desired by the village* for any of the subjects with which our Forerunners had acquainted them. (Emphasis added; 238-239)

It is easy to understand from the above information why even the Purdahnashins were impressed by this idea, and showed interest in this scheme, and not only did they raise funds for it, but also began working for it as voluntary forerunners. The special plus point of this enterprise initiated by Sorabji was of course that these secluded women became the pioneers of such social work. She goes to mention here that several Purdahnashins joined together and worked for the cause, although within the limitations of purdah. Expectedly, the group meetings were held in strict purdah and, therefore, the number of women grew from 150-500 (241).

In fact, there was one Purdahnashin, a begum who became the President of the League and directed the Purdahnashin unit, and all the secluded women would meet together in her house. But later, the Bengal Congress Workers threatened her and demanded large sums of money. Consequently, these meetings and social work came to a halt. Sorabji affirms that although the scheme did not last long, it still created an impact in the minds of women that together they can work towards their own empowerment even without the help of any men. It surely must have been a valuable lesson in self-confidence and mutual co-operation among women towards a shared goal.

Thus, it can be seen from the above discussion that during the beginning of the twentieth century, women began to be aware of their own potentials and they started actively participating in organizations and associations that not only worked towards the betterment of women, but also towards the general welfare of society. Moreover, the realization that women could aspire to carve out a destiny for themselves even without the consent and support of conservative patriarchy must have in itself been a great achievement. It was certainly a source of much psychological empowerment for a section of society that had, for centuries, borne the brunt of male oppression and helplessly acquiesced in their secondary status. Of course, this psychological attainment and participatory role must have come to a small proportion of womenfolk in general. Its benefits needed to trickle down to

the mass of women. Moreover, this emancipation had to translate into political empowerment of women and it would not be too far away.

4.4 National Freedom Struggle

Here, it must be acknowledged in all truthfulness that in the early twentieth century, there were very few women on the political front of India. Although several women were now educated, most of them did not participate in the political activity until much later. In fact, during the pre-independence era of the twentieth century, there were three notable phases of the freedom movements wherein women's participation was witnessed in various degrees: the first was the Non-Cooperation Movement against partition of Bengal around 1905; the second coincided with the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1921; and, the third with the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930, both (the latter two) being initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. Although several women participated in the 1905 and 1921 movements, women's contribution to the freedom struggle became evident only in the 1930 movement, since by that time, the society's perception towards women had considerably altered, thanks to the spread of education and reform. As such, women were encouraged to actively participate in the national struggle. This gradual change was somewhat simultaneous with the changes occurring on the political front of India and, the root of this alteration can be traced to the year 1920, which Renuka Ray describes as "the dawn of the Gandhian era" (18).

4.4.1 Empowerment of Women vis-a-vis the Freedom Struggle

However, it must be admitted that the partition of Bengal in 1905 had already created an impetus for the non-cooperation movements, since several men and women had participated in the non-cooperation movement in opposition to the partition. Thereby, under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj, many educated women, had already been attending meetings and had given up purdah. But the larger section of women were still under the purdah system. Interestingly, what tilted the political balance in favour of the still-in-seclusion and under privileged women was the infamous Rowlatt Act.

The introduction of the Rowlatt Bill and the subsequent Jalianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919 saw a major change in the Indian political arena. It is a recorded and acknowledged fact of history that innocent, unarmed and helpless Indians were brutally killed by the British army ordering firing upon a peaceful gathering trapped within the confines of the premises with no exit for escape. This event led to an unprecedented awakening of a strong sense of nationalism in the hearts of Indians, whereby the determination for the Independence of India grew even in the minds of the moderates. Consequently, a wider participation of men and women in the freedom struggle ensued.

As such, this turned out to be the landmark era of India's freedom struggle which witnessed, in 1920, the emergence of the Gandhian politics and subsequently of Gandhian philosophy on the Indian political scenario. Gradually, from this point onwards, Mahatma Gandhi began to use his weapons of non-violence and non-cooperation, already tried and tested for their efficacy against the empirial might of the British in South Africa. They were equally successful in India, since he had especially studied the situation on the ground, traversing the length and breadth of rural India. The impact was spontaneous and unprecedented. What is more, he did not differentiate between men and women and young or old. This gave a further impetus to a still wider participation of women in the freedom struggle in the 1920s.

Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences: Social Development during the Gandhian Era and After* (2005) in writing about the influence of Gandhian ideas on people from different sections of India, captures this impact aptly thus, "[B]y the time the special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta, Gandhiji had already succeeded in arousing the nation – whether it be *women from their seclusion* or youth from educational institutions or any other section of the people" (Emphasis added 14).

Ray goes on to offer a detailed account of the encouragement provided by Gandhiji to women to move out of seclusion and contribute in the freedom struggle of India. She herself worked under Gandhiji and convinced womenfolk to participate in the political movement. Thus, under Gandhiji's guidance a group of women including Renuka Ray visited the secluded women from house to house trying to rouse national consciousness among them. Ray's account of these visits is interesting:

> [I]n those days the women of orthodox affluent families lived in the andar mahal, the inner quarters of the household, and we could reach them only after getting consent from the men who were their guardians. Sometimes we would be driven out for being the followers of seditionist agitators like Gandhi and C. R. Das. *Sometimes the women would come to us through the bye-lane and ask us to return at a specific time when the men were absent*. (Emphasis added 25)

This significant description convincingly reveals the interest these women took in matters of the nation. The very fact that these womenfolk would ask the Gandhian disciples to return at a time when their men were not present, demonstrates without doubt their desire to know more about the freedom struggle. It is possible to conjecture that perhaps they even wished to participate in it. On the basis of the evidence in Ray's above cited description of these women who were confined within the household by the restrictions imposed by their male counterparts, one can deduce that the 'apparent absence' of women nationalists from the political arena prior to the Gandhian era was not because of a lack of patriotism on their part or due to an apathy to their motherland. It was mainly due to this confinement imposed upon women, and probably also due in part to their ignorance of the outside reality, being denied access to the world outside. The immense significance of Gandhian method of door-to-door contact and of 'educating' the women confined to their homes, must have been instrumental in drawing women in large numbers into the public domain during the freedom struggle.

Renuka Ray makes a pertinent observation in this context on the Congress session of 1920, held in Calcutta. She writes:

> [P]roudly, Lalita and I took our seats among the delegates who were our elders. Although we were both only sixteen, a special relaxation had been made for women because their numbers were still negligible. Sitting opposite us were the Congress Subjects Committee members and all around were the visitors' gallaries where there were a large number of women. On the delegates' benches, however, there were only a handful of women. (20)

Ray's observation reiterates the point of women's interest in the functioning of the Congress, in participating in the struggle for Independence as well as their keen desire to step out of the house towards these objectives. However, the interesting contrast between

the large number of women present for the meeting and the few women delegates, despite the age relaxation for women, is an eye opener; it reveals the existence of an invisible hurdle that obstructed the women from crossing over the boundary between the 'safe zone' of 'witnessing' guarded by their male counterparts and the unguarded political arena of 'participation' whereby they could actually contribute to the struggle for freedom. Participation in the socio-political front, would not be easily allowed to a woman, as it would also give her a voice of her own and thereby empower her.

However, with the persistent exhortation from Gandhiji for women to contribute to the freedom struggle, the situation slowly changed. In her auto-narrative, Renuka Ray throws light on the ideas of Gandhi on the role of women in the freedom struggle. Gandhi was fully aware that women could well be the torch bearers of the Satyagraha movement, as self-denial came naturally to women, since they had endured domination for centuries. Considering the fact that Gandhian Satyagraha was based on inner strength of character and self-sacrifice, it is not difficult to see why Gandhiji set such high expectations by women's participation in the freedom struggle. In fact, his basis on strength of character made it easier for more conservative males to let their women join the struggle for freedom.

In encapsulating Gandhi's views expressed during a meeting in which he addressed women, Ray observes, "[I]n essence, he wanted women to come forward, discarding purdah and other customs which had prevented their growth and development, and take the lead in this movement and help the men to behave in a disciplined manner" (27).

Little wonder then, that from 1920 onwards with the motivation from Mahatma Gandhi, more and more women began to step out of purdah and participate in the meetings, and in the non-cooperative movement. Having first-hand experience of the changes brought in by Gandhiji, and of the impact of his words on the Indian women, Ray opines that along with the progress on the national front, there was also a noticeable change in the general attitude towards women. More and more nationalists were now supporting their wives' participation in the non-cooperative movement. Women with their traditionally imbibed abilities of self-sacrifice and discipline, which were upheld as the primary requirement for a true satyagrahi, were now looked upon as assets for the national cause. Renuka Ray relevantly asserts that:

> [T]he women who came from the seclusion of purdah and those who came from remote rural villages in response to Gandhiji's call were the means through which a *countrywide silent revolution* took place. While others had been busy striving to change the laws to bring about equality for women and the backward classes, *Gandhiji's method was far more effective*. He brought about their *freedom from the social bondage* in which they had been enveloped through the centuries *by action*, not just by enacting some legislation. *There could be no going back*: once women and others who were discriminated against had shed the trammels of seclusion and broken rigid social rules. (Emphasis added; 27)

In fact, the society gradually loosened its restrictive stranglehold on women's freedom as their participation in the freedom struggle increased and came to be accepted as necessary and useful. Over the last few centuries, for various reasons and under several pretexts, the patriarchal society in India had always confined their women to the homes. But at this juncture in the history of India, for the first time, women were encouraged to join the freedom movement, and thereby cross the *Lakshman rekha* (boundary ordained by tradition) of their houses. In *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42* (2006) Suruchi Thapar-Björkert explicates the reasons for the sudden change in the outlook towards women's participation in the political arena. She observes:

> [T]he congress leaders also realized that without the participation of the 'masses' (and ordinary women), the elite congress-led movement, could not universalize the movement and claim to be representing a unified Indian nation. The nationalist project would be incomplete without the support of middle-class women. The importance of the symbolic category of 'woman' to the nationalist movement can be understood in relation to these nationalist needs. (46)

Therefore, a vast difference could be seen, with regards to the participation of women in the two phases of Civil Disobedience movement. While only women belonging to the élite families, and whose male family members were congressmen, participated in the first phase, masses of women belonging to various sections of society actively participated during the second phase.

Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (2004) provides an account of the multitudes of women participating in the freedom struggle at the time when all the leaders were imprisoned. He observes:

> [M]any strange things happened in those days, but undoubtedly *the most striking was the part of the women in the national struggle. They came out in large numbers from the seclusion of their homes and, though unused to public activity, threw themselves into the heart of the struggle*. The picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops they made their preserve. *Enormous processions consisting of women alone* were taken out in all the cities; and, *generally, the attitude of the women was more unyielding* than that of the men. (Emphasis added; 226)

Nehru's autobiography serves not only as an account of his life but is also a record of the national events that were witnessed by him. He provides great details of the national freedom movement. Interestingly, it is pertinent to note that he hardly mentions the contribution of women in the previous two movements of 1905 and 1921. But when he speaks of the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement, he generously praises the work carried on by women in the absence of the men. This helps gauge the huge and significant spurt in women's participation in the freedom struggle at this point in time. In fact, Nehru has highlighted upon this contribution of women not only in *An Autobiography*, but also in *Discovery of India* (1972) where he writes:

> [M]ost of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. *Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle*. *Women had always been there* of course, *but now there was an avalanche of them*, which took not only the British Government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here *were these women, women of the upper or middle classes,* leading sheltered lives in their homes – *peasant women, working-class women, rich women – pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police lathi*. It was not only that display of courage and daring, but *what was even surprising was the organizational power they showed*. (Emphasis added; 41)

As mentioned by Nehru, the multitude of women who moved out of their safe zone and participated in the Indian political movement, were not restricted to any particular section of society. Unlike the reform movement in the nineteenth century and the organizations of

women, wherein only women of certain privileged section participated and benefited from the movement, this national movement towards India's Independence united the Indian masses from different parts of India belonging to diverse religions, castes and classes. Civil disobedience involved participating in multiple activities: picketing of foreign goods and alcohol; challenging any unfair laws that were implemented, such as the salt law and forest laws; the refusal in paying taxes; and so on. All such activities did not really require any particular expertise or training. Therefore, hordes of women were easily drawn towards such campaigns.

Consequently, women who had had to sabotage their desire to participate in the struggle for freedom earlier because such a participation then required a certain level of intelligence and training, now found this avenue of empowerment opened up for themselves. Previously, qualifying for active participation was against the wishes of their patriarchal families and society in general (as testified by Ray in her auto-narrative). They were now free to participate spontaneously in the struggle for freedom, as Gandhiji and his ideals of non-violence and non-cooperation made women's participation much easier.

In this context, it is pertinent to note Uma Rao's observation that, "[I]t was argued that the feature of non-violence assisted women's equal participation, as 'because the struggle was non-violent, women could participate equally. They amply possessed the qualities required for a non-violent struggle: tolerance, courage and capacity for suffering'" (qtd. in Thapar-Björkert 44). Hence, the qualities that were traditionally instilled in women to *feminize* them, were now directed and harnessed towards the national cause. In a way, women subverted their feminization by utilizing those feminine qualities to participate equally with men in the freedom movement and thereby experience empowerment.

However, this is not to say that participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement was easy for women. They had to face rigorous imprisonment. In *An Autobiography*, Nehru observes, "[M]ost of the girls and women who were sentenced had a very bad time in prison, even worse than the men had" (344). Further, Nehru also narrates an almost fatal incident his mother experienced during a peaceful procession. In his own words:

> [I]n Allahabad my mother was in a procession stopped by the police and later charged with *lathis*. When the procession had been halted some one brought her a chair, and she was sitting on this on the road at the head of the procession. […] then came the police charge. My mother was knocked down from her chair, and was hit repeatedly on the head with canes. Blood came out of an open wound in the head; she fainted, and lay on the roadside […] (349)

Nehru says that although this incident had a very grave effect on his mother's health, she was proud of sharing such a privilege of serving her country with the other volunteers. Thus, even the lathi charge and the imprisonment did not stop women from actively participating in the freedom struggle.

A study on the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 points towards the dawn of a new outlook which Thapar-Björkert discusses as "[T]he metaphorical construct of the 'extended family' and the nation as the family" (47). To further ensure the participation of the masses in the freedom movement the 'household space' which was so far considered to be the 'female space', was now extended to the 'social space', whereby "[…] the public activities were seen as natural extensions of household roles, thus facilitating women stepping out from their homes. This provided an important metaphor in facilitating women's activities beyond the domestic sphere, and into the public sphere" (Minault qtd. in Thapar-Björkert 47).

Therefore, during this time, women participated in the freedom movement in two different ways: on the one hand, there was the 'female intelligentsia' wherein active educated women "[…] took over leadership roles and facilitated the participation of 'women of the extended female space'" (47); and on the other hand, there were the masses of mostly uneducated women, who participated in satyagraha and non-cooperation movements and treated these political activities as an extension of their household duties (Thapar-Björkert 47). Thereby, they further empowered the movement as much as themselves.

Against this backdrop, the sudden emergence of multitudes of women actively participating in the freedom struggle can well be understood. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* bears witness to the multitudes of women contributing in the nationalist movement in different ways. She writes:

> [T]he nationalist movement brought women out of seclusion to oppose British rule. At the first they were not many but as the movement grew, especially under Gandhiji's direction, women swelled the ranks.
>
> As early as during the Revolt of 1857, daring leaders such as Rani of Jhansi, Begum Hazrat Mahal, and the Rani of Ramgarh had fought the British. […] Almost fifty years later we find that the work of the pioneers to awaken women from seclusion had succeeded because the Swadeshi movement and the anti-partition agitation in Bengal saw large numbers of women participating. Rani Swarnarmoyee of Murshidabad was a notable figure among them, but many unknown women came forward and gave their gold ornaments for the nationalist cause, and consigned foreign clothes and articles to bonfires. Almost every middle-class home saw women willingly taking the vow of Swadeshi and encouraging Indian products. Sister Nivedita too was a member of the National Revolutionary Council. Sarala Devi acted as a liaison between Punjabi and Bengali revolutionaries. She established a centre for physical culture – the Bharat Stri Mandal, and the Lakshmi Bhandar for the sale of Swadeshi goods. The young revolutionaries who took to terrorism to fight the British also included women members. At a later stage the names of Lila Roy, Santi and Suniti of Comilla, Bina Das, and Kalpana Dutt, who took part in the Chittagong armoury raid, and Pritilata Waddedar, who shot a police officer and took poison rather than be captured, are well known. (71-72)

Ray's observation also points towards the fact that albeit most women participated in Gandhiji's pacifist non-violent movement, there were also women who militantly took up arms against the British rule.

Here, it is also pertinent to note the reaction of the menfolk towards this sudden active participation of women in the political scenario. Leaders like Gandhiji and Nehru were fully in support of women's participation. Nehru's outlook towards the women of his family, participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement, can be gauged through his autobiography, wherein he writes:

> [W]hen I heard that my aged mother and, of course, my sisters used to stand under the hot summer sun picketing before foreign cloth shops, I was greatly moved. Kamala did so also, but she did something more. She threw herself into the movement in Allahabad city and district with an energy and determination which amazed me, who thought I had known her

> so well for so many years. She forgot her ill-health and rushed about the whole day in the sun, and showed remarkable powers of organization. (225)

The significant aspect of the above appraisal is that as an author, Jawaharlal Nehru makes very few references to his mother and sisters in his autobiography. Similarly, he hardly writes much about his wife and their relationship. But the above quote reveals his unstinted admiration for the work undertaken by his womenfolk for the national cause.

However, Nehru also observes that many men were not in favour of women's participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, he writes, "[U]sually when girls or women took an active part in the campaign, it was in spite of their fathers or brothers or husbands, or at any rate not with their full co-operation" (344). Nehru also discloses the discomfort felt by his father Motilal Nehru, when he sees the women of the house, partaking in the activities, and observes that, "[H]e [Motilal Nehru] did not at all fancy my mother or the girls rushing about in the hot sun, but, except for an occasional remonstrance, he did not interfere" (225). This shows that all men were not spontaneously and whole heartedly in support of the active participation of their womenfolk in the freedom struggle, which is quite understandable given that age, their individual temperament and societal status. But in light of the larger picture of Independence, most of the Congressmen did not interfere in women's participation. Hence, the national struggle gave an impetus to women to move out of their so-called safe zone guarded by the rules of patriarchy, and be empowered.

4.4.2 Women's Demand for Equality and Reform in Personal Laws

Towards the end of the pre-independence era, women's participation in the Indian freedom struggle as equals with men, was perceived to be an opportunity to change the society's outlook towards women and bring about social laws that would emancipate women. Ray aptly observes:

> [T]HE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT had brought women out of seclusion. Women participated in their thousands in the Civil Disobedience movement. Women's organizations too were inspired by the nationalist fervor of women from all walks of life. We hoped to use the momentum of nationalism to change the social legislation of India

> and bring about one common code for the social laws that would remove the legal disabilities of women once for all. (54)

Consequently, many of the women's organizations too joined hands in this nationalist endeavour, with hope that through this struggle, the women's rights to equality would be established. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah in *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (1991), discuss the impact of the Nationalist movement on Indian Women's Movement (IWM). They argue that as a result of the nationalist movement, the IWM "[…] moved onto a different path, away from its social work and parliamentary orientation" (17). At this point they observe a divide in the approach of the IWM – there was now on one hand, the pragmatic reformism and on the other, the new equal rights approach. The "[…] women affiliated to the nationalist movement wanted adult franchise and gender equality as a Constitutional right, and no reservation of electoral seats" (Gandhi and Shah 17). The pragmatic reformists accused the latter group of being "idealist and blind to the real position of women in Indian society" while the new group thought that "women could not ignore the nationalist movement or the political consequences of women's struggle for their rights" (17).

During the post 1930s era women began to make claims for their equality by raising two significant issues: Women's Suffrage; and, reform in areas of personal law by means of a Hindu Code. It is significant to study the response these claims received from men, as it reveals their true perception of women.

4.4.2.1 Women's Suffrage

According to Liddle and Joshi, the issue of women's suffrage was first raised by the Women's Indian Association in 1917, "[…] when Montagu, secretary of State for India, came to discuss Indian demands for political representation. It was not mentioned in his report, and it was rejected by the subsequent franchise report on the grounds that orthodox opinion would oppose it and it would be premature when so many men still required education to vote 'responsibly'" (35).

Later in 1919, the Government of India Act enfranchised few Indian men but women were excluded. However, the Provincial Assemblies were allowed to drop the exclusion clause.

This concession was given since most of the political groups testified in support of women's suffrage. Although most of the provincial assemblies did drop the exclusion, yet women were not enfranchised because ownership of property was seen as a qualification for suffrage, and in India most of the women had no independent share in the family property. Interestingly, at this point in time, in Britain too all women did not have the right to vote. The Representation of People Act was passed in 1918 granting women over thirty years, who owned houses, the right to vote. G.M Trevelyan in his *A Shortened History of England* (1977) records this event, in his words:

> [E]arly in 1918, while the War was still raging, the Fourth Reform Bill was passed by general consent, giving what was practically Manhood Suffrage, and a large instalment of the new principle of Woman's Suffrage; the cessation of outrages by the Suffragettes, and the splendid war work done by women in the factories and elsewhere, had converted many objectors to their enfranchisement. (553)

It is pertinent to note the subtle and significant similarities between the women's movement in India and in Britain. In Britain during the First World War (1914-19) women were compelled by circumstances, in the absence of men, to move out of their houses and take on 'manly' roles, and prove their potential which was until then hidden beneath the garb of femininity imposed by patriarchy. Likewise in India, the women crossed their thresholds only for a national cause, especially when all the men were imprisoned. Though many women were already participating in mass movements, the female intelligentsia took on leadership roles mostly in the absence of male Congress leaders. It is also significant to observe that it was because of this mass participation in distinct forms in India (and in Britain too), that equality for women was taken into consideration later, in the form of women's suffrage.

Liddle and Joshi remark that although Indian women were fully enfranchised much later, the gesture (almost a tokenism) made in 1919 when the exclusion of women was dropped, was very important: it showed that many Indians were in support of women's suffrage, this is in stark contrast to the British who fully enfranchised their women only in 1928. Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* observes that:

> [W]omen under Mrs. Pankhurst in Britain and those in Europe as a whole had to fight a long and bitter battle courting imprisonment and violence before they earned the right to vote and obtain their franchise on equal footing with men. In contrast, the pioneer women in India owed much to the men of the renaissance period and thus those who brought the women's movement in India into existence were not inspired by narrow suffragist attitudes. In India it was the forces of orthodoxy and prejudice that arrayed themselves against enlightenment and progress. (72)

Later, after the 1930 movement, women's suffrage was supported even further. In 1931, the Congress session held in Karachi "[…] adopted the principles for a new Constitution and, thanking the women for their part in the civil disobedience campaign, pledged itself to sexual as well as caste and religious equality before the law, no discrimination in employment or offices, and universal adult suffrage when independence had been achieved" (36).

Such an act definitely boosted the morale of women, as it was felt that the social perception towards women had changed. However, the support for suffrage for women was not only based on their progressive thinking, but there were many other concealed motives too behind this seemingly generous act towards women. Firstly, the Indian men wanted to prove to the British that they were progressive in thinking and were fully in support of their women and therefore were socially more advanced than the British. By proving this, the claim made by the British, that India was backward, and therefore, their colonization was more of a missionary work would be shattered. Secondly, women's suffrage would also be a boon to the national cause as it would increase the Indian political representation. Lastly, Indian men were by then well aware of the divide and rule strategy of the British, and thus they did not want the women to accept the separate electorate provided for women by the British government. Ray in her auto-narrative throws light on this aspect and says that:

> [T]he British effort to carry out the policy of divide and rule by separate favours to women failed miserably. […] As early as 1917 a memorandum was presented on behalf of the women of India to Edward Montagu, Secretary of State for India, supporting the broad claims of the people for self-government. The memorandum requested that women be

> given the vote on equal basis with men. Women, in short, did not want reserved seats or special nominations to the legislatures as offered by the British rulers. (72-73)

Hence, the support of Indian men towards women's suffrage would also ensure that women would not be tempted to accept the British government's offer, which would jeopardize the Indian political situation. On this backdrop, one can say that although many Indian men were in favour of women's equal rights and their emancipation, it cannot be assumed that the general social perception towards women had completely changed. This is further affirmed in their disapproval of the demand for reforms in the personal law by the Hindu code.

4.4.2.2 Hindu Code

The demand for reform in personal areas was made in the 1930s. Ray writes that the campaign for a uniform social code for all women was undertaken by leading organizations such as the AIWC in the 1930's. "[I]t was a twofold campaign: public opinion had to be won over, and the Central Assembly had to be convinced to pass the relevant legislation" (54). Since most of the Congressmen were still in prison, this task was taken up by women alone with no help from their male counterparts. Thus, this campaign was very significant as it was the first endeavour on their own. Prior to this, women had participated in the national cause. But, this was the first time where the focus of the movement was thoroughly on women's empowerment.

This campaign aimed at reforming personal laws such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. A demand for the required changes in the Law of the land in support of women's right was voiced in the Central Assembly, bills were drafted which sought solutions to the disabilities suffered. Renuka throws more light on what she means by disabilities; first of all, she says women had no protection under the law:

> [T]hey were married off at a very early age and had no say in this crucial matter. If they were unhappily married, they had no recourse. What was more, even when a man deserted his wife or took another wife, there was nothing that she could do. The happiness of women was dependent on the benevolence of their menfolk – father, husband, or son. (56)

Therefore, reforms in areas of marriage and divorce were necessary.

However, the demand for change was opposed by many men. An instance narrated by Ray, while the campaigns to build up public opinion were being made, bears evidence to the negative reaction of men to this reform. According to her, when Sarojini Naidu was to address a public meeting in the Calcutta Senate Hall, a large number of men from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh sat on the front seats meant for the supporters and began interrupting the meeting and started shouting: " 'Down with the women's social rights'" (55). Sarojini Naidu intervened, and said:

> I am shocked and ashamed to find that my own brothers can be so uncultured and un-Indian in their ways as to not only come in and forcibly occupy the front seats at a meeting convened by women but behave in this ungentlemanly and outrageous fashion. We have no objection to your attending our meeting as women always like to encourage their brothers. If you want to say anything, you must ask me as president to give you an opportunity and to come up one by one to the dais. *We are not afraid of you. We know we will convert you to our ideas* but only please behave as Indians and cultured gentlemen. (Emphasis added 55)

While the act of interfering in such a meeting reveals the opposition of men towards the reforms suggested, the courage and intellectual prowess displayed by Sarojini Naidu, on the other hand, divulges that by this time many women had gained the confidence to face such hurdles in the path of their own empowerment and that of other women. The statement emphasized upon in the above quote reaffirms this self-assurance.

However, it is significant to note that not only men, but several women too opposed the reforms. Ray explains that:

> […] both men and women were in favour of reforming the laws for women and the opposition too represented both the sexes. Among those who opposed changes were well known and prominent women. Thus, we could see that the fight was not between men and women but between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction. (56)

Opposition grew more with regards to reform in inheritance. Even some of the progressive people disapproved the inheritance reforms, which recognized the daughter's claim to the

father's property on an equal level with that of the son (62). Thus, although the women were successful in changing the public opinion to quite an extent, they were not successful in acquiring an equal status with their male counterparts and it remained as a dream to be fulfilled only after Independence. Ray comments, "[W]omen did not succeed in changing the social laws before independence, but they had won a psychological victory: an important section of public opinion was convinced that change was essential" (66).

Hence, Independence was anticipated not only as national freedom from colonialization, but as an era of progress and change, where there would be equality for women as promised in the 1931 Congress Session.

4.5 Women Empowerment: A Closer Look at the Pre-Independence India

In the pre-independence era, the various socio-political changes and the desire for national freedom did create an impetus for women's empowerment. The women's empowerment movements of the times, studied previously, highlight the progress and the upliftment of the status of women as a result of the continuous efforts of these movements, which tried to empower women either directly or as an outcome of a larger struggle. While on a societal level a change regarding the perception towards women has been noticed, it is also pertinent to know if there has been such a change on the personal level too. Empowerment, as discussed before, is a state of being whereby a women has control over her life, her body and wherein she is able to take decisions for herself and stand by them. Therefore, it is significant to study the women of those times, individually, as represented in the select primary texts, on the basis of the degree of their awareness of their oppression, the extent of resistance and the sphere of domestic empowerment attained by them in their personal lives.

4.5.1 Awareness of One's Oppression

The most significant and fundamental step towards women's empowerment is having the awareness of one's oppression and of the factors that lead to that oppression. In discussing the consciousness-raising approach to women's empowerment, Sushma Sahay asserts that women need to be aware of the various complex factors that cause their disempowerment.

As discussed earlier, traditionally, women believed that their subordination and oppression was a part of their destiny and fate. Women themselves felt that perhaps their gender deserved this treatment and that there was nothing wrong in it. Such thinking leads women to ensure their own disempowerment, trapping themselves into a position of powerlessness. Therefore, a woman can be empowered only when she realizes the source of her disempowerment and understands the ploys of patriarchy, as only then can she resist oppression.

Cornelia Sorabji and Renuka Ray are two distinct women of their times, who are conscious of the patriarchal system and its role in marginalizing women; they also try to bring this awareness to other women. Sorabji realized fairly early in her life, that only because of her gender she was not allowed to pursue her career at various stages of life in India and noticeably also in England. This was inspite of having a very supportive and enlightened familial background. She had to face hurdles as she was not allowed to answer examinations, hold scholarships that she had won, only because she was a woman. Even after passing the L.L.B examination she could not enrol herself as a lawyer. Sorabji writes, "'[C]ould I cite the precedent of a Woman *Vakil*; even one instance would do,' was the evasive excuse. One could not waste time either on resentment or on a fight" (64).

Although she had to face challenges, she struggled for her right confidently. She not only empowered herself but also generated awareness among the Purdahnashins who, as a result of ignorance and lack of education, still felt that women were destined to be oppressed, and thereby, internalized patriarchy. The Purdahnashins also believed that a husband had ownership over his wife as she was his possession: "A wife belonged to her husband to kill; or to keep alive" (137). Sorabji with her intellect and reasoning abilities tried to gradually dispel such patriarchal myths and even persuade them to educate the child-wives.

During the nineteenth century, the campaign for women's education had begun. Consequently, there emerged two sections of women: on one hand, were women who belonged to progressive families, were educated and had an exposure to the reform movements. Therefore, they were, to quite an extent, aware of their oppression and the factors leading to their oppression. While on the other hand, there was the majority of

women who did not have any education and therefore they had very little awareness, either of their plight as victims of patriarchy or of their rights as individuals.

Commenting on this situation of her day, Renuka Ray writes:

> [T]oday, with greater opportunities opening out, women of the middle and upper middle classes are benefiting. We find that the position of women is paradoxical. We have highly educated women who hold responsible jobs and lead independent lives and have blazed a trail in politics and public life. But by their very success they have increased the gulf between themselves and the less privileged women. The great majority of Indian women, apart from being discriminated against, are also subjected to economic and social deprivation along with their menfolk. (74)

Ray and Sorabji belong to the first category of women, as they are well-educated and are financially as well as intellectually independent. However, a majority of Indian women could only dream of being as privileged as Ray and Sorabji. These privileged women had the advantage of belonging to progressive and intellectually liberated families that not only allowed them education but inculcated in them the determination to follow their dreams rather than being 'feminine' and 'conforming' to the oppressive norms of patriarchy.

Lakshmibai Tilak is another woman from the nineteenth century. Although she belonged to the middle class and her husband was a learned man and a teacher himself, she received education very late in her life. Lakshmibai was aware of the troubles her mother, mother-in-law and she herself, faced as a wife and moreover as a woman. In her auto-narrative she writes about the suffering of women at the hands of their husbands. But many a time she refers to this suffering as the fate of most women, which shows that she was not an intellectually liberated person. Her perception towards the subordination of women can be gauged by closely reading the words she uses in narrating the predicament of her mother and mother-in-law. While speaking of the helplessness of her mother in the context of her marriage, she says, "[M]other too was worried, but she was only a woman. What could she do?" (8). Later while referring to her mother-in-law she says, "[H]er fate was not unlike that of my mother" (15). It is only later, towards the end of the autobiography that she grows intellectually and becomes reasonably empowered, whereby she was able to express herself fully and take decisions for herself.

In the case of Lakshmibai Tilak, it is very pertinent to note that the time-frame of her autobiography spans from 1857-1919. Historically, the mass participation of women takes place in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, thus her autobiography ends much before women could experience large-scale empowerment through their participation in the freedom movement. One can also notice that, although she lived in an era where reform movement and the campaign for women's education had already received the attention of many women, none of the Indian women in her autobiography are educated. Only her mother-in-law, Jankibai, was able to read and write a bit, because of the efforts put in by some missionary women. In Lakshmibai's words: "[…] some missionary women used to come and visit her, and taught her sewing, embroidery, and other things. It was they who gave my mother-in-law the Book of Proverbs out of the Bible" (16). Hence, in this context, her limited awareness is understandable.

Baby Kamble belongs to the Dalit community. Her autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) focuses on her community, its poverty, plight and the revolution that takes place under the guidance of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Due to her distinct cultural and social background and history, her outlook on women's disempowerment and marginal status differs from the rest. In the Dalit community, women are not the only victims of domination, both men and women are marginalized by the high castes. In describing the condition of the Mahar community, Kamble writes:

> [W]e were just like animals, but without tails. […] But how had we been reduced to this bestial state? Who was responsible? Who else, but people of the high castes! They destroyed our reasoning, our ability to think. We were reduced to a condition far worse than that of the bullocks kept in the courtyards of the high castes. […] But our condition was far worse. Our place was in the garbage pits outside the village, where everyone threw away their waste. That was where we lived, in our poor huts, amidst all the filth! (49)

Accordingly, she perceives women's oppression and disempowerment as a result of the ignorance and superstitions which surround the Mahars, as they were traditionally bound to serve the high castes and had no opportunities of education.

Kamble speaks about the practice of child marriage which was carried on even in the twentieth century among them. She also throws light on the brutal way in which wives and daughters-in-law were treated. She observes:

> [E]veryday the maharwada would resound with the cries of hapless women in some house or the other. Husbands, flogging their wives as if they were beasts, would do so until the sticks broke with effort […] but there was nobody to care for them. They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; […] women led the most miserable existence. (98)

Kamble devotes a complete chapter in her auto-narrative to reveal the suffering of daughters-in-law, who had to be slaves to their husband as well as the in-laws, and endure pain and harassment. Albeit Kamble exposes such domination over women, she still feels that this was not solely due to patriarchy but rather as a result of the frustration of being oppressed by the high castes. She remarks, "The other world had bound us with chains of slavery. But we too were human beings. And we too desired to dominate, to wield power. But who would let us do that? So we made our own arrangements to find slaves – our very own daughters- in- law! If nobody else, then we could at least enslave them" (87).

However, Kamble is not completely ignorant of the fact that women in such conditions are doubly marginalized as they endure domination from the high castes like their menfolk and also endure the pain inflicted by their own menfolk. This can be seen in Kamble's observation: "[S]uch was the life of our poor hapless daughters-in-law! The life of the women in the lower castes was thus shaped by the fire of calamities. This made their bodies strong, but their minds cried out against this oppression" (102).

Hence, these women had a sense of awareness about their own oppression, yet their devotion towards their husbands, who were their oppressors was unshakable. It is in this context that Kamble writes thus:

> [W]e are very protective about the kumkum on our foreheads. For the sake of the kumkum mark, we lay our lives at the feet of our husbands. We believe that if a woman has her husband she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the world holds nothing for her. *It's another thing that these masters of kumkum generally bestow upon us nothing but grief and suffering*. (Emphasis added; 41)

The above quote shows the internalization of patriarchy by women, who consider that a woman has an identity and value only with a husband, and that without a husband she is nothing. However, in the line emphasized in the above quote Kamble also comments that these are the same husbands who cause them pain and suffering. In a very subtle way, Kamble points towards the devotion and dependence of women on their own oppressors, which makes resistance impossible; thus, confining women to a perpetually powerless position.

4.5.2 Resistance

For the empowerment of women, it is not enough that women may merely be (made) aware of the factors leading to their oppression. To be empowered, it is essential to resist the forces of disempowerment. Karlene Faith in "Resistance: Lessons from Foucault and Feminism" elucidates the functioning of resistance and how through resistance women can be empowered. She observes that:

> [R]esistance cannot simply defeat, overturn or suddenly transform disciplinary power. Such powers circulate independently of particular authorities who institutionalize and claim them for themselves. Resistance can, however, resituate the problematic of power abuse. That is, resistance weakens processes of victimization, and generates personal and political empowerment through the acts of naming violations and refusing to collaborate with oppressors. (Radtke and Stam 39)

There are many forms of resistance adopted by the women in the pre-independence era. Some women were able to resist outright, while others resisted in a more subtle way using several mediums of resistance.

Women like Cornelia Sorabji and Renuka Ray, who came from progressive families and had the privilege of education were able to directly resist oppression through their determination and the never-give-up spirit. Both Ray and Sorabji were socially and politically active women. Ray involved herself in political activities and asserted her rights while simultaneously fighting for the emancipation of Indian women. By representing Indian women's organizations in the Central Assembly and affirming the need for a

Uniform Code, Ray worked against the wishes of men and challenged the patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinate position.

Cornelia Sorabji managed to cross all the hurdles placed before her and not only became India's first women Barrister, but also strove to give justice to the multitude of secluded women who had no means of gaining legal help or justice before Sorabji arrived on the scene. Many men tried to dissuade her from attaining her goal but she did not give in. She also tried to make provision for any woman who would like to tread on this path in future. She worked towards the emancipation of Indian women and thereby resisted the patriarchal myths and norms by taking on a profession which was until then under the monopoly of men alone.

In fine, it can be maintained that these two women namely, Sorabji and Ray, outrightly resisted the patriarchal system and thereby empowered themselves. But apart from such bold and capable women who opposed oppression directly, there were other women who also resisted domination but subtly, in an indirect manner. Many a time, women secretly acted against the wishes of their husbands, and thereby, resisted their subjection indirectly. In *The Second Sex* (1987), Simon de Beauvoir states, "[…] only through deceit and adultery can she prove that she is nobody's chattel and give the lie to the pretensions of the male" (220). Likewise, in the autobiography of Lakshmibai Tilak, her mother uses pretence and deception to get some relief out of her suffering. Lakshmibai writes, "[M]other always hungered for companionship. She would bathe other people's babies, comfort the young daughter-in-law, dispense medicine to one, speak kindly to another. […] But all this she did secretly. Father's rule was another story" (4). Lakshmibai's father suffered a psychological shock with the death of his father-in-law, and thereafter, he became an eccentric. He believed that everything that came in contact with the outside world was 'unclean'. Thus, he gave strict orders to the members of the house-hold that everything had to be 'washed' by Lakshmibai's mother and grandmother. In this context, Lakshmibai writes:

> [A]ccording to orders they washed everything, or at least *made a pretence* of washing […] Many and many a time *they practiced deception*, and *taught us to dissemble too, but not without reason*, for when the grain was brought in from the fields, father demanded that it

> should be washed before it was stored. How could Mother and Grannie wash twenty bushels of corn at a time? They washed a little of it, and spread that over the rest of the heap. (Emphasis added; 4)

Thus, with the help of pretence, Lakshmibai's mother was able to resist the oppressive order (or at least diminish its outcome) in the only way possible for her – deceit. Unlike Ray and Sorabji, her mother could not resist fearlessly, since she was dependent on her husband economically and emotionally. She, like several other women, could not risk their marriage by directly resisting, as the patriarchal society would never have accepted such a thing. After all, women had no identity other than the one given to them, first, by the father, and then, the husband. However, they resisted using such methods or strategies of harmless deception.

Another form of resistance utilized by women is to let out the repressed sufferings and emotions by expressing themselves in different ways. Lakshmibai's mother-in-law Jankibai lived a miserable life. She was a submissive housewife, yet her husband Wamanrao Tilak harassed and humiliated her, as he considered her to be an evil omen in his life. There were some missionaries who had visited her and trained her in some skills and also taught her to read and write. But when her husband came to know of this he was furious. He put an end to all the possibilities of her empowerment. Although Jankibai was unable to resist his domination due to the reverence towards her husband, she used to let out her trapped emotions through poetry. However, her husband was against this too and would burn all her poems. Thus, of all that she wrote only two lines had remained, which are quoted in Lakshmibai's autobiography, they read thus: "[S]ee this small doll of rags, what dignity her share! / Our girls from her in childhood learn a Mother's care" (15).

There must have been yet many other women who lived in oppression without resisting it there and then. But in the very act of writing their story through an auto-narrative mode, and thereby, revealing the pain they endured, they resisted their powerlessness and were thus empowered. It is not easy for women to write an autobiography, as by the very act of doing so they deconstruct patriarchal myths and challenge their own femininity. By patriarchal norms, a 'feminine' woman is supposed to be meek, submissive to the will of men, and endure everything in utter silence. However, in writing about their lives, women

break the silence and also display their potential, thereby challenging the tag of inferiority. Many times women do so in hiding due to fear from the reaction of their husbands and the family.

Baby Kamble when interviewed by Maya Pandit, the translator of her auto-narrative, reveals the trouble she went through to keep her writing a secret. She says, "[W]riting was a difficult task. I had to take care that nobody saw me writing. I used to hide the papers under old newspapers. I used to keep my notebooks hidden in places that nobody bothered about […]" (Kamble 147). When Pandit inquired about the reason for hiding her writings, Kamble reveals that she feared her husband. She answers:

> [F]irstly, because of my husband. He was a good man but like all the men of his time and generation, he considered a woman to be an inferior being. He would not have tolerated the idea that I had taken to writing. I used to be scared of him. […] I used to be scared of both my son and my husband, scared of their reaction. My husband always called me an ignorant woman! I was afraid of his response. So I kept everything hidden away from their eyes for almost twenty years. (147)

It is significant to mention here that Kamble's auto-narrative barely touches her personal life. Her auto-narrative is more about her community, its plight and the changes that slowly take place with the arrival of Ambedkar on the scene. There is very little written about her marriage and her relationship with her husband and in-laws. Whenever she writes of the suffering of wives and daughters-in-law, it is always in a general sense, without directly revealing any of her personal experiences. When Pandit asks her about her personal life, she simply replies: "[I]t was quite common for a husband to beat his wife because he doubted her faithfulness. And I wasn't an exception" (154). She also recounts that once while travelling in a train some young men stared at her, "[M]y husband immediately suspected me and hit me so hard that my nose started bleeding profusely. [….] The same evening we returned and he was so angry that he kept hitting me in the train. Such things were so common. All my life I had to face this violence" (155).

Although Kamble endured such ruthlessness, she does not divulge this in the auto-narrative even once. In fact, she says:

> [W]ell, he was my husband after all! I spent so many years of married life with him. […] Besides this was the fate of most women; I wasn't an exception. So why write about it, I felt. Besides, the root cause of this was the male ego. Look, husbands then didn't have anything else to do. No education, no jobs, even food they had to beg for. Their male ego gave them some sense of identity, 'I am a man, I am superior to women, I am somebody. If the whole village tortures us, we will torture our women.' Fathers used to teach their sons to treat their wives as footwear! A wife's place was near her husband's feet. That was their way of asserting that they too were somebody! (156-157)

Kamble's reply shows that most of the women of her community (besides others, perhaps) went through a similar dilemma: they could not oppose their husbands as that would put their married life into jeopardy. However, although Kamble does not write about her personal experiences directly, she writes about the suffering of wives and daughters-in-law which represents her own experiences too. Perhaps, she projects her own pain, when she writes about the other women in the maharwada, and thus by writing she voices their collective oppression and resists her own suppression somewhat.

Likewise, Lakshmibai Tilak too resists patriarchy by writing her auto-narrative. Although, Lakshmibai always resisted it in thought, she never back-answered her father-in-law. She learns to resist outright only later in life. However by writing about all her experiences and the suffering she went through, she gives a voice to her disempowered state. In her context, it is very significant to note that Tilak, her husband, had passed away sixteen years before Lakshmibai could write her autobiography. As such, she was a widow when she wrote about her life.

In India, the treatment given to widows has already been discussed before. For a widow, to shatter the silence surrounding her life and take up writing would have definitely been a difficult thing to do. Yet ignoring all the criticism and humiliation Lakshmibai Tilak must have faced, she still wrote about her life, her relationship with her family, and her husband. It is not hard to understand how she must have been ostracized by her family, for revealing the truth of her life and their lives. Thus, the very fact that she writes this autobiography is a sign of her resistance, and moreover, of her empowerment.

Hence, in different forms women resist their disempowerment by "[…] naming violations and refusing to collaborate with oppressors" (Radtke and Stam 39). This resistance then leads them to a more empowered position.

4.5.3 Familial Empowerment

Familial empowerment is empowerment within the private sphere of the home. Earlier, a study on women's empowerment movements has been made, wherein empowerment on the societal level has been emphasized upon. However, it is also significant to study the status of women within their homes. To be empowered, women need to be able to take their own decisions and have control over their own lives and bodies.

A majority of women did not have any decision-making powers in the house; at the most they would take decisions pertaining to the kitchen. The home was like a prison wherein women were confined. Baby Kamble reveals how the honour a family enjoyed was dependent on the seclusion of women. She observes:

> [I]n those days, it was the custom to keep women at home, behind the threshold. The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of the woman thus confined within the four walls of the house, then this 'honour' became the talk of the town […] My father had locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage. (5)

It is pertinent to note that Kamble's "In Those Days" refers to the early twentieth century. During this time the social reform movement had already taken place whereby Purdah system was challenged. Kamble's description, however, highlights the fact that the Mahar community was hardly influenced by the reform movements and the practice of Purdah was continued.

In *I Follow After*, neither does Lakshmibai's mother nor her mother-in-law have any decision-making rights in the house. All the decisions of the house and of their lives were taken by their husbands. Lakshmibai too lived most of her life in accordance with the whims and fancies of her husband Tilak. He would decide to leave everything behind and suddenly move from one city to another. Wherever they went, they lived as paupers as

Tilak would squander all the money he had earned due to his extreme generosity. He would neither think of the future nor his wife and children who lived either on the mercy of Lakshmibai's maternal family or on the charity of the neighbours.

In every house, the daughters-in-law would be treated as slaves working ceaselessly to serve the husband and the in-laws. Lakshmibai's father-in-law, Wamanrao Tilak would make her serve him all through the day, yet he would never leave a chance to taunt and humiliate her. He took away all the ornaments and good clothes given to Lakshmibai by her family. She woefully writes, "[N]ot even soap or oil for my hair would he give" (31). Once he falsely accuses her of not doing the work and says, "'[H]old my feet and swear. Take care. You will be burnt to an ash if you touch my foot with your hand.'" Lakshmibai writes, "I fell forward on my face, and seized both his feet. I did not burst into flames and die. I was terribly disappointed. I was reduced to thinking it would be a good thing to die" (39). This indicates the extent of oppression she had to suffer; she was even ready to die rather than endure this humiliation. Her suffering reiterates the French Marxist feminist Christine Delphy's words when she speaks in context of women's unpaid labour. In her words:

> […] within families men systematically exploit and benefit from women's labour within a domestic mode of production. […] Women's domestic work is undertaken as a personal service to a male head of household. He effectively appropriates her whole person and the labour she embodies, so that the work she does is potentially limitless and depends on his requirements. (Jackson 17)

Thus, a housewife slogs the whole day more than any worker and is yet financially dependent on her husband. Thereby, she remains in a position of powerlessness and is unable to be empowered.

Likewise, a woman does not have control over her own body too. There are many examples of women conceiving very often, at a time when they are physically unfit and would not, if given a choice, choose to be pregnant. Baby Kamble in her auto-narrative gives a detailed account of the suffering that had to be endured by pregnant women, who in addition to labour pains had to face pangs of hunger due to extreme poverty. Moreover, they also had

to risk their lives as a consequence of the various superstitious practices they were forced to follow.

Kamble says that first of all, "[…] the girl generally would be very young as all girls were married of at a tender age. Obviously, they were physically quite underdeveloped at the time of their first pregnancy. […] The girl could overcome all obstacles and have a safe delivery only if her luck held strong!" (58). Secondly, due to their poor state, they could not afford to go to a doctor or buy any medicines, they had to depend on ignorant mid-wives who usually worsened the problems. The pregnant woman would scarcely have a morsel of food to eat, childbirth was more of a torture.

Kamble comments on this condition of women and says:

> [M]ost women suffered this fate. Labour pains, mishandling by the midwife, wounds inflicted by the onlookers' nails, ever-gnawing hunger, infected wounds with pus oozing out, hot water baths, hot coals, Profuse sweating – everything caused the new mother's condition to worsen and she would end up getting a burning fever. On most occasions, it was tetanus. […] Many young girls on the threshold of life succumbed to death. One in every ten lost their lives during childbirth. Infants died as well. (60-61)

This vivid description and oppression faced by these new mothers, brings to mind Radical feminist Shulamith Firestone's argument that the role women play in giving birth to children, puts them in a subordinate position. Although this argument has been challenged vehemently by the likes of Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich, in the current context this seems to be true. As narrated by Kamble, the Mahar women risk their life in childbirth, yet Kamble notes that in every household there were at least eight to ten such children and some even had fifteen to twenty (8). Albeit, there is no direct evidence showing that the Mahar women were against having so many children, keeping in mind the amount of pain and suffering they underwent during childbirth, as described by Kamble, it is difficult to believe that women would willingly have so many children. Moreover, due to their miserable condition, many infants died of hunger.

Most of the times, in such cases, women have no part to play in the decision of whether to have a child or not; like all other decisions, this decision also is taken either by their

husbands or in-laws. Therefore, even in these private matters women become helpless and powerless. Thus, although on a social level the status of women may have improved, the same cannot be said with regards to personal decisions with any degree of conviction, in the absence of reliable data.

4.6 Conclusion

By the early twentieth century, although women achieved a sense of empowerment through their participation in the freedom movement, on a personal level they still remained disempowered in many areas. However, the women of this era did take a step forward through their awareness to offer some resistance to patriarchy, but they were yet to be adequately empowered. Women needed to gain control over their lives and their bodies to take their own decisions independently. There is no clear evidence in the primary texts to show that this might have happened.

It is also pertinent to observe that with the influence of the various empowerment movements during this era, new professional possibilities opened up for women. This can be seen through the examples of Cornelia Sorabji and Renuka Ray who created a niche for themselves in the fields of law and politics, respectively. Besides, a few women of their times, did take up the challenge of exploring similar or parallel possibilities in the pre-independent India. But most significantly, it must be maintained that this era of struggle against colonization ended with a new hope for an independent India wherein women would have equal rights, and an equal status vis-a-vis their male counterparts. To what extent this hope converged into a reality has been analysed in the context of relevant primary texts and corroborative evidences in the following Chapter.

Chapter Five

Women Empowerment in India: Independence and After

5.1 Introduction

The Independence of India in 1947 was not only a new era in the Indian history, but much more. For over one and a half century, India was struggling against the colonial yoke; many sacrificed their lives for Independence and others devoted their lives for the service of the country, working towards Independence, giving the nation priority over everything else. Therefore, Independence was the reward of the struggle of the multitudes, and every Indian had very high expectations of this new era; it was aspired to as an era of freedom, sovereignty and equality that had been anticipated for long. Particularly for Indian women, India's Independence was the dawn of a new society whereby all forms of domination and discrimination would end, and there would be equality among all across the boundaries of caste, class and gender.

In *My Reminiscences* (2005), Renuka Ray describes the scene of the midnight hour of Independence. In her words:

> [A]T THE STROKE OF midnight on 14 August 1947, in an atmosphere charged with emotion, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stood up in the Constituent Assembly and made that never-to-be-forgotten speech about India having a tryst with destiny. […] As soon as Panditji concluded his speech, on behalf of the women of India, Hansa Mehta and other women members presented the tricolour flag with the emblem of the Ashoka Chakra to the President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. *It was in the fitness of things that Indian women who had courageously fought side by side with men in the freedom struggle were represented in this symbolic way*. (Emphasis added Ray 125)

Ray highlights the beginning of this new phase with the Independence of India. By representing women at this historical hour, the promise of universal adult suffrage and equal rights, made to women, was reaffirmed, and thus, women felt that with Independence the tyranny of patriarchy would end, and women would be empowered.

However, although Independence brought an end to the struggle for freedom, the struggle for women's empowerment was far from reaching its goal. The constitution of India legally ensured equality for women, but written laws alone could not empower women and thus even in the post-independence era, efforts to empower women by way of the women's empowerment movements continued. During this time women's empowerment faced two major challenges: first was the huge sense of complacency and trust in the political system that resulted in passivity; second was the body blow that Partition rendered to womanhood in India.

With the Independence of India, there was a firm belief that women did not have to struggle for their rights anymore, and therefore for quite some time the movement faced a lull period, whereby the organizations and movements took a passive back seat from activism and waited for things to happen on their own. Although the organizations did not completely discontinue their work, yet they went into a kind of coma.

Secondly, the Partition of India, and its consequences, victimized women and weakened their morale, and had a huge, adverse impact on their empowerment. However, women's movements rose yet again in effort to empower women. Hence, it is pertinent to study this era in detail and evaluate its ups and downs in the context of women's empowerment.

This Chapter focuses on the women's empowerment movements that took place from Independence onwards and will also study the status of women in the independent India. As in the previous Chapter, in this Chapter too, the empowerment of women in India has been dealt with at two levels: firstly, the women's empowerment movements that took place in the post-independence era have been examined along with corroborative evidences, if found in the primary texts, to analyse the impact these movements might have had on women with regard to empowerment. Secondly, the primary texts that fall under this period, have been analysed at length to trace the empowerment of women during this era, using the empowerment criteria delineated in Chapter Two.

5.2 Twin-faced Independence: Women as victims of Partition

In 1947 along with the joy of Independence, came the catastrophe of Partition. Ironically, the price India had to pay for its Independence was the partition of the geographically undivided India on the bases of religion. The British policy of divide and rule was successful here as the British colonial masters at that point in time could manipulate the Muslims and encourage them in the demand for a separate state, Pakistan. Although Gandhiji argued against it, he had to finally give in to the viewpoint of other leaders. Thus, India's Independence was accompanied by the pain of partition which was intensified by the communal riots that took place across India.

Having lived in these times, Renuka Ray writes about the partition and its grave effect on the country in unflinchingly forthright words:

> [T]hus, with the manoeuvring and help of the British bureaucrats in India, Pakistan was created. It was the parting kick of the British rulers. When India became free this tragic dismemberment of the land took away some of the exhilaration and hopes of the moment. Yet the general public accepted partition as they were told that it was the only way to get out of the clutches of the British and to keep peace. There was great rejoicing throughout the country at the moment of deliverance from the foreign yoke. Little did we realize at the moment that looting, rape, and killings were takipg place on a widespread scale in the two Punjabs (sic). Independence was to be ushered in with the terrible ordeal of a two-way migration in the west and later on a one-way traffic into India in the east on an unparalleled scale. Gandhiji was once again right; Partition did not solve the Hindu-Muslim conflict, but only accentuated it. The refugees still come and communal tensions arise periodically. (115-116)

Other than Ray, Khawaja Ahmad Abbas also reveals his opinion of Partition in *I Am Not An Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (1977), quoting from his own column "Last Page" in the *Bombay Chronicle* that: "India was killed by Britain. The first blow was struck when the British (after ignoring and neglecting them for half a century after the events of 1857) instigated and encouraged the Muslims to demand separate electorates and then conceded it. That was the first step towards Pakistan […]" (280). However, Abbas believes that although India was partitioned by the British policy of divide and rule, the British alone

cannot be held responsible for it, and goes on to elucidate the role of the fanatical Muslim Leaguers and the fanatical Hindus in the dismemberment of the country. Without mincing words he analyses the pain and sense of loss experienced at this national catastrophe, thus:

> India was killed by fanatical Muslim Leaguers who played upon the community's apprehensions and fears to produce in them a peculiar psychosis which was a dangerous combination of inferiority complex, aggressive jingoism, religious fanaticism, and fascistic *Herrenvolk* legends.
>
> India was killed by the fanatical Hindus, the Hindu fascists and Hindu imperialists, the dreamers of a Hindu empire, the crusaders of Hindu Sangathan, who provided the ideological fuel for the fire of Hindu communalism and fanaticism.
>
> India was killed by the Hindu communalists, the believers and supporters of Hindu exclusiveness […] who yet masqueraded as Nationalists and Congressmen, who prevented the National Congressmen and the National movement from becoming a fully representative, completely non-communal front of all Indian patriots.
>
> India was killed by the communist Party of India which (during the days of its 'People's War' and 'pro-Pakistan' policies) provided the Muslim separatists with an ideological basis for the irrational and anti-national demand for Pakistan.
>
> India was killed, and stabbed in the heart, by every Hindu who killed a Muslim, by every Muslim who killed a Hindu, *by every Hindu or Muslim who committed or abetted, or connived at, arson and rape and murder during the recent (and earlier) communal riots*.
>
> That an imperialist power planned the dismemberment of our country in the very hour of our freedom is not surprising. *The wonder, and the tragedy is that India should have been killed by the children of India* […] (Emphasis added 280-281)

Abbas underscores the fact that there were many factors that led to the Partition of India. In the above quote he clearly refers to the communal violence between the two major religious communities in India namely the Muslim and the Hindu.

Elsewhere, in his auto-narrative Abbas relates the various incidents of violence he personally experienced as a result of the riots. His family was still in Panipat during Partition and because of the danger to their lives there, they had to be safely transported to

Delhi, which was done with the help of Nehru. From Delhi they had to be brought to Bombay where Abbas lived, but this was difficult as there was news that the trains were being attacked. His friend went on his behalf and Abbas writes that "[W]hen I saw him off at Bombay Central, little did I know that from his own compartment some helpless Muslims would be dragged out at the Bharatpur station and beheaded just outside the railway premises" (296). Fortunately, he had some money just enough for his family to travel back by flight.

Such occurrences and worse continued to take place in India in that era of public hysteria, when fear psychoses and dementia were the rule rather than an exception. Riots that took a huge toll on the nation had begun much before partition. According to Ray, the series of riots and communal violence began from the day Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared 14 August 1946 as Direct Action Day, wherein it was announced that the "[M]uslims would protest against any possibility of the rejection of Partition" (106). Ray writes that:

> [W]hatever be the intention behind Jinnah's statement on Direct Action Day, the League government in Bengal under H.S. Suhrawardy took it as a signal to resort to direct action by an organized anti-Hindu campaign which led to killings, loot and arson, throughout the province, though it was mostly concentrated in Calcutta and is thus known as the 'Great Calcutta Killings'. […] In retaliation, three days later the Hindus organized themselves and reprisals took place. (107)

From that day onwards there were continuous riots that took a heavy toll of people, property and societal peace, leaving death, arson and unrest in its wake.

The most horrible side of Partition was the murders and killing, the frenzy that took control of people, so much that there seemed to be no emotions, no humanity left. There were such horrendous sights such as trains full of dead bodies which people saw during partition. Kamala Das, who also lived in those tumultuous times, writes in *My Story* (2009) about her experience of Partition. She writes, "[O]nce we saw a lorry filled with laughing people, mostly Sikhs, carrying aloft the yellow body of an old woman impaled on a spear" (65). The Muslim attacked the Hindus and Sikhs and they retaliated by counter-attacking; if the Muslims raped women and massacred people the Hindus and Sikhs retorted with much

more violence and vice versa. However, the worst hit in this nightmare of hatred and violence, were the women because on both the sides they were made the punching bags.

Padma Sachdev's family was directly affected by the communal riots during Partition, as her father became a victim of one such mindless communal killings. Sachdev's mother had to find employment and yet live as a dependent on her own brother, suffering the taunts and humiliation of her sister-in-law. However, through her personal account, Padma Sachdev writes not only of the grief her mother (and the family) endured, but also of Partition and the communal violence that had taken Jammu and Kashmir into its grip:

> [S]he [Sachdev's mother] hid her own pain, and buried deep the anguish of the awful atmosphere of the death's dance that partition had become. Tayiji's sons would bring news from the *bazaar* – today this place was attacked by marauders, yesterday people fled that place, how many were killed, how many were missing, *how many women jumped into wells to protect their modesty from the raiders,* how many children were flung up to the sky and killed on the rocks. There was no end to the stream of people coming in search of refuge and with them would come fearful, horrifying accounts of carnage. (Emphasis added; 72)

Sachdev's account of the riots and violence sadly highlights how several women committed suicide by jumping in the well, so that in killing themselves they might save their honour and dignity. The worst atrocities were committed against women – they were molested, abducted and left in the streets. If rescued or if they could escape from the clutches of the perpetrators of violence and rape, they were not even accepted back in their families, but were instead disowned and considered to be defiled and dishonoured. It is pertinent to study why women were made the scapegoat to hurt and revenge the enemy community.

Noakhali was a village badly affected by the communal riots. Gandhiji and a group of people including Acharya Kripalani and his wife Sucheta went to the village to console the people and help them rehabilitate. Ray relates Sucheta's observation and says, "Sucheta found that there was complete devastation. *Some of the women had been raped, others were hiding in the jungle in fear*. Mutilated persons and corpses were to be seen everywhere" (Emphasis added; 108-109). This description of the destruction caused by the riots, which continued even after the Partition, brings us to the point of utmost significance,

that is, the victimization faced by women of both religious communities. In this whole battle between the two religious communities, it is the women who were the worst affected, who faced victimization on both the sides.

In "Women and Partition: Some Questions" Bharati Ray tries to unearth the reason why women were victimized by both the communities. She says that the violence inflicted upon women during these times had a lot to do with the ideology that a woman's body is "the repository of men's honour" (14). Thus, alluding to the notion of "Power rape" which refers to "[…] the raping of women to demonstrate and defeat rival men in patriarchal societies", she deduces that, "[T]he rape of a woman is akin to the rape of the community to which she belongs" (Ray and Basu 14). Furthermore, she observes that:

> [S]ince the Hindus and the Muslims at that point of time perceived one another as harmful enemies, they sought to take revenge by inflicting insults on the womenfolk so that memories of the injury would persist. To plunder women's bodies, perceived as men's property, was to indicate that the enemy had occupied the most intimate possessions of the men to whom the women belonged. On women's bodies, thus, the 'political programmes' of the mutual enemies were 'inscribed'. (15)

The extreme violence inflicted upon women, during the communal riots for and after the Partition, was rooted in the existence of such an ideology, that women, though human, were mere possessions of men. Women have been traditionally assigned the responsibility of upholding the honour of their entire community, and that has led to the existence of 'dishonouring rape' by the offenders and the 'honour killings' by the so-called 'defenders' even in our own day. During the Partition era the sole aim of both the fanatical sides was to attack this honour of the enemy community which lay in the hands of women.

In her auto-narrative, Padma Sachdev also highlights how in times of any calamity or trouble, women are always at the receiving end. Without any fault of their own, they are humiliated and victimized, they pay the price for the deeds and decisions of men, in which they were never involved. Sachdev relates an incident that took place when she was ten or eleven years old, and she goes along with an old lady who used to stay the night with her mother, to her village. There she sees something unusual, Sachdev describes, "[I] can vaguely recall a house and behind it a small outhouse in which a thin, pale, young girl who

may have been between 18 or 20 years old was *held captive*. I had looked at her very affectionately but she was very subdued and went inside" (Emphasis added; 95). Sachdev points towards how women were abused and held captive. Perhaps this young girl was from the enemy community and therefore "held captive", for just after this description, Sachdev observes that, "[…] whenever there was a division of families or nations, or empires, it is always the women who are humiliated" (95).

Consequently, it can be observed that even in this situation patriarchal ideologies had a great role to play. The women, particularly the women from the masses, who fought against all obstacles to build up their morale during the times of the freedom struggle, were now the victims of partition.

The places that were worst hit by communal riots and killings were, Calcutta, Amritsar, Lahore, Noakhali among several others. In most of the places that were close to the East and West Pakistan, the condition was terrible.

An inherent paradox could be seen in the Indian situation, where on one hand, there was an utter bliss of freedom and Independence that was won only after a long struggle, while on the other hand, there was the utter misery and tragedy in the name of partition and the horror of the riots and mass killings. This paradox becomes more evident when Ray reveals that just before delivering his historic Independence day speech to the nation, Nehru was informed about the terrible situation in Punjab, and he had to mask his feelings so that the celebration spirit of the Independence day would not be marred by the sadness on the condition of Punjab and many other places that were under the grip of communal riots. Many people were not even aware of the intensity of violence taking place, they were just happy that the nation was now free to progress and develop, without realizing that this was done at a very heavy cost.

Sachdev's account re-iterates how the effect of Partition on common lives was very traumatic, although she indicates the social ethos of sharing the sense of suffering. She writes:

> [T]hose days Jammu was rife with the painful living examples of the result of partition. […] Someone's father had been left behind, another's sister had flung herself into a well

> […] Somebody's child got lost, others had to see their daughter raped in front of their eyes, and others saw one as she was dragged away. Their memories were full of such images which hammered at their heads, but the people of Jammu were always there to share their agony. (99-100)

Even today, after so many decades, people remember partition as the greatest tragedy of India, with fear and resentment. The hurt and bitterness caused by the Partition which came as a precondition to Independence, continues to fester in the hearts of people even today, and perhaps the continuous enmity and wars between the two countries is a manifestation of the same bitterness and hatred that was implanted in the hearts of brothers by Partition and its consequences.

5.3 The Constitution of India: Laws in Favour of Women's Equality

To establish the Indian Republic in a true spirit of democracy, the enactment of a Constitution was vital. Towards this end, the members of the proposed Constituent Assembly had been elected earlier, in the undivided India. But now, due to the Partition of India in two different political States, new members had to be elected. Abiding by the request of Gandhiji that the Constituent Assembly should reflect diverse views, people from opposition parties and eminent Indians who were not politicians were also included in the Assembly. For instance, Dr. Ambedkar who had opposed the Congress, became the chairman of the Drafting Committee (Ray 127). Renuka Ray affirms that Gandhiji "[…] had taken a particular interest in the selection of women, Harijans, and other backward classes and minorities for the Congress nomination." Ray also was nominated by the Congress for election from the West Bengal Assembly, and thereby became a member of the Assembly (127).

In the Assembly days, Ray and many other progressive members brought up the issue of the Hindu Code Bill once again, but Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was the Chair of the Constituent Assembly, particularly opposed the daughter's right of inheritance, and therefore even at this time, after Independence the Bill on the Uniform Hindu Code was not passed. Many Congressmen where still hesitant in making any reforms in the personal sphere that would challenge the men's monopoly on certain rights.

Albeit women's right to vote and gender equality was already accepted, yet when it came to property rights, the progressive group faced strong opposition. This shows that, even after women proved their equal abilities by participating in the freedom movement shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, many conservative men were still debating against extending gender equality to all the spheres of life. Renuka Ray states that:

> [O]nce freedom had come the progressive elements in society, both men and women, felt that the time was ripe for this legislation to be passed. A band of women members including Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, who became Health Minister in the first cabinet, and Hansa Mehta, Durgabai Deshmukh, Ammu Swaminathan, Sucheta Kripalani, Begum Aizaz Rasul and others supported the social reforms and made a great effort to push the Hindu Code Bill through. Pandit Nehru was a strong supporter of women's rights. (137)

However, as a result of the stiff opposition from the orthodox party members, Hindu Code Bill was not passed. Ray writes that it was not until 1955 that the bill was finally enacted into law with the ardent support of H.V. Pataskar, Union Minister of State for Law. The Bill became law only in 1956 which according to Ray, was "[…] almost twenty-five years after the campaign for the removal of the legal disabilities of women was started by women's organizations" (137-138).

The Constitution of India was enforced on 26th January 1950. *The Constitution* asserts that no citizen would be discriminated against, and that there would be equality amongst all. *The Constitution of India* clearly states the Right to Equality in Part III: Fundamental Rights, Article 14 and 15:

> 14. The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
>
> 15. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
>
> (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—
>
> (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or

(b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children. (6)

The right to equality was thus explicitly established in *The Constitution of India*, and a feeling of satisfaction rose among women, who had hitherto struggled to be recognized as equals. Six years later the Hindu code was also passed, whereby personal laws were codified and enacted. To quote from Liddle and Joshi (1986):

> [M]onogamy was established as a rule for both men and women, divorce became permissible under certain conditions, the minimum age of marriage was fixed at 18 for women and 21 for men, and women were given the right to inherit and adopt. Later laws included the Prohibition of Dowry, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic, and a liberal abortion law providing social reasons as grounds for abortion. (74)

On the basis of this and other similar women-friendly legislation which took almost four decades to be enacted, scholars on women's movements in India, like Radha Kumar and Suma Chitnis, deduce that during the first few decades of the Independent India, the women's empowerment movements and campaigns underwent a lull period. In a like vein, Renuka Ray in *My Reminiscences* highlights the complacence and shift in priorities of women's organization during this period by observing that:

> [S]oon after independence, particularly after the Hindu Code was enacted in 1956, a certain amount of complacency crept into the women's movement. It was assumed that the All-India Women's Conference which had at one time given the lead in pioneering movements, should now concern itself mostly with constructive social work through its branches and sub-branches with governmental grants and assistance. […] *But the activities of the Conference as an organization that highlighted the need for transforming the thinking process of society came almost to a halt.* This change of direction took place because *Indian women wrongly believed that independence itself would bring a new and better environment for them* and for citizens in general. (Emphasis added; 80-81)

With the laws in place, it was assumed that the outlook of society towards women would change on its own. No doubt, these laws did open new avenues for the women who were

already educated and belonged to the female intelligentsia of the times. In fact, Renuka Ray in her auto-narrative writes of the women who had represented India in international forums. She affirms that even before Independence, women like Sarojini Naidu, Charulata Mukerjee and Vijayalakshmi Pandit fought against all odds and attained much glory, as a result of such positions held or roles played by them, which until then had been the exclusive prerogatives of their male counterparts.

For instance, Charulata Mukerjee became the vice president of an international conference for the prevention of immoral traffic in women and children held in Indonesia. Vijayalakshmi Pandit who, incidentally, was the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, became the first woman to lead an Indian delegation to the United Nations during the time of the interim government (Ray 80). After Independence, with women-friendly egalitarian laws in place, more women followed into the footsteps of these illustrious women from elite backgrounds. In this context, Ray observes:

> [A]fter independence, a number of women attended the United Nations and its associated bodies. Hansa Mehta was a delegate to the Commission on the Status of Women. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur attended UNESCO as its vice-president. Maitreyee Bose went to the International Labour Conference. Quite a few women after Vijayalakshmi Pandit went as delegates to the United Nations. I was the first, to be followed by Sucheta Kripalani and Lakshmi Menon. During those days Indian women delegates to various world bodies were acclaimed for their contributions. (80)

In fine, the new laws provided newer and wider opportunities for the women who were already intellectually empowered. However, the success and empowerment of these few women cannot hide the plight of the masses of common women who continued to remain uneducated and often completely unaware of the laws which claim to guarantee their empowerment. It is in this context that Swarup Kumar Banerjee cautions:

> [T]he visibility of a few women sometimes makes people forget the invisible mass of women whose concerns remain unaddressed. Inspite of tremendous attempts on the part of the government through constitutional and legislative measures or there upliftment, the profile of the Indian women is pitiable and blurred (sic). It seems as if these laws were

> meant for the exclusive 'visible' women, while the sea of women have receded to the background. (Das and Daspattanayak 40)

In consonance with the above view, it must be stated here that, it is not enough to place laws and legislations on paper; they have to be implemented. The ideology and outlook of the society towards women would not change simply as a fallout of Independence, this can be clearly seen in the continuity in preference for a male child over a female child. In her auto-narrative, *A Drop in the Ocean* (2011) Padma Sachdev reveals her grandmother's reaction to the birth of a girl-child.

This continues to this day, if sex determination test and the recent legislation needed to regulate it are any indications, this tendency of the Indian mind, particularly of the female, has continued to linger on; this is clearly a vestige of the pre-independence era as seen from the words of Sachdev:

> [W]e were in Jammu at the time of my birth. My grandfather had passed away but my grandma was very unhappy to have a daughter as the first child – as if my mother had deliberately given birth to a girl child! She reprimanded my mother, 'You have arrived and put my son's neck in the noose. (38)

Unfortunately, it was soon realized that such laws as described by Sushila Mehta were mere 'paper tigers', since they were "[…] enforced neither by the machinery of the state nor by women themselves" (Liddle and Joshi 74). The majority of Indian women were not even aware of such laws that ensured equality. Ray confirms this fact and observes that, "[M]ost of the women are unaware of their rights. We cannot but emphasize often enough that in the rural areas where the majority of our population live, legislation is often not implemented" (84). Thus, it is not wrong to deduce that these laws remained only on paper. Moreover, with their placebo effect, the women's movement gradually passivized and lost its fire and focus.

5.4 Resurgence of Women's Movements

Radha Kumar also concedes that, after Independence, the women's movement or the feminist campaign, came to a halt. However, she assigns two reasons for this state of affairs: along with the initial satisfaction of women with the laws of equality; the movement

faced another challenge and that was the lack of a common enemy. Before Independence, all Indians, male as well as female, had a single antagonist in front of them – the Colonizers. But after Independence, India was freed from the clutches of the British rule. This led to much disorientation and fragmentation in the movement itself. As such, Radha Kumar aptly observes in *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (1993): "[I]n Post-Independence India, feminists were more fragmented than ever before, for they no longer saw a common enemy. Political divisions became more important than they had earlier, especially since feminists had neither openly sought nor identified the enemy in gender terms […]" (97).

However, the women's movement was not the only one to receive a setback, nor was women's empowerment the only issue to be side-lined; there were many others. As such, within a few years, a sense of disillusionment crept in among the general public as poverty and unemployment were on the rise, and so, the people grew disillusioned with the government's development policies, the prevalent economic rights, land rights and the price rise.

After Independence, the people had expected the Indian government to speedily and effectively fulfil all the promises that had been made in the course of the freedom struggle and through the march towards the republic. But issues like redistribution of land, unemployment, that were promised to be promptly dealt with, were continuously being delayed. Finally, when the Kisan Sabhas began to agitate, the government tried to suppress the movement by imprisoning the peasants. There was widespread unemployment, and the prices were continuously on the rise (Kumar 97). Thus, many such issues brought people face to face with reality that even after Independence their struggles were not over.

This must have been quite an eye-opener to the Feminist movement and to the activists in the field of women empowerment, too. This is borne out by Vina Mazumdar and Indu Agnihotri's assertion in "The Women's Movement in India: Emergence of a New Perspective", that: "[T]he resurgence of the movement in contemporary India was both a response and a reaction to the deepening crises within our society and the State" (226).

In short, India was facing a number of crises. Besides, the multitude of refugees entering India was also one of many factors leading to economic stagnation. Consequently, many organizations and movements began to take place in which men and women equally participated. Parties like the CPI, which were under Maoist influence in Andhra Pradesh, tried to deal with issues regarding share croppers and land redistribution, and even in the violent rallies and strikes, conducted by the organization, women became very active. However, according to Kumar, later, that is around 1951, it was called off after continuous harassments from the government (97).

In the 1960's many more movements took place, but with regard to feminist concerns and women's empowerment, the most significant were organized during the decade of the 1970's onward. The clear reason for this was that, at that time a wave of new ideas began to come to the fore, wherein emphasis began to be laid on issues such as culture, gender, caste, tribe and so on, that had been neglected before. In the view of Kumar, the movements leaning towards feminist ideas began, as a need was felt to organize the women's movement in such a way as too interconnect analysis of women's oppression into their political involvements (99).

Consequently, agitations such as the Shahada Agitation, which triggered off after the rape of two Bhil women, were spearheaded, supporting the Bhil (tribal) landless labourers against the exploitative landlords. Likewise in Maharashtra, women activists and women intellectuals took the initiative of forming a united front called Anti-Price Rise Women's Committee and organized direct action against the culprits who artificially created a man-made scarcity of essential goods. Thousands of poor and lower middle class women joined the struggle spontaneously, because the focal issue of the agitation touched them intimately.

In a similar view, the problem of family violence, wife beating and alcoholism became issues of grave concern around this time and the strategy of retaliation was adopted. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) movement in Ahmedabad led by Ela Bhatt, was a pioneering women's trade union movement that began in 1972. Thereby, women involved in various trades in the informal sector were brought together by their shared

experiences of low earnings, harassment at home, harassment by contractors and the police, poor working conditions, non-recognition of their labour and so on (Kumar 103).

Several other agitations also asserted the need for rights and *lokniti*; of these, an important one was the Nav Nirman movement of 1974, which began as a student movement in Gujarat, chiefly against corruption. Influenced by the concept of and the urge for 'revolution', the movement critiqued the rigour and out-datedness of the caste system and of the mindless irrelevant religious rituals. Besides its involvement in political and economic issues, this movement was also concerned with those which had been considered 'private', such as family violence, domestic roles and challenged patriarchal stereotypes (Kumar 103-104).

In 1974, The Progressive Organisation of Women (POW), in Hyderabad, worked towards organizing women against gender oppressive structures in society, namely, the sexual division of labour and the culture that sought to rationalize this discrimination. The organization promoted the ideology of 'equality' and opposed the economic dependence of women on their male counterparts.

There were also other movements like the Mahila Samta Sainik Dal (MSSD), formed by Dalit women, which saw religion as a major agent in oppression of women as well as Dalits, and the caste system, as a source of inequality in India (Kumar 99-105). Emphasizing the impact of the two organizations, Radha Kumar asserts that:

> [B]oth the POW and MSSD Manifestoes stressed the sexual oppression of women in a way that earlier social reform or feminist groups had not done […] The emphasis laid by POW and MSSD […] was on the sexual oppression of all women; and is an emphasis which quite clearly distinguishes the contemporary feminist movement from those that preceded it – even though it was, and is, differently viewed by different groups within the contemporary movement. The POW, for example, felt that all forms of male domination were based on women's economic dependence on men; whereas the MSSD felt that men's base desire for 'sexual pleasure' had led them to 'enslave' women. (106)

Interestingly, Kumar further states that these two organizations have very different opinions on whether biological difference is at the root of women's oppression. While

POW argued that, "[…] the sex stereotype was not due to basic biological differences but due to the thousands of years in which the division of labour has prevailed, and men and women were conditioned to the ideology of male supremacy". The MSSD debated that, "[…] the women's oppression was predicted on their reproductive capacities: 'it is not necessary to treat women as inferior because they have accepted the responsibility of bearing children'" (106).

Here, it is pertinent to note the new ideas that evolved during this period and to acknowledge the organizations which began to question age-old myths and find new answers to the cause of women's oppression. Interestingly, the view expressed by the MSSD with regards to reproduction is very similar to the arguments made by the Radical feminist, Shulamith Firestone in the west. In *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for a Feminist Revolution* (1970), Firestone argued that the reproductive role played by women reinstates her subordinate position. It is difficult to assume that the women from the MSSD organization had read or were aware of Firestone's work, as the book was published at the same time when such ideas were already taking shape through the new movements and organizations in India.

In fact, in *The Prisons We Broke* (2008), Baby Kamble wrote about the continual suffering of the Mahar women, as each woman would give birth to several children and each time she would conceive, her condition would be horrifying, due to poverty, lack of medical facilities, ignorant midwives and a number of superstitions. Most of the times the mother or the child would die during child birth. Thus, the notion of child-bearing as a role that subordinates women was not new in India. However, it was the MSSD organization which expressed this openly on a public platform.

During this time, emphasis was laid on what Kumar appropriately calls, 'self-definition'; the women's organizations tried to debate the issues which they would focus on. Whether these issues should only pertain to domestic violence, dowry deaths, and molestation or whether they should also include issues like equal wages for women, and more general issues like poverty, inflation, natural calamities and so on, began to be debated upon (106). Although the latter issues were not strictly pertaining to women, they were also

acknowledged as important, since women had to suffer the most in situations where they prevailed.

Another rising debate was whether the approach should be universal or more exclusively defined, should minority or Dalit women's issues that were very different from those which affected the larger majority group of women be addressed in the same way, on the same platform, or should those issues be treated separately (Omvedt 179-180). Little wonder then, that distinct movements and organizations evolved during this time. In the reckoning of Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel, these new organizations could be grouped into six types, as under:

i. Agitational, propaganda, consciousness raising groups which may be termed as autonomous groups.
ii. Grass roots or mass based organisations like trade unions, agricultural labourers organisations, democratic rights groups, tribal organisations etc. Not only women participate in these large organisations but many times women's issues like wife beating, sexual violation, harassment by landlords, drinking, witch-craft have been the main factors for launching mass struggles.
iii. Groups concentrating on providing services, shelter homes to needy women
iv. Professional women's organisations such as doctors', lawyers', scientists', researchers', journalists' etc.
v. Women's wings or fronts of the political parties.
vi. Groups involved in research and documentation on women's issues. (62-63)

Among these, the autonomous women's group was a new and very dynamic group. These women had no links with political parties or older organizations like the AIWC. In this context Ilina Sen observes in "Women's Politics in India" that:

> [T]he 70s also witnessed the emergence of the 'autonomous' women's movement. During the mid-70s, many educated women took to radical, active politics, and simultaneously promoted an analysis of women's issues. Groups of women came together in many cities. Among the incidents that played catalytic roles in crystallizing these meetings into organizational efforts were the Mathura rape case (1978) and the Maya Tyagi rape case (1980). Both were cases of custodial rape by the police, and led to nationwide protest movements by women (primarily from the intelligentsia). (196)

However, it must not be presumed that the emergence of such groups was merely spontaneous. It was the result of the need to steer clear of political as well as patriarchal interferences. As Sen indicates, in the groups which were affiliated to political parties or larger general organizations, the course of action would be decided not by women themselves, but by the leaders of those parties, which were men. Sen also elucidates the fact that these groups were almost completely dependent on the funds provided by the government and consequently, "[…] the donor agencies' priorities for possible courses of action for these groups sometimes dictated the way in which they worked. […] [this shows that] the women's platforms emerging in the context of mass movements do not necessarily provide women with a significant representation in the leadership of the overall movements" (202).

The autonomous women's movement emerged as a reaction to this, wherein women felt that they need not be subordinated to the decisions of any political party. However, although the major decisions of the movement had to be made by women alone, men were also a part of this group (Desai et al 64).

5.5 National and International Influences on Women's Movements

In the mid-1970s, three major events impacted the flow of women's movements in India. They were the following: the report on the Status of Women in India, known as *Towards Equality* in 1974; the imposition of a state of National Emergency in 1975-1977; and, the declaration of International Women's Decade in 1975-1985. All these events impacted and influenced the women's movement in diverse ways.

5.5.1 Towards Equality

In 1971, the Government of India appointed the Status of Women's Committee which submitted its report on the status of women in India in 1974. After enacting several laws and making provisions for the benefit of women, the Indian government decided to take cognizance of the changes that women may have undergone during the last few decades. It was also felt that due to the changing socio-economic conditions in the country, women's status might have altered, and consequently, new problems leading to the retardation of

process of development of women may have emerged, which would require new social policies. Thus, the Committee established in 1971 submitted their report aptly titled *Towards Equality,* on 31st December 1974 after the in-depth investigation (GOI xii). The committee consisted of Phulrenu Guha, Maniben Kara, Savitri Shyam, Neera Dogra, Vikram Mahajan, Leela Dube, Sakina A. Hasan, Urmila Haksar, Lotika Sarkar, and Vina Mazumdar.

This report described the shocking reality of women's lives which became evident in the declining sex ratio, the high rate of female mortality, and low literacy rate prevailing among women. In the 'Preface' to their Report, the Committee on the status of women, directly stated that, "[O]ur investigation has revealed that large masses of women in this country have remained unaffected by the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution and the laws enacted since Independence" (GOI).

The Committee also underlined their observation that the women's status in the very few matrilineal communities in India, was far better than the status of women in the patrilineal system. Here, it must be stated that, matrilineal should not be confused with matriarchy; in a matrilineal system, even if the women is the perpetuator of the line, the power still rests with men. Yet the committee affirmed that in such a system, women are more liberated than in a patrilineal system, "[H]usband's position vis-à-vis the wife is considerably different from that prevailing in the patrilineal systems. He is not her supporter, nor does she gain her status through him" (GOI 56). The report also stated that most of the major problems faced by Indian women were linked to marriage-related issues, like early marriage, dowry, polygamy, widowhood, divorce and so on.

The Report was an eye opener as it showed that even after Independence social ills that were fought against, way back in the nineteenth century, still continued to exist. Moreover, there were ills such as dowry, often resulting in bride burning and several other forms of persecution and exploitation. Several auto-narratives of this time also provide evidence to this reversion of practices and customs.

With the Hindu Code established, there were reforms in personal laws as discussed earlier, and divorce was made possible for women who were trapped in marriage. In *A Drop in the*

Ocean Padma Sachdev reveals the trauma and embarrassment she underwent in her marriage with Deep Saheb. Although, theirs was a love marriage, at a later stage, things began to change when Sachdev was diagnosed with Tuberculosis and had to be hospitalized for three years. Not once did her husband come to see her in the hospital. Even when she recovered he did not bother about her at all.

Moreover, when she began to live with him again, she continued to face many problems. For one, Deepji was penniless and to add to her woes, he became a drunkard. At this time Sachdev took up a job at the radio station and began running the house on her own. Yet, her husband would abuse her and humiliate her in front of others. Once, he even went to the extent of humiliating her mother. Yet, she could not bring herself to do much to defend herself and her interests. In short, she lived a horrible life. Much later, when she found no other solution, and was frustrated with his incorrigible ways, she decided to separate from him. This was a very difficult decision for her. Yet she mustered courage and decided to divorce him.

However, ironically, when she returned to her hometown, she realized the staunch opposition of the society to her bold decision. She candidly writes:

> [S]uddenly there erupted a plethora of evil minded scoundrels in Jammu. […] First these people began to provoke Deep Saheb into going to court against me. When he did not agree they began to spread all kinds of rumours against me. […] All at once I had become a female demon, a *daanvi*, because I wanted to live my life according to my own wishes and not like a helpless woman. When I came into town I was met with all kinds of sarcastic accusations, all kinds of lurid gossip. That a daughter of a Brahmin should divorce a husband who is considered to be an embodiment of god was not acceptable to these people. All those who felt sorry for my pitiable state earlier, now could not tolerate my assertion of courage. […] Even at the radio station the atmosphere began to turn hostile to me. […] At that juncture when I was really left alone, everyone in my home town washed their hands off me. (253)

The opposition against the divorce grew so much that there was a conspiracy against her in the office and the Director of the radio station, where Padma Sachdev worked, was given an application with the request that, "[…] a woman who has divorced her husband should

no longer be retained in service" (255). She says that the conspirators believed that if the job on which she was financially dependent would cease to benefit her, then she would return to her husband.

In the case of Sachdev, one can observe the furtive reach of patriarchy against a woman's legitimate interest. It is unthinkable that in the twentieth century India, although legally divorce was allowed, yet the vested interests of patriarchal society could not accept that a wife could divorce her husband, whom conservatives believe, she ought to worship all her life. We also realize that because Sachdev was courageous, educated and economically independent, she could take and stand by such a radical decision in her retrograde societal context. An uneducated and powerless woman might never have been able to take such a bold step.

In *My Story* Kamala Das also unfolds the insensitive and biased approach of her immediate social set-up to herself as a woman. In a frank revelation about her early arranged marriage to a person who was much elder to her, she describes how her marriage was fixed, when she was a mere fifteen year old. All her friends were shocked to hear of this, as they felt that she should complete her education before marriage. Das could not do anything about it as she knew that she was a burden on her parents and grandparents, she says, "I was a burden and responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long. Therefore with the blessing of all, our marriage was fixed" (77).

Das also comments that during the marriage the lavish expenditures and the outward show was given more importance than anything else. She writes, "[M]arriage meant nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours. It was enough to proclaim to the friends that father had spent half a lakh on its preparations. The bride was unimportant and her happiness a minor issue" (82). Here, Das also subtly hints at the dowry system prevalent in India. Since she belonged to a well-to-do family, there may not have been any bitterness in terms of dowry as everything might have been given willingly. However, there have been no dearth of cases of bride burning and blackmailing for dowry in India right into the present century.

But to return to the Status of Women Committee's Report mentioned earlier, a major consequence of this report was the realization of the plight of women even in Independent India. The report also proved that although laws that guaranteed equality and empowerment were enacted way back in the 1950s, they were not justly and equally implemented, and for a large majority of people the laws continued to be as good as non-existent at least in practice. In the auto-narrative, *Memories of a Rolling Stone* (2010), Vina Mazumdar, one of the committee members on the Status of Women in India, writes about her experiences of the investigation conducted. In her own words:

> [W]hat I did not realize at this time was how this assignment was to radically alter the direction of my life and that of many others who worked with me. Our findings (a) through pooling of available social science knowledge, on varied sections of India's diverse communities/regions/ class/traditions; and (b) through extensive discussion with over 10,000 women from different backgrounds in most states/cultural regions, revealed our own ignorance and shattered our self images as social scientists/teachers and as 'daughters of Independence'. The greatest teachers, we discovered, were the peasant and other working women across the country. They were involved in agriculture and other primary occupations. Their labour kept their families alive but no one had informed them of their rights under Independent India's Constitution. (68)

Mazumdar's observation not only highlights the methodology used in doing the report, but also affirms the widespread ignorance of laws and provisions thereby made by the government of India for the betterment of its citizens, particularly the marginalized sections of the society including women.

5.5.2 Internal Emergency in India

A state of Internal Emergency in India was declared by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi in June 1975. In *My Reminiscences* Renuka Ray writes of the emergency in clear, unambiguous terms thus:

> [I]n June 1975, the Allahabad High Court Judgement unseated Indira Gandhi from the Lok Sabha; […] A great deal of political turmoil followed and law and order broke down. Soon after came the unexpected and extreme political decision announcing a state of Internal Emergency in India along with the promulgation of the Maintenance of Internal Security

> Act (MISA) under which people could be arrested and detained without giving grounds for their detention; and arrests followed throughout the country including that of Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai. (237)

The women's movement was also affected by the Emergency. Scholars like Neera Desai, Vibhuti Patel and Radha Kumar affirm that many women activists were imprisoned at this time. Others turned their focus on civil rights. In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted, several women's groups and movements took to mass protest. After the imposed silence of nearly two years, the atrocities committed against women were openly documented and reported in the press. According to Patel, as a result of this, many women's groups took to the streets to protest. Desai and Patel explain that:

> [W]hen the emergency period was over, a great uproar against state-expression, mass rape, police-rape culminated in a nationwide anti-rape movement with the two central demands of reopening of the now famous Mathura rape case and enacting amendments in the rape law. The State had to respond positively to women's organisations because of tremendous pressure from the mass of women. (67)

While the above quote reveals the mass-oppression that women in India faced under the façade of the draconian rules imposed during Emergency, it also demonstrates the power of mass protests. Hence, more and more women who had been silenced before began to voice out and protest against the atrocities committed during the Emergency. These protests were not only in the form of movements but also in discussion forums and seminars.

At this time, several journals and magazines emphasizing upon women, equality and society emerged. In 1977, a group of women in Delhi, started *Manushi*, a journal in Hindi and English. Later, in the late 70s and 80s there were many others, such as, *Feminist Network* in Bombay, *Baiza* in Pune, *Ahalya*, *Sabala Sachetana*, and *Pratibadi Chetana* in Calcutta, *Women's Voice* in Bangalore, and *Stree Sangharsh* in Patna (Sen 197).

Co-incidentally, right at the time when India was going through the Emergency on the International platform, another significant event took place which largely influenced the ongoing Indian women's movements. This was the International Women's Decade declared by the United Nations in 1975-1985.

5.5.3 International Women's Decade

The first United Nations Women's Conference, held in Mexico City in 1975, designated the years from 1975 to 1985 as the UN Decade for Women. The International Women's Decade stressed upon the need for research, documentation and analysis, it also provided the opportunity of consciousness-raising among women about their own problems and issues. In the words of Desai and Patel, the decade generated "[A] new sensitivity about the overt and covert oppressive conditions of womankind […]" They further assert that, "[…] the decade also sensitized women to the necessity of perspective in not only understanding the problems but also meeting the challenges" (81).

The decade highlighted upon women-centric issues and thereby brought these issues to the notice of policy makers and bureaucrats (Desai et al 83). This International endeavour to improve the status of women was a real boost to the women's movements in India, not only ideologically in the discussions about women and their problem as real and active, and that need attention and solutions; but also financially. Ilina Sen notes that during this decade numerous funds were allocated to women's movements and activities and thus even in India, the women's movements and organizations grew. She observes insightfully that:

> [W]ith the inflow of funds and with international cognizance being given to women's issues by UN fora, the field of women's activities in India witnessed somewhat unusual growth. The period 1975-85 was officially declared as the UN decade for women, and a large amount of money was channeled into women's activities through various groups and voluntary agencies. These groups undertook a programme of conscientization of and/or organized economic activities for women. (199)

Hence, there was an upsurge in the Indian women's movement during this time.

As a response to the International Women's Decade and the Indian Status of Women Report, new platforms for discussions and debates on women's issues emerged and this also laid the foundation of Women's Studies.

5.6 New Movements and Campaigns in the Late Twentieth Century

Thus, new campaigns and movements, which addressed the increasing crime rates against women, began in the 1980s. There were campaigns against dowry and rape. As mentioned earlier, the first protest against dowry was made by the Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad in 1975, but these protests did not grow into full-fledged campaigns. In 1979, a group of women called Stree Sangharsh analysed the issue of dowry in India and campaigned against it. Later, many other organizations took up the issue of dowry and highlighted the issue of the violence inflicted upon women due to parents' inability to fulfil the expectations of the in-laws with regard to dowry. Many a times, in the past there used to be deaths due to unrelenting demands for dowry. However, if one is to believe Kumar until such campaigns were launched, the cases of deaths due to dowry-harassment were not even properly investigated, as they were considered as 'private affairs' (117-119).

Another significant campaign was against rape, one of the most under-reported crimes in India. While there are several cases of rape by employers, landlords, police and so on, that occur on a wide scale, they mostly go either unreported or un/ill-investigated(Kumar 128). In 1979, there were demonstrations by women against police and landlord rape. It is pertinent to remember that during the Emergency there were several cases of rape by police, and these cases received great attention from such movements.

Indira Goswami in her *Unfinished Autobiography* writes about the rape of a woman whose husband had died in a bridge building mishap, and who was then treated as a prostitute. Since this woman had nowhere else to go, with her children, she had to give in to the desires of the men. Goswami's housemaid Padmabai speaks about this woman, in these words: "[S]he works for the company. Her husband was drowned in the foundation well of a bridge at Sarangkheda. Our contractor brought her here. Haven't you ever seen her three children begging at the kitchens of the mates, and 'langars' of the 'khalasis'? […] She is a whore!" (37). Goswami also writes about the constant sexual abuse faced by young widows, as they had no voice to retaliate and resist this domination. There were many such cases in India, most of which were not reported at all.

The movements and demonstrations against these social ills, created an awareness among all women and encouraged them to resist this oppression. Thus, more and more organizations, NGOs, and movements began to throw light on women-centric issues and, thereby, help in empowering women by conscientizing them and motivating them to break their silence.

5.7 Towards the Turn of the Century

In the 1980s and 1990s the movement went through some significant changes. During this time, new Women's Centres which provided "legal aid, health care and counselling" were formed. Although such centres had existed even before, the new centres were different from the previous ones in that they dealt with a wider range of issues which were considered to be interlinked. Moreover, their outlook towards women's health had grown, and "[…] the new centres looked at women's health in a more holistic way, providing not only information on all gynaecological problems but also looking at the socially structured ways in which women treated their own bodies" (Kumar 144). They also had, "a more flexible, individualist approach" to women's problems and issues (144).

During these decades, there was also a growing focus on "defining the movement's identity, purposes and strategies for both internal and external relations" (Mazumdar and Agnihotri 229). Towards the close of the twentieth century, several new organizations and debating forums have tried to bring to light distinct and contemporary gender specific issues. For instance, the movement has focused upon domestic violence, unequal wages, and objectification of women in media and so on. Women's research units have been set up in SNDT Women's University in Bombay, and in Delhi, the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) has been established. Both these institutions have begun to jointly host national women's studies conferences (Kumar 151). Women's studies has also been introduced as a subject at post-graduate level in various universities, including Goa University, and research has seriously begun to be carried out on issues of primary concern to women. The Indian Women's movement continues to grow even in the twenty-first century, using various forms of multi-media and journalism as platforms to deliberate upon the women's question. Again, the special provisions granted by law for women have been

implemented in India. Important among them is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

During the contemporary times, India has witnessed marvellous contributions of women in general across different fields of life, may it be in education, politics, law, medicine, humanities, astronomy, sports, defence forces and so on. Some of these fields are unconventional. The Indian society and its outlook towards women has definitely changed for the better. However, inspite of all this, the picture of women's empowerment is still not rosy. Even in the twenty-first century, despite wide-ranging efforts made by law makers, women's organizations, and women's movements wherein men and women have together striven towards women's empowerment, there is much to achieve for the faceless ordinary woman in the society to be fully empowered.

Enhancement of social awareness, capacity building among women, provisions of economic, social as well as psychological security, are still targets to be fulfilled. At least, the rising graph of crimes against women, and the still wide gap between the male and female literacy rate and the ominous sex ratio against the female shows that perhaps a large number of Indian women are still endangered, deprived and unwanted. They are not yet empowered. To analyse the reality of women's life and discover the possible impact of the post-independence women's movements on individual Indian women it would be significant to study the lives of the authors of the primary texts as reflected upon in the individual auto-narratives and examine their level of empowerment or disempowerment.

5.8 Individual Empowerment of Women

Empowerment is not something static, it is dynamic; and therefore, its goal post is ever-changing. If in the nineteenth century, empowerment of women would mean the mere possibility of a life after the death of the husband without enduring persecution; in the early twentieth century, moving out of the seclusion of the house and being able to actively participate in the freedom struggle as equals also meant being hugely empowered in the given circumstances. Subsequently, in post-independence India having equal rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution was also an empowerment hitherto unknown. Hence, the meaning and scope of empowerment is prone to change as per its social or political

context. Yet, the core and essence of empowerment remains the same. Sushma Srivastava, a scholar on women's empowerment identifies it in precise and clear terms thus:

> [T]he core of empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. This implies that to be empowered women must not only have equal capabilities and equal access to resources and opportunities, but they must also have the agency to use those rights, capabilities, resources, and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions. And for them to exercise agency, they must live without the fear of coercion and violence. (17)

As discussed before, in Independent India, women are legally provided 'equal access to resources and opportunities' by the Constitution of India. But it has to be also acknowledged that even in contemporary times these laws and policies have often not reached the grass-root level, and many people, both male and female, are still unaware of these laws. Hence, in the context of the select primary texts that represent this period, it is significant to examine to what extent the women writers under study have been affected by the laws and the women's empowerment movements at crucial stages of their lives.

5.8.1 Awareness and Resistance

As seen previously, even after Independence, many social ills were prevalent in India. Thus, it is pertinent to see whether women were aware of such ills and whether they resisted them or not. In this era, as mentioned earlier, there have been campaigns against rape, domestic violence and dowry and the movements have attempted to motivate women to resist these oppressions. In *My Story* Kamala Das faces such oppression in her life. She divulges the sexual violence she undergoes at the hands of her own husband. Even before marriage, after their engagement, her fiancé abuses and harasses her, she reveals, "[W]herever he found me alone in a room, he began to plead with me to bare my breasts and if I did not, he turned brutal and crude. His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin" (79).

Das also writes about the pain she endured during pregnancy, she says, "I did not get enough sleep at night for my husband took me several times with a vengeance […]" (86). Marital rape was not a very familiar term (or even concept) at that time, yet after the first

night of marriage Das blatantly states in her auto-narrative, "[T]he *rape* was unsuccessful" (emphasis added 84). Albeit Das could not resist her husband openly yet she makes an attempt to subtly resist him by using the pretext of her own weakness and ignorance in sexual matters. Thus, she writes, "[H]e grew tired of the physical resistance […]" (85). Das' words re-echo the comment made by Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* (1987):

> [D]isdaining marital rights and refusing the support of the laws of society, he will try to conquer her in single combat. He tries to get possession of the woman even in her resistance; he pursues her in the very liberty through which she escapes him. In vain. (223).

In the above quote Beauvoir highlights the mentality of these men who feel it is their right to have sex with their wives whether they agree to it or not. Kamala Das tries to resist her husband's demands but she was unable to do so for long. As a wife, Das could not resist her husband outright and nor could she share her agony with anyone else. She expresses the difficulty she faces in openly telling her father that she was not happy in the marriage. Das writes that when her father once visited her, she wanted to share her sorrow with him, but could not do so. She writes, "I wished then to cry and to tell him that he had miscalculated and that I ought not to have married the one I did, but I could not bring myself to hurt him. My father was an autocrat and if he went wrong in his decisions he did not want ever to hear about it" (86). Here Das also underlines the male ego in her father, who reportedly does not want to even think that his decision might have been wrong.

However, even though Das does not speak out against her husband she does retaliate and resist in other ways. Since she did not get the love she wanted from her husband, she defiantly looks for it outside the marriage. In her words:

> I yearned for a kind word, a glance in my direction. It became obvious to me that my husband had wished to marry me only because of my social status and the possibility of financial gain. A coldness took hold of my heart then. I knew then that if love was what I had looked for in marriage I would have to look for it *outside its legal orbit*. I wanted to be given an identity that was lovable. (Emphasis added; 90)

By breaking all the traditions of morality and loyalty to the husband in the marriage, that are inculcated in women from birth, Das resisted marital excesses and what is more, in candidly writing about it in her autobiography she has challenged patriarchy altogether.

Das also reveals the rape of employed maids who had no chance to resist. She says, "[H]e told me of the sexual exploits he had shared with some of the maidservants in his house in Malabar" (79-80). In another chapter she discloses, "[F]or him such a body was an embarrassment veteran that he was in the rowdy ways of sex which he had practiced with the maids who worked for his family" (85). In fact, rape by employers was very common and was widely campaigned against in the late twentieth century. Yet, these maid servants mentioned by Das did not resist.

Furthermore, it seems like Das' husband was very proud of 'this achievement', which he brags about to his own wife. This points to the crude mentality of some men even in those times with regard to women and sex. However, the very fact that Kamala Das writes about this, shows not just her awareness that such things were wrong and criminal, but also her courage to speak out and the fire in her to defy conservative society that wants to put a wrap on such crimes against women. Apart from voicing the agony of an exploited and violated wife, Das' narrative also underscores how vulnerable was the domestic women-workforce to the horrors of 'silent' rape.

In this context, it is also pertinent to discuss the exploitation and/or the physical violation of another societal component of womanhood in society – the widows, the single women and the divorcees. The report *Towards Equality*, showed that even in the twentieth century, atrocities and oppression of widows continued. Albeit the Indian Constitution declared that a citizen should not be discriminated against on any grounds, yet widows continued to live as sub-human individuals, victimized and marginalized by society. In *An Unfinished Autobiography* (2002), Indira Goswami writes about the Radheshyamis in Vrindaban, and the oppression they faced. She observes:

> [I]n the vicinity of my quarter in the temple precincts, there lived a number of *Radheshyamis*, i.e. destitute widows who earned their living by singing bhajans. They passed their days in small, dark rooms, that should better be called cages. […] Some of them were drawn to that place by their religious impulse, but most of them sought shelter

> there to find an escape from the woes of their private and domestic life. The tales of life of most of them were indeed very painful and heart-rending. (119)

No one provided these widows with shelter unless they had money. Many of the younger widows had also fallen prey to the desires of their employers. These widows used to sing bhajans in the Bhajan ashram. A woman discloses to Goswami, "[Y]ou must have observed the ways of these *munshis* (the secretaries). They engage these young widows for doing their household chores. Sometimes, they force them to sleep with them" (157). Unlike the Radhesshyamis, Goswami was an educated, intellectual women, although she went through a traumatic phase in her life after the death of her husband, and found it very difficult to get hold of her life once again, yet she rises again and does not allow anyone to persecute her as a widow. She endured humiliation, because of her widowhood. She writes:

> [A]s I lived by myself at Goalpara like this, I came across some people of strange character. They were all men – looking for a chance always to enjoy the company of a single woman. One of the men who had declared himself a well-wisher of mine, left behind on my table some such vulgar pictures, which no sooner had I seen them, filled my mind with disgust against all males. (83)

This shows that single women, divorcees, and widows who broke away from the rigid patriarchal norms, were many a time seen as loose women, and some pervert men would humiliate them and harass them in such ways. However, in Goswami's case, despite all the suffering, she challenges the patriarchal excesses, traditional norms and the customs which marginalize widows. She first takes a job in a school, and later goes to Vrindaban to complete her Ph.D. and thereby resists oppression by seeking to empower herself through education and employment`.

Even Padma Sachdev goes through such a phase after her divorce; she writes, "[B]ecause I was a divorced woman people thought I must be available" (269). A significant factor that makes women like Das and Goswami aware not only of their oppression but also of the possibility of resistance, is education. These women were perhaps well aware of the laws of equality. They knew that they need not suffer in silence anymore, and this knowledge is provided by education.

5.8.2 Education in the Twentieth Century and Women's Empowerment

Education in the twentieth century may be said to be much more advanced and effective. In Chapter Four, it was seen that in pre-independence India, women's education had taken roots, and efforts to educate women were being made. However, at that time women's education meant only training women in various domestic skills and making them better wives and mothers. In Independent India, education has not only made women aware of their rights as equals, but also trained them to think and analyse their own problems and empowered them to resist oppression as well as to challenge exploitation. Education has also given them opportunities to take up different professions and be economically independent, thereby facilitating their decision making prospects.

5.8.2.1 Economic Independence

One of the greatest advantages of education was the ability to be financially independent. As discussed in Chapter Four, it was difficult for women to resist patriarchal domination because they were completely dependent on their menfolk (who were often also their oppressors) emotionally and, more so, financially. Women had no property of their own in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as property rights were legally enacted only in the 1950s. But even after that, women rarely inherited property. Hence, they could not live on their own independently. Wives were constantly under the fear of the husband disowning them, as they would then have no place to go, and their families would never accept them back.

However, in the mid and later twentieth century, because of the widespread education of women, and the opening of new career possibilities for women, they could now be educated and could take up a profession of their choice. Most of the women writers of the primary texts belonging to this era, are educated and are economically independent.

Padma Sachdev is an eminent poet and a writer of national repute. Earlier, she also worked at a radio station. Kamala Das is an equally renowned writer and a poet. Her boldness and rebelliousness is evident in most of her works, wherein she resists patriarchal norms and challenges any form of femininity. While Indira Goswami is also a very celebrated writer,

she has been a teacher too. Even in the auto-narrative of Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, we see that his wife Mujji was educated; she was a graduate. Abbas confesses in his narrative that when he wrote to her asking whether she was willing to marry him even though he did not earn much, she replied, "[A]greed. That is the life I would like to lead – but I would claim equal rights to stand on my own feet" (247).

Economic independence, along with education, gave these women the ability to assert and express themselves openly. What is more, it also empowered them to take tough decisions at various crucial junctures of life. For instance, even after her divorce, if Padma Sachdev could live as an independent individual despite all the hurdles she had to cross, it was because she was educated, and had knowledge of the laws, and financially she was neither dependent on her mother nor anyone else. After getting a divorce Sachdev says, "[T]hose days one used to get a fifteen-day contract with radio. But I had been getting one continuously. I had been working regularly for a year and a half so I had no apprehensions. My salary was my support and I did not want to be dependent on anyone" (252-253). She lived independently, and later she also re-married a person of her choice.

5.8.2.2 Intellectual Empowerment

Along with education also came the ability to critically evaluate the norms and restrictions of society. Women were now able to understand the ploys of patriarchy and also question the patriarchal myths. In addition to providing women with economic independence, education also shaped the mind-set of women to understand their privileges and predicament. This provided women with the opportunity of openly voicing out their wrongs, desires and rights. In the earlier times, although women identified the factors leading to their oppression, they could not voice out their opinions. In the previous Chapter, illustrations from Lakshmibai Tilak's autobiography show that though she did resist patriarchy, it was only in thought; she could not openly oppose her father-in-law and express her views directly. However, in the auto-narratives belonging to the post-independence era, one observes that women are more courageous and they openly express their views not only through the auto-narrative but also directly.

One such woman is Padma Sachdev, who in her auto-narrative speaks about the conditioning of men and women to behave in a certain way. While thinking about the reason why her husband Deepji did not take her to the hospital or even once come to see her after she was admitted, she realizes that she was wrong in thinking that she could change him after marriage. She says that although he loved her, what came in between was male ego. She writes:

> [B]ut nobody can demolish a man's ego. Even if it does happen he will still not accept it because generations have installed in him that a woman is equivalent to a man's slippers; small or too big, they can be discarded. Buy a new one. Or mend her.
>
> Was it because of this conditioning that Deepji did not bring me to the hospital? Who knows? (156-157)

Sachdev's analysis points towards her ability to question certain actions of her husband. Usually Indian women just accept whatever their husbands do without any question, but here Sachdev tries to analyse and understand the mentality and the social conditioning of her husband. Even later, when at last he goes to her native home to take her back, Sachdev openly and directly asks him, why he could not for once visit her in the hospital. Later, when her husband in a drunken state humiliates her mother and urinates in front of her native home, Sachdev expresses her anger and even complains against him in his office. Sachdev describes her reaction to her husband's act in the following scathing words:

> I was like a raging tigress. I took out a stick from a bundle and cried out, 'I'll kill you today. You can say what you like to me, but you dare not say a word to my mother. Today I'll finish this whole farce. Either you'll live or I. I'd rather be hanged by the rope or grind the wheel forever in jail. That'll be better than living life like this!' (241)

It is very reassuring, from the perspective of women's empowerment, to note that unlike other women Sachdev does not endure the humiliation of her family, mainly of her mother (notably another woman) in silence. She had suffered quietly for a long time. But when her husband humiliated her mother she could no longer be silent. She writes from a very analytical point of view: "I do admit that a woman can bring herself to reconcile with a situation up to a point, but not at the cost of her self respect and dignity. If there is no

respect, love has no meaning. But where do women ask even for respect! We only say please don't insult us" (239). This statement captures the very crux of the nature of empowerment women seek and should be entitled to. It also draws the line of limit of endurance that a woman can put up with. In her own case, her husband had crossed these limits and thereafter she asserts herself and accosts him. Her strength and courage comes from her education, economic independence and intellectual empowerment but also from the ethical value system imbibed by her.

Like Sachdev, Indira Goswami also reveals how widows were treated inhumanly in Vrindaban and furthermore exposes the hypocrisy of men who are considered to be holy. In her autobiography, she relates an incident wherein a supposedly holy baba, called Lila Baba, was addressing his devotees and delivering a talk, on the occasion of the inauguration of his new temple. Goswami writes:

> [I]n the course of his lecture, he had remarked that for a widow, life was totally devoid of any meaning or purpose. I felt sorely provoked by his words. The slightest reverence I had for him, now evaporated. I was about to stand up and ask him, 'Your words will only deepen the sores of a woman's mind. It's your business to lend succor to the worn-out spirit of a widow. You're known to be a saint in this place, and I believe it to be your duty to impart the healing touch to all suffering souls. Instead, your words only aggravate their sufferings. Though I may be foolish, I have no doubt that your words show only indiscretion.' I was about to speak out my mind, but some well-wishers sitting next to me, counselled restraint. (147-148)

It is pertinent to note that she does not say this in front of everyone. But this silence is not because of her own hesitation but because her well-wishers told her that such a statement would provoke the large number of devotees to attack her. She says that with great restraint she stopped herself, considering the danger to her life. However, the ability to think in such a rational and clear way points towards her intellectual empowerment. Even in her auto-narrative, she exposes these saints and shows how many a time these people use their power and influence to fulfil their illegitimate and immoral desires.

In this context, it has to be said that even in this era, auto-narratives remain the most candidly potent way in which women can and do express their feelings and opinions. In

her auto-narrative *My Story*, Das writes about her opinion of marriage and comments upon the day-to-day life of a middle-class housewife. In her frank, dispassionate analysis, she criticizes the institution of marriage as perceived by unenlightened, middle-class parents with regard to their daughters. Her sharp sarcasm throws light on the latent notions of patriarchal vanity ingrained in women's psyche. She observes in retrospect how:

> [M]y life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives. I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children. I would be a middle-class housewife, and walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet. I would beat my thin children when they asked for expensive toys, and make them scream out for mercy. I would wash my husband's cheap underwear and hang it out to dry in the balcony like some kind of a national flag, with wifely pride […] (80-81)

In the above quote, Das seems to suggest that ironically an average middle-class Indian woman's sole aim and purpose in life was and largely remains to be married. This holds a kernel of truth. Even as recently as the twentieth century, although women started having their own professions and career plans, marriage still continued to be the only way of life and was of utmost importance.

This can be seen across all auto-narratives: in Goswami's case, her mother's struggle to get her married is very evident; she goes to various saints and holy men because her daughter was not getting any marriage proposal. Goswami writes of her unease, "[A]s for me, despite her relentless efforts, my mother could not find a suitable match. She felt very frustrated. It became increasingly difficult for me to look at her in the face" (15). In fact, because of this frustration, Goswami takes a wrong step in her life and marries a boy without the knowledge of her family, but she could not tell them the truth nor go to the man she had married in court. Later when her family gets to know of this, she gets divorced from him and marries Madhu.

Marriage is a patriarchal institution that cannot be escaped from very easily, at least in India. Therefore, it can be seen that, any woman who tries to get away from this is scorned, persecuted and humiliated, as seen earlier in the case of Padma Sachdev. However, it is also seen that the women writers under study struggle against the binding norms of

patriarchy and through their intellect and determination try to overcome the obstacles in the path of empowerment. Hence, education played a great role in empowering the women of the twentieth century.

5.8.2.3 Political Representation

As a result of good education, economic independence and intellectual empowerment, women in Independent India began to represent themselves in Indian politics. As discussed earlier, due to the plea of Gandhiji, women were represented in the Constituent Assembly; this opening given to women, boosted their self-esteem and it can be seen that more women participated in the political scenario. Renuka Ray is an illustration of such women. She contested for the first Lok Sabha elections in 1952. Although she lost it, she was appointed as a Rehabilitation Minister on the insistence of Dr. Roy. However, five years later in 1957, she contested again for the Malda seat, and won it and became the first woman minister in a state government in India. Ray writes that the Chief Minister, Dr. Roy was very proud of having a female minister in his cabinet. In her words: "[H]e used to tell them [visitors to the state] proudly that apart from the Central government this was the only state government which had appointed a woman to a cabinet rank post after independence" (186).

In *My Reminiscences*, Ray also highlights the increasing number of women taking part in politics and reaching great heights. She writes:

> [S]arojini Mahishi made a good impression on many people by her maiden speech in 1962, and later as a Minister of State for Communications she played a leading role in bringing the Indian Airlines and Air India strike to an end. One other woman stands out: the dowager maharani of Gwalior, who was on the Congress benches in 1957, a good speaker and very often able to counter the arguments of the other maharani from the Swatantra benches. However, after the death of Pandit Nehru she left the party, as a result of the treatment of party bosses, and founded her own party and became its leader. […] In 1962, my sister-in-law, Sharda Mukerjee, Subroto's wife, came into the Lok Sabha where she made a good impression as she took the trouble to study the subjects on which she spoke – she took particular interest in the welfare of defence personnel. She is now an able Governor in the state of Gujarat. Another old friend was Lakshmi Menon in the Rajya Sabha, who was an

> able and competent Parliamentary Secretary and later became Deputy Minister and subsequently Minister of State for External Affairs. Violet Alva, also from the Rajya Sabha, was a Deputy Minister for Home Affairs. Later she became the Vice-Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and made a name for herself. (194-195)

While the number of women entering the political profession points towards the upward progression of the status of women in India, this change was not easy to come by. Even after Independence, women had to struggle to climb the social ladder; they faced opposition and discrimination, as affirmed by Ray. In the above quote Ray underlines that the dowager maharani of Gwalior, left the Congress Party after the death of Nehru, because of the ill-treatment of party bosses towards her. In another place Ray writes about Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the Health Minister in the first cabinet, who was bullied by H.V. Kamath. However, it is pertinent to note that these women did not give up, the maharani of Gwalior established her own party and became its leader.

As discussed in Chapter Two, it is not enough for a woman merely to be elected as a member of the parliament, as many a time, her husband introduces her to politics and she has to remain his puppet, while all the decisions are actually taken by the husband. In such a case, the woman is neither in a position to understand the needs of other women, nor is she able to be of genuine service to her country in any way. However, although such cases may have been rampant in India, it is interesting as well as reassuring to see that even in the early years of Independence there were women who independently took decisions for themselves and the nation.

Ray writes of Sucheta Kripalani and her husband Archarya Kripalani, who were both an integral part of the National Congress. However, later because of the increasing self-interests that could be seen in the policies introduced by some Congressmen, Archarya Kripalani left Congress and joined the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Whereas, Sucheta chose to stay back in Congress, even though that would perhaps mean opposing the views and opinions of her husband in some ways. In a similar vein, several women were participating in different levels of governance and decision-making on a national level.

5.9 Conclusion

The above discussion, with the illustrations and evidence provided, proves that in the twentieth century a large number of women were empowered notwithstanding the obstacles and oppression in their path. However, it would be completely wrong to say that every Indian woman was likewise empowered. The fact remains that even today a vast majority of women in India, especially in the rural areas, still do not receive education. Again, while there is a large body of working women in India as there are women holding various positions in diverse professions or even working as house helps, or labourers, many of them do not actually control their own earnings. Quite often, they give it into the hands of their family, in-laws or husband, and are, therefore, still dependent on others and remain disempowered.

It is also significant to observe that women who belong to more liberated and enlightened families become empowered individuals. The nature and mental frame of the society they belong to and the family in which women are brought up, affects the empowerment of women in a great way. This is seen even in the pre-independence era, in the case of Cornelia Sorabji, whose family is very enlightened. Her mother was an empowered woman in their own right. Therefore, even in the absence of any law to support her fight for equality in terms of education and taking up a profession that was meant only for men, she was still able to challenge patriarchy and fight her way out from the position of powerlessness to empowerment. Similarly, it is seen that those women supported by their husbands find it easier to empower themselves as seen in the case of Renuka Ray who proudly writes:

> [I]t is the fact that without breaking up my married life I established the right of the wives of those in public services to follow their own independent career in political or public life. […] To many this was surprising, particularly as my husband was a member of the Indian Civil Service under alien rule in the earlier days and my political involvements had repercussions on his career. He was not only ungrudging about my work but throughout our forty-four years of married life he always encouraged me to follow my own bent and I got his wise counsel when I asked for it. (245)

Hence, it can be seen that with the intellectual and economic independence received through education, with the support and backing provided by law and the political

representation of women in the twentieth century, women have taken great steps towards their own empowerment. Although limitations and obstructions to the complete empowerment of all women in India still exist, a remarkable change in the status and condition of women is seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the twentieth century more and more women have attained a strong sense of empowerment as seen through the examples from the primary texts, and this trend positively continues in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The overall scenario of women in the twenty-first century India, the opportunities available for higher education, job possibilities open for all, political representation of women and so on, creates a utopian illusion in the mind of any Indian, that in contemporary times, women are on par with men, and that gender discrimination is only a past phenomenon that has been washed away by the new generation with its focus on scientific progress and technology.

However, a closer look at today's woman, whether she is a housewife, a professional or a working class woman, her conditions on a broad scale show that the lot of Indian women and the societal attitude towards them has not changed positively to the extent it should have.

Considering the vast mileage covered by the reform movements, freedom struggle, women's movement, Women Empowerment programmes of NGOs as well as the Government and all the awareness campaigns through media and universal education, Indian society has yet to bear the fruit of a truly gender-friendly ethos, egalitarian treatment and an integrally empowered status for women in India. However, alternately, the picture is also not wholly bleak in terms of the sheer awareness of this lacuna and sustained efforts of the government, the NGOs and the progressive section of society across class, caste and gender.

All this has created a paradoxical situation of sorts. Although, women in general are allowed to move out of the threshold of the house and create a niche for themselves in the world outside, yet when it comes to home, most women are still expected to hold a subordinate position to their male counterparts. They are not just permitted, but rather expected to earn, but they are not allowed control over their earnings. Moreover, even today in times of catastrophe, it is the women who are the worst-hit, and therefore new concepts such as the 'feminization of poverty' have emerged, as poor economic conditions affect

the women more than men as per scholars such as Srivastava, as also witnessed in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*.

The conservative, insensitive and biased comments passed even by the so-called 'intellectuals' and leaders of the country on the rape or molestation of a woman, censuring and critiquing women and their manner of dressing, time and mode of socializing, rather than condemning rapists and the perpetrators of violence and the highly regressive patriarchal ideologies which still promote Khap Panchayats, honour killings and discriminatory civil codes are responsible for such inhuman attitude towards women. They are the obsolete signs that point towards the still disempowered mass of women.

As such, the current researcher was drawn to raise the following questions: have the women in India been really empowered and to what extent? What does empowerment really mean? Is it only an external transfer of power to women by means of constitutional rights, legal provisions and governmental policies? Or is it an internal growth, change in consciousness and attitude leading to selfhood within women and the progress of society in general? These and other questions led to the study of women's empowerment in the pre-independence and post-Independence eras. On this backdrop, a detailed study on the women empowerment movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was undertaken to examine their impact on women and their empowerment. This study formed the basis for several observations and findings which are listed in this Chapter.

6.2 Chapter-wise Observations of the Study

In the course of this study the following chapter-wise approach has been adopted and corresponding observations have been made:

6.2.1 Chapter One: Introduction

This Chapter introduces the study on women empowerment in the pre-independence and post-independence eras, and delineates the aims, objectives, scope, hypotheses, methodology, delimitation, selected primary texts and the relevance of the study. A literature survey of secondary sources is also undertaken. Since, the primary texts selected are auto-narratives, they are expectedly based on facts and they reveal events, occurrences

and social customs or trends that have been witnessed by the authors in their life. Therefore, they are used to corroborate the actual social, historical and political occurrences that have taken place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that had an impact on Indian women and their empowerment.

The observations based on this Chapter are as follows:

- Certain facts and events have been reliably reported by others, to the authors of the primary texts. This information has been duly represented in the auto-narrative. For instance, in the case of Lakshmibai Tilak, the oppression faced by her mother-in-law, Jankibai at the hands of her husband, was not directly witnessed by the author, as her mother-in-law had died much before Lakshmibai's marriage. Her husband, Tilak told her about the suffering his mother endured. This information was confirmed and corroborated by Tilak's siblings. So when Lakshmibai wrote about this in her auto-narrative, she was actually expressing the plight and predicament of an average, high caste women from poor background.

- The chosen primary texts represent the cross-section of castes, classes, religions and geographic/linguistic regions in India. The authors selected for the study belong to the following states: Maharashtra, Assam, Jammu Kashmir, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. However, most of the authors have migrated or travelled to several other places thereby depicting their social situation in their auto-narratives. For instance, Jawaharlal Nehru's ancestors were originally from Kashmir but later they moved to Allahabad. However, in his life-span Nehru has travelled vastly in India and abroad and he writes about these places and societies in his autobiography. So do the other writers to lesser or greater extent. This helps to form a fair idea of the overall situation in the country.

- Although the period taken under study is the 19th and 20th centuries, the earliest primary text chosen for the study, begins from the 1850's; this may be because not many women wrote in English in the early 19th century, as very few privileged women were educated at that time. However, this does not mean that auto-narratives in regional languages were not written in that era, but hardly any

women's auto-narratives belonging to that era have been translated in English although an attempt to translate some excerpts of the earlier works have been, undertaken in Suise Tharu and K. Lalita's anthology, *Women's Writing in India*.

- It has been observed that even in the regions colonized by the Portuguese and the French, which do not fall under the purview of this study, there were educated and empowered women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, Propercia Correia-Afonso de Figueiredo was an educationist, a reformer and a literary stalwart in Portuguese- ruled Goa in the early decades of the twentieth century.

- With a majority of women's auto-narratives as primary texts, two male auto-narratives had also been chosen to represent the male point of view of the events and movements that occurred in India and their impact on women. The male authors selected, being enlightened and observant intellectuals, with critical acumen, they provide both, a corroboration of events and occurrences, as well as the sounding board for assessing the veracity of crucial facts and observations stated by the women authors.

6.2.2 Chapter Two: Empowerment of Women: Context of Feminism

This Chapter dwells in depth on the concept of women's empowerment, the approaches to and perspectives on the empowerment of women, the levels of empowerment and the criteria of empowerment. This Chapter also studies Feminism, its various definitions, the diverse perspectives and theories of Feminism and briefly traces the feminist movements in the West and in India. The observations based on this study are as follows:

- Although efforts to empower women go back even before the nineteenth century, the concept of women empowerment per se was introduced and defined only in 1985 in the International Women's Conference at Nairobi.

- Empowerment is dynamic in nature. Its meaning and scope changes from time to time according to the changes in the society and therefore there are multiple approaches to empowerment.

- Empowerment is at times considered to be power given to women by the society and the government through laws, policies and provisions. However, as Ranju R. Dhamala has pointed out, empowerment has to be from 'within' not merely from 'without'. This argument is relevant in the context of India, where all kinds of equality and freedom from discrimination have been enshrined in the constitution as fundamental rights and yet, average women are not truly empowered in the proper sense of the word.

- There are several dimensions of empowerment such as Economic Empowerment, Political Empowerment, Social Empowerment, and Familial Empowerment. For complete empowerment, women have to be empowered in all of these areas.

- With regard to Sarah Longwe's five level framework of empowerment including Welfare, Access, Conscientization, Participation, and Control, it has been observed that Conscientization is the most fundamental level. Especially in India, for centuries, majority of women have not been aware that the patriarchal system, its conservative ideologies and discriminatory norms are the main sources of women's oppression.

- Although, several criteria of empowerment have been identified by the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, they focus primarily on three areas: reforms in social outlook towards women by getting rid of discriminatory customs and practices; increase in self-esteem of women through education, participation, and decision making powers; and changes in the roles and responsibilities of women within the house and outside. Some of these criteria have been met in the Indian context. It is observed that as a result of the nineteenth century reform movement, Indian women became increasingly aware that the discriminatory practices were just patriarchal ploys to subjugate women. In the twentieth century, more and more women were educated. Women also participated in the national freedom struggle and later in the other campaigns against dowry and rape. With the

economic independence attained in the post-independence era, women's roles in the home also underwent a change, although to a limited extent.

- Like empowerment, feminism is also a dynamic concept which evolves from time to time along with the changing ideologies and attitudes in society.

- Although the concepts of feminism and women's empowerment were developed theoretically, only in the twentieth century, have there been women writing about women-centric concerns. In the West, for instance, Christine de Pisan's books envisioning women as powerful and educated (written in 1405 and translated in English by 1521), are some of the earliest feminist texts. In India also, way back in the 6th century B.C., *Therigatha* contained songs focused on women's issues and struggles.

- The concept of *écriture feminine* introduced by Hélène Cixous, is very much applicable to the women's auto-narratives selected as primary texts for this study, as through their auto-narratives, the women authors not only reveal their own experiences and struggles, but also break the silence of women's sufferings and victimization in general.

- It has been observed that various social and political movements have tried to improve the condition and uplift status of women in India. This, although each of them had a different approach and objective. The social reform movement aimed at women's welfare and education; the freedom movement aimed at representation of women in the political struggle, and thereby, women's participation; the women's movements that emerged much later aimed at voicing out, creating awareness, and protesting against the injustice suffered by women.

6.2.3 Chapter Three: Auto-narratives and Empowerment: A Critical Discussion

This chapter focuses on the study of the genre, the definitions, etymology and critical discussions on auto-narratives. Various critical perceptions on auto-narratives have been studied and the dual link between auto-narratives and empowerment has been critically examined. The observations based on this study are as follows:

- The genre of writing about one's own life has witnessed many shifts in terminology, based on the changing perspectives of self-life writing. It was first called self-biography in 1796, then autobiography in 1797, then during the postmodern period it was referred to as autobiographical discourse.

- Although autobiography, memoirs and reminiscences have been traditionally considered to be separate genres, in the contemporary age all these distinctions get blurred and an umbrella term such as auto-narratives, life writing and life narrative is used to describe such writing.

- Historically self-representation in different forms began very early, although not in the form of a book. However, prior to the eighteenth century autobiographies were not seen as separate from historiography and biography.

- Although Gul-Badan Begum's *Humayun-nama* in Persian, is said to be the first reminiscences by a woman written as early as the fourteenth century, it is more of her memories of her father and brother than of her own self. The first full-fledged autobiography of an Indian woman with the focus on her (own) life is Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban* in Bengali, published in 1876.

- There is a propensity among the authors of auto-narratives, to fictionalize either intentionally or unintentionally, as even memory on which the auto-narrative is based changes and is reinterpreted differently in each act of remembering. Some memories are also based on repressed desires that are creatively redesigned using imagination and thereby get an outlet through the auto-narrative.

- Although the recorded memories in an auto-narrative may not be factual, the auto-narrative still reveal the inner thoughts, ideologies and perceptions of the author and it also shows the degree of empowerment in the author in terms of the courage and determination to voice them.

- Traditionally the focus of autobiography was on individuality. As Philippe Lejeune argues in his definition of autobiography, women lacked individuality, and so there were not many women's auto-narratives earlier. Moreover, only famous men with a public appeal would write their auto-narratives. Since most women were confined within their homes, they were discouraged from writing and publishing their auto-narratives. However, with the changing times and the rise of women's empowerment movements and advent of feminism, more women were motivated to write about their day-to-day lives and unveil the woman's private world.

- It has been seen that while the male auto-narratives focus on self and individuality, women focus on relationality, as individuality was denied to them in the patriarchal system. Even great intellectuals like Nehru and Abbas make only a passing reference to their womenfolk, while focusing more on their own inner selves. Whereas most of the women's auto-narratives focus on the relationship with the parents, siblings, in-laws and husband. This can be seen very clearly in the auto-narratives of Lakshmibai Tilak and Padma Sachdev.

- It has also been argued that male authors try to conceal the gaps of memory, insecurities, and hesitations in their auto-narrative, whereas women state it clearly in their auto-narratives. However, Nehru's case becomes an exception, as at several points in his auto-narrative, he clearly states that he does not remember the exact chronological flow of events that took place. Thus he openly informs the readers about the gaps in memory.

- A strong connection between auto-narratives and empowerment has been observed, as this genre is a significant medium of expression of one's views and opinions thereby challenging patriarchal norms.

6.2.4 Chapter Four: Women Empowerment in India: The Pre-Independence Era

This Chapter studies women's empowerment movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The social reform movement, the emergence of women's organizations and the national freedom struggle have been carefully examined with regard to their impact on the society, its outlook towards women and the individual empowerment of women.

- In the pre-independence era there were three major movements that had an impact on the collective empowerment of women, they were: the social reform movement, emergence of women's organizations, and the national freedom struggle. While the first movement, attempted to liberate the society and get rid of the customs and practices that were demeaning to women, the second, united women together who shared an experience of oppression, through organizations which in the beginning were founded or supported by men, but later through women's organizations run by women independently. The third movement, united not just the elite but the masses of Indian women who broke away from the age-old custom of seclusion and actively participated in the national cause.

- In the nineteenth century the reform movement tried to alter the position of women by getting rid of discriminatory customs and practices such as sati, child marriage and purdah system. Evidence of these practices are found in the works of Lakshmibai Tilak and Cornelia Sorabji. However, even after the abolishment of sati and child marriage, the twentieth century texts prove that this movement was not completely successful in establishing a fair and just society for women. Nevertheless, this movement was fundamental in challenging the age-old patriarchal believes and in creating an awareness of the oppression faced by women.

- The reform movement also campaigned for the education of women, but at this time the education provided for was only in domestic skills that would make them better wives and mothers. Although the declaration that men and women would be equally admitted in educational institutions was passed, as affirmed by Sorabji in *India*

Calling, her own struggle proves that women were not easily allowed to attain any degree of education and thereby enter in the professions monopolized by men.

- Although the reform movement was said to have been pioneered by men, a small number of eminent women have also greatly contributed to the movement, such as Ramabai Ranade, Pandita Ramabai and Savitribai Phule.

- Along with the reforms, the social reform movement, also helped create a new section of respected upper middle class women called the bhadra mahila, detached from the masses.

- The case of Rukhmabai, as cited in Cornelia Sorabji's *India Calling*, shows that with education, women not only got the ability to realize their dreams and an opportunity to work towards achieving them, they also acquired intellectual and emotional strength and conviction to desist from succumbing to the will of their oppressors. Marriage did not remain the only way of life, as economic independence through education was a new option. However, during this time very few women could choose their own path and be financially independent. But a gradual change began from here, and thus in the post-independence period an evident change is visible.

- The instances in the primary texts, show that sati was a major patriarchal strategy, to ensure that no property or any inheritance of the deceased husband would go to his widow, although a part of the inheritance was allowed to the wife by the Vedic scriptures, as argued by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

- Unlike in the other movements, there was a mass participation of women in Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement, due to diverse factors: the awareness created by Gandhi's door-to-door method of education as described by Ray; the simple but effective planning of the movement by Gandhi facilitating the participation of women who were not well-educated. In fact satyagraha was based on inner strength and self-sacrifice which are qualities that were inculcated in women from their childhood, and therefore women were no longer stopped by their

menfolk from participating in the freedom struggle. Hence multitudes of women could freely participate during this time.

- As a result of the 1930s movement, the quality of self-denial in women, which was looked down upon by feminists, became the very reason for their participation in the freedom struggle and thereby their empowerment, since for the first time women crossed their threshold, broke their seclusion and participated in the struggle of their nation along with their male counterparts.

- In the freedom movement, empowerment of women came as a by-product. Nehru's auto-narrative showed that many men, like Nehru's father, were not very happy with women's participation, but they did not interfere or stop their womenfolk in view of the greater cause of Independence. This movement was not driven by the aim of women's empowerment, but the sole purpose of this movement was national freedom. However, it definitely impacted women's empowerment as it changed the outlook of society towards women. To be a representative group of the whole nation, it was essential that women too should be represented. Therefore, even the rigid doors of the Congress opened up to women. All these changes took women a step closer to their empowerment.

- In the light of Sarah Logwe's framework of empowerment, the nineteenth century reform movement focused more on Welfare of the society and to a limited extent on Conscientization of women towards their oppression. While, the emergence of women's organizations accentuated Conscientization, the struggle for freedom, particularly the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930, brought about mass Participation of women.

- In the Indian context, Conscientization and Participation preceded Access, since equal access to resources and opportunities for employment was legally gained only after Independence, but Conscientization and Participation were already prevalent in the pre-independence era, by means of the empowerment movements.

6.2.5 Chapter Five: Women Empowerment in India: Independence and After

This chapter analyses the impact of Independence and Partition on the society, mainly on the condition and status of women in India. Women empowerment movements that took place in the post-independence era are studied along with the national and international events that occurred during this time, to examine their effect on women and their empowerment.

- Independence re-affirmed the equality of women. But on the other hand, due to Partition, women suffered untold miseries on mass scale. Traditionally considered as the emblem of the community's honour, women were the worst hit in the catastrophe. The auto-narratives of Padma Sachdev and Renuka Ray, provide evidence of the victimization of women during partition.

- The nomination of women like Renuka Ray to the Constituent Assembly, as a result of Gandhi's plea for wide representation in the Assembly, is a sign of progressive change in favour of women, after Independence.

- With the enactment of the Hindu code, personal areas were also reformed. Women now had right to inheritance and also to put end to an oppressive marriage. But this could be achieved only in 1956, almost after twenty-five years of a campaign, started much before Independence. Even after Independence, there were educated men, and political stalwarts like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Constituent Assembly, who opposed the daughter's right to inheritance. This shows that the society after Independence was still apprehensive of treating women as an equal.

- New avenues opened up for women, with equal level of education for women and equal employment opportunities in different professions, as affirmed by Ray in her auto-narrative. However, it was mostly the elite, educated women, who benefited from the laws of equality. Those who were uneducated were hardly aware of these laws and opportunities. This shows the importance of Conscientization over Access or Participation.

- The laws of equality and the enactment of the Hindu code, brought a kind of satisfaction in women and therefore the women's movements of this time face a lull period which is corroborated by the comments of Renuka Ray on the sudden halt in the activities of the AIWC after Independence.

- Three matters hugely impacted women's empowerment movements in those times: the report on the status of women in Indian, *Towards Equality*; the state of National Emergency from 1975-1977; and the International Women's Decade (1975-85).

- The women's movements in this era endeavoured to stress upon women-centric issues and also led campaigns against the practices such as dowry, domestic violence, and rape. Women's organizations, strove to bring these issues to the notice of the government. Yet, it took decades for suitable legislation to be enacted to curb these mounting problems and crimes.

- However, despite many shortfalls, many advancements in the status and improvement in the condition of women can be seen in the period after Independence. Increase in the literacy rate of women, increase in the number of economically independent women and the growing political representation of women, whereby women not only contested in elections at various levels, but also represented India in the United Nations, are evidence of the development and empowerment of women in India.

6.3 Overall Findings of the Study

The overall findings of the study are as follows:

- It has been found that although auto-narratives may not always be purely factual, yet even the fictionalization that may occur in it, is based on the ideologies, attitudes and life experiences of the author. This reveals the dilemmas and even the suppressed desires of the author which are subtly represented in the auto-narrative. Hence, an auto-narrative does not only record the past of the author, but also the present ideas and attitudes of the author which alter and reinterpret the past memory while writing it in the present. This is found in many of the primary texts selected for the study, such as the auto-narratives of Indira Goswami and Padma Sachdev.

- It has been found that unlike men's auto-narratives, women's auto-narratives focus upon relationality rather than individuality, and as a consequence of this, a woman's auto-narrative becomes a collage of the lives of many women, particularly those who were in a close connection with the author. All of the selected women's auto-narratives for this study, may it be of Cornelia Sorabji, Baby Kamble, Lakshmibai Tilak, Padma Sachdev, Renuka Ray, Indira Goswami and to some extent even Kamala Das proves this, as each of them speak of other women: their mother, relatives, neighbours and even acquaintances and thereby reveal their life stories too. Hence, it can be said that relationality in a woman's auto-narrative leads to a kaleidoscopic view of the status of women in a society, since it tells the story of several women belonging to different classes, and times.

- On a deeper study of women's empowerment and women's auto-narratives, it has been found that the auto-narrative genre has a dual connection with women's empowerment: on one hand, auto-narratives become a medium of expression and resistance of women against patriarchy, whereby women empower themselves; on the other hand, empowered women use their auto-narratives as an expression of their empowered self. It also becomes a channel through which the suffering of other women are brought to light. Empowered women, like Sorabji and Ray, use this genre to comment upon the status of women in India and expose the oppressive

ploys of patriarchy. Moreover, the auto-narrative of an empowered woman poses a challenge to patriarchy by inspiring other women to resist and subvert patriarchy, through their own life example.

- The social ills, prevalent in the nineteenth century India, were the result of the patriarchal strategies used to ensure that women would always remain under the domination of men and would never dare to challenge patriarchy, or combat their own state of powerlessness. Girls were given away in marriage at a very young age, so that from childhood their minds would be moulded to be feminine – docile and submissive. After marriage, women were secluded from the rest of the world so that they would live forever in the darkness of ignorance, myths and superstitions, depending completely on their oppressors for everything and believing every word they said. Widowhood, and the norms that widows had to follow were harsh and inhuman, which only added to their helplessness, dependence and personal trauma. It was almost a punishment for those who were not fortunate enough to die before their husbands or with them, by committing sati. Thus, by trying to get rid of these social ills, reformists freed women from the life-long captivity and made them aware that this oppression had nothing to do with their fate or destiny.

- Although the education campaign only sought to educate women in domestic skills, it was still a very significant campaign as before that women received no knowledge or awareness even about issues such as personal hygiene, child bearing and so on, as affirmed by Cornelia Sorabji in her auto-narrative. Hence, this campaign, later supported by religious institutions such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Dev Samaj was the first to carry the light of knowledge, in the darkness of the zenanas or the andarmahals.

- While examining the impact of the women's empowerment movements on individual women, it was found that the familial background and the conservativeness or openness of the family played a significant role in the degree of empowerment achieved. For instance, while Cornelia Sorabji and Renuka Ray went far ahead of their times and were highly empowered, Lakshmibai Tilak who belonged to a conservative family, was not privileged with similar opportunities

and developed a sense of empowerment only much later in life. Likewise, the support and encouragement given by their husbands, help women to be more confident and attain a greater degree of empowerment as seen in the case of Renuka Ray.

- Similarly, education and economic independence was found to be an essential criteria for empowerment. This is seen in Padma Sachdev and Indira Goswami's auto-narratives and holds true for both the eras under study.

- In the post-independence era, many signs of progress in the status and condition of women can be seen. Women's education and employment has been on the rise, with more women being financially independent. All the writers taken under study were educated and economically independent. Similarly, political representation of women is also seen during this time. Renuka Ray, records that many women contested for elections. She herself had contested for the first elections but did not win it. However, she won the second round of elections. She also writes of women who represented India in international conferences and forums.

- In comparing the status of women in the pre-independence era to that in the post-independence era, it can be seen that there was great improvement in the latter era. During this time, not only has the awareness among women increased, but also the level of resistance to oppression and injustice had greatly amplified. This has been a consequence of the progressive thinking which permeated through education and the rise in confidence by way of economic independence and spurt in empowerment due to political representation. During the post-independence era, more and more women were empowered, as empowerment was provided by education, guaranteed by law, and was also promoted by society.

- In a comparative study of the primary texts, it is found that the texts belonging to the years after Independence have a larger focus on self, personal life and inner struggles than those belonging to the pre-independence period. Auto-narratives like those of Indira Goswami and Kamala Das lay greater emphasis on their private struggles in life. Although Goswami does write about the society in which she lived,

her autobiography records more about her personal life, her marriage, and widowhood. Similarly in Das' auto-narrative the focus is on her personal life, relationships, her bohemian view and opinions, and most of all her individuality. Her sense of self-confidence and empowerment allows her to divulge her private experiences and vent her non-conformist views candidly in her auto-narrative. This change in the mode of writing possibly points towards the growth of individuality in women which coincides with the rise of intellectual and economic independence in Indian women during that era.

- In a close study of the women empowerment movements and the primary texts belonging to the pre-independence era, it has been found that although the three women's empowerment movements, during this time, have resulted in a positive change in the status and condition of women in India, women were not empowered to the desired extent. Perhaps this was because, even towards Independence, a considerable change in the society's outlook towards women was not seen. This is particularly found in the perception of men towards women, more so in their negative reaction against the demands made for reform in personal laws. This state of affairs continues even after Independence, as can be seen when Ray observes that most men in the constituent assembly were against the daughters rights to inheritance. Therefore, although women reached great heights in the public domain, within the home they still lacked the right to decision making and control over their own lives and bodies.

- The enactment of Fundamental rights and other egalitarian legislation did not impact women to the desired extant, due to the lack of proper implementation of laws and widespread ignorance among women and men in the early years of Independence. A gradual change could be seen in the alteration of society's outlook towards women as the level of education increased among women in the later years. The increase in the number of women contesting in elections both at Centre and State levels, which resulted in women, their needs and concerns being represented in the Indian political system, stands as evidence to the slow but evident growth

and empowerment of women in India. Thus, it would be utterly incorrect to say that women in India are not empowered at all.

- Tracing the progress in the condition of women right from the nineteenth century, where a widow had no right to live, to widow re-marriage, education of women, intellectual and economic independence, to women standing as representatives of the masses of Indian women in the Government of India, and women representing their country in the United Nations and other international forums, a great and massive change is visible. Women in India have been considerably empowered compared to their counterparts half a century ago. But going a step further, it is important to question what the extent of this empowerment is and whether all women are equally empowered.

  Unfortunately, even today patriarchal ideologies continue to manifest themselves, though perhaps not as strongly and as widely, as they did before. There are many women who still lack empowerment, who are still dependent on their male counterparts. For complete empowerment, enlightenment through education, economic independence and political empowerment is very essential. A combination of all these ensures empowerment as seen in the case of empowered women such as Cornelia Sorabji and Renuka Ray.

  However, what changes the status and condition of women today is the widespread awareness of women's rights and the support of laws and women's organizations that assist and encourage women to be independent and empower themselves. There are several women's self-help groups, NGO's and organizations, working even in contemporary times to help women to be self-sufficient and to assert their rights.

  The increasing conferences and forums on feminism and women's empowerment regionally, nationally and internationally underlines the change in societal attitude and ways that are gradually growing more sensitive towards women-centric issues. The sheer impact of public opinion and pressure on the system was witnessed during the agitation in the Nirbhaya case and the enactment of Sexual Harassment

of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Despite this there is still need to ensure the safety and security of women across classes, regions and status. But the positive side is that public awareness is huge.

Hence, although there is still room for progress and empowerment of women throughout India, the positive and visible changes in the Indian society and in the status of women, over the years from the nineteenth century to present times shows that the women empowerment movements in the eras taken under study have largely impacted women and have boosted their empowerment.

6.4 Revisiting the Hypotheses

The study on women's empowerment in India began with a two-fold hypotheses in mind which was stated in Chapter One. The **first assumption** states that**:** the empowerment of women in India is relative to the introduction and development of policy of Education, social reform, and attainment of political autonomy by India. Extending the privilege of getting education to women and their mass participation in the freedom struggle might have acted as a catalyst to women's empowerment.

This assumption has been proved right in this study, particularly in the light of the discussions made in Chapter Four which examined the impact of three developments on women and their empowerment in India: the social reform movement in the nineteenth century; the campaign of women education that began then and continued in the twentieth century; and, the national freedom struggle.

In this study it was found that as a consequence of these movements in the pre-independence era, women were not only made aware of their powerless condition but also of the fact that it had nothing to do with destiny or religion. More importantly, they were awakened to their own needs and potentials. Education gave women the ability to think on their own and not to be controlled by the patriarchal ideology, nor to be unduly swayed by the myths and falsities which had held women captive for a long time, causing them to internalize patriarchal norms and practices. Education allowed women scope for intellectual empowerment.

The freedom struggle urged common women to step out of their threshold and participate in the national cause. Moreover, the Civil Disobedience movement provided them the opportunity to participate in a manner which neither required great education nor experience. In fact, the burning desire for freedom made the patriarchal society more flexible towards women. So much so, that although women's active participation was not really agreeable to many of their male counterparts, they did not stop their women from joining in. Hence, it can be definitely maintained that all these movements definitely impacted women collectively and individually and furthered their chances of empowerment.

The **second assumption** of this study was that: there is a visibly marked change in the status and the degree of empowerment in women in the pre-independence and post-independence India, which can be explained by way of rational arguments and factual illustrations through a study of this kind.

The Independence of India, the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution and allied laws enacted by the Indian Government from time to time ensured gender equality and the growing women's organizations, made more women aware of their rights and assisted them to fight for their privileges and needs. Even the national and international events that took place after Independence positively impacted women and their empowerment. Hence, today there is definitely a huge positive change in the outlook of the Indian society towards women.

Further, there is a visible improvement in women's condition and a large spurt is seen in their status over the centuries. While in the nineteenth century, it was very difficult to think of women living their lives independently and being economically self-sufficient, during the twentieth century, particularly after Independence, there have been a large number of educated and semi-educated women across the class divide working in diverse professions (often away from home) and at different positions, being the bread-winners of the family.

Today, women enjoy 33% reservation in political institutions at the grass-root level. Several Indian women have joined politics and made a career as politicians, representing women and their concerns. Others have come forward to join the Administrative and

Defence Services, hazardous professions, conventionally the male-domain-occupations and are making a success of their careers. Again, large segments of uneducated and working class women are benefitting from independent incomes and comparatively a much-better life, than their sisters before Independence. These are significant markers of change.

Moreover, many of these notable changes, though not all, are very much visible through the auto-narratives chosen for the study. Where most of the women written about in the auto-narratives belonging to the pre-independence era were powerless and emotionally as well as economically dependent on their menfolk, ironically their menfolk themselves where their oppressors. This can be clearly seen in the case of Lakshmibai Tilak, her mother and mother-in-law or even the Purdahnashins and the widows in Sorabji's auto-narrative.

However, in the auto-narratives belonging to the post-independence era, there were several women who were intellectually enlightened, economically independent and who resisted oppression directly and fearlessly. This is seen in the auto-narratives of Padma Sachdev, Indira Goswami and Kamala Das. Although these women authors themselves had to struggle to be empowered and fight oppression, they had legal support and the opportunity and education to be self-sufficient which furthered their empowerment and their chances of subverting oppression and injustice. Thus, there is a vast change and a progress in the degree of empowerment achieved by women in the pre-independence and post-independence period. Hence, these findings reiterate the hypotheses stated in the beginning of the study and confirm it.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Research

This study was undertaken with a focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries India. However, it would be interesting to take up a study of women's empowerment in the twenty-first century and the phenomenal movements and monumental events that have impacted women in the present era.

The work undertaken on this research topic has opened up access to new and emerging theories and conceptions which study the oppression of women in connection with other

fields of knowledge such as the theory of ecofeminism, theory of trauma, lesbianism, and so on. Some of those highlight how nature bears a similar brunt of the domination of men just like women, and how feminization of poverty studies the economic issue of poverty and its impact on women, while arguing that women are the worst affected in these conditions. These issues among many others could also be taken up for further research.

6.6 Relevance of this Study

A deep curiosity, anguish and concern about women and their struggle against constant victimization and domination even in modern times, led to this study of women empowerment, to understand and trace the growth and development of women and their status in India. This study began with the presumption that women must have been empowered to some extent and this empowerment was connected to several factors such as education, participation, equality rights and so on.

However, in the course of this study it was comprehended that along with every progressive step towards reform and women's empowerment, came many obstacles and the rise of regressive ideologies, thereby making it difficult to exactly measure the degree of women's empowerment. At every point of time a combat between progressive thinking and regressive thinking is visible in India. At some points such as the freedom struggle, progressive thinking and a greater national cause won over regressive and conservative ideologies. Whereas, at other junctures such as the reform in personal areas, the conservative minds were able to put a hold to the enactment of the Hindu Code Bill for a long time. However, it is pertinent to note that with the increase in awareness and education of women through organizations and movements headed by enlightened men and women, the society gradually became more progressive.

Even in contemporary times, the existence of conservative patriarchal ideologies cannot be evaded. There are people of both genders, who continue to follow patriarchal ideology, practice discriminatory norms and subscribe to male-superiority myths. However, the need to magnify the struggle for women's empowerment and help them to fully understand their potentials is greatly felt. Many national and international organizations have risen to

address this need, and not only deliberate on the issue of women's empowerment but further act upon it.

Today, a sensitivity towards women's issues and concerns has been developed. It has been made mandatory by Law to implement gender parity as well as to promote gender sensitivity in Educational and Government institutions and in the private sector. Media has become very sensitive towards women's rights and protective of their individuality. Law has provided a strong backing to women's fight for justice. Governmental and non-Governmental organizations are trying to plug the loopholes of exploitation and oppression, despite the constant obstacles from regressive ideologies and conservative forces.

Use of technology is being made at various administrative levels to ensure that women get the financial and other benefits, which are their due, directly – without any male/other interventions. Self-help groups have been started by Governmental and non-Governmental organizations to make women from weaker/marginal sections self-reliant. Tremendous support in terms of scholarships and freeships are provided to young women across the board to empower them through education, and this has shown remarkable results. All this shows the change in the society's outlook towards women.

Even in present times, the struggle to empower all women from within continues steadily, and marvellous changes in attitudes and ideologies are seen. This significantly, points towards the relevance of the present study in its modest contribution to women's empowerment. After all, women's empowerment is not a thing of the past but a living struggle that continues to reverberate even today.

Moreover, the concept of empowerment of women is not merely an academic or literary notion but something much beyond the theoretical realm of probability – it is an objective, a reality and an attainable target towards which an egalitarian society ceaselessly endeavours. It is expected that the present study has done its bit to further the course of this endeavour in its own way by modestly contributing to the history, progress and perception of women's empowerment in India.

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