

**Tribhuvan University**

**The Depiction of Suppressed Desire for Selfhood of Women in *Shodh* in  
the Feminist Discursive Context**

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This thesis entitled **The Depiction of Suppressed Desire for Selfhood of Women in Shodh in the Feminist Discursive Context** submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Anand Kumar Jha has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

This is a presentation of “The Depiction of Suppressed Desires for Selfhood of Women in *Shodh*”. This is an effort to show how man-made patriarchal social system has become an obstacle in the path of women’s progress and dignity. In patriarchal socio-economic structure Jhumur becomes a doll and suffers physically as well as mentally. Though she is educated, she is forced to bear the social autocracies. But continuous discrimination, domination and repression which she has to bear leads her to revolt against all the social evils. Taslima wants to impart the idea that in creating happy and just society there must be mutual harmony between men and women. The idea of social equality is the main thrust of the novel.

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## **I: Historical Overview of Taslima Nasrin**

### **Introduction**

‘If any religion allows the persecution of the people of different faiths, if any religion keeps women in slavery, if any religion keeps people in ignorance, then I cannot accept that religion.’ Having this kind of concept in mind, the advocate of women, Taslima Nasrin was born in 1962AD. in a small town called Mymensing in what then was Pakistan. After it gained its independence, the country is called Bangladesh. Before she was born India portioned Bengal based on its people religion. East Bangladesh became East Pakistan, which was 1000 miles away from West Pakistan. Also, before she was born in the language movement orchestrated by the Bengali people with the demand of establishing Bengali state language of East Pakistan, led to the death of some protesters who were killed by West Pakistani rulers. When she was six, she became aware in 1969AD. of the uprising of the Bengali people and when nine, she witnessed a war to get freedom of land on the basis of the great spirit of secularism.

Her childhood was not much different then that of the other girls of the generation. She was sent to the school like other girl. Girls typically attend the school, but they frequently dropped out when they were fifteen or sixteen age at which they often were given into marriage by their parents. Few girls had a chance to continue their studies, for after an arrange marriage they were not allowed to continue studying nor could they take a job. They became totally dependent upon their husband. She observed those all girls and women had to have is their husband, and during old age it their son.

It was usual for the children to read the Qu’ran in Arabic early in the morning and like all other children in Bangladesh she did this. But she found herself asking

questions .She wanted to know what she was reading, what the meaning of Qu’ranic verses were . Her language is Bengali, not Arabic and it was impossible to know the meaning of the verses that she read. She simply read, without comprehending what she was reading .When she asked her mother to tell her meaning of what she was reading, she explained that the meaning was not important but that she was reading Qur’an in it’s original language that was important. However, she was not satisfied with the answer her mother gave her.

When she was thirteen years old, she found a book that translated the Qu’ran into Bengali. To her surprise, she found Allah saying that men are superior to women. Men could have up to four wives. Men could divorce their wives any time they wanted. Men are allowed to beat women. Women are not allowed to give testimony in some legal cases. Women are not allowed to inherit property of their father equally with their brother. She was definitely in shock to discover such injustices and inequalities in a holy book.

She realized that Islam does not consider women full human being. Men were the original creation and womankind was created secondarily for the pleasure of men. Islam considers women nothing more than slaves or sexual object. The women’s role is to stay at home and obey her husband. Women are considered weak, so they should be taken care of their body and mind, their desire and wishes, their rights and freedom must be controlled by men. Islam treats women as being intellectually, morally and physically inferior. In marriage, Islam protects the rights of men only. The Qu’ran gave total freedom to men saying, “Your women are as your field, go onto them as you will” (2.223). And Allah says very clearly that men have authority over women. “Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient.

They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in bed apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them, surely Allah is all knowing and wise. (4.34)

Women are considered by Allah to ruin their husbands where ever they are, what ever they do. The Hadith says that two players that never reach heavens are those of the escaping slaves and those of the reluctant women who frustrate her husband at night.

She was the student of science, so, it was hard to accept that the sun moves around earth, that moon has its own light and that the purpose of the mountain is to support the earth so that it will not fall down some where. She came to support that Qu'ran was not written by Allah but by a selfish greedy man who wanted only his comfort. Then she read the Hadith, the word of Mummad. She found different events of Muhammad's life in which he had problems, Allah saved him immediately. For example, when he was sexually aroused by seeing his daughter- in- law, Allah sent him a message saying that he could marry her because his son Zaid was adopted.

She was so shocked to see that Allah who is considered the judge of everything gave Muhammad a blank cheque saying, "Prophet, we have made lawful for you the wives to whom you have granted dowries and the slaves girls whom Allah has given you as booty, the daughter of your paternal uncles and your paternal and maternal aunts who fled with you, and any believing woman who gives herself to the prophet and whom the prophet wishes to take in marriage. This privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believers"(33.50).

After she read what was written about the women in Qu'ran, it became clear to her that Qu'ran was not written by Allah, but rather some selfish greedy man had



written the Qu'ran for his own self-interest. So, she stopped believing in Islam. She threw off the veil, the sign of oppression, which her mother wanted her to wear. She tried to convince other women not to wear the veil and to read the Qu'ran in order to understand its stated meaning, so that they could understand that Islam is patriarchal and oppresses women. There is no way to attain freedom and the right to live as human beings other than to cross the barrier of religions and patriarchy. When she studied the other religions, found that they also oppressed women. All religions are oppressive to women. Women are oppressed not only by religion but also by culture, tradition and customs. All the religions are created by the man for their own interest, for their own comfort, for their own fun. Women have not significant role in any of the major religions the world. Gradually however secularism has been bringing changes but Islam still remains in dark. She believes education a candle in dark. A secular education is important and requires changing the society. It is important for the peaceful evolving of what a society is and should be. It is imperative that children receive a secular education. All the children of the earth deserve to learn about all the religions, but they also deserve the right to freedom from religions, to learn about the alternatives of atheism and humanism or just physical living. If children are taught humanistically, society will evolve in a progressive and positive way. If women have any wish to live with dignity and honor the traditional family structure absolutely has to change. The new society she envisions is one in which love, not religion and patriarchy rules.

As she grew up, she kept observing the condition of women in our society. Her mother for example was a project example of a woman oppressed; she had been given into marriage when she was but a child. Although she excelled as a student in a school, she was not allowed to continue her studies. Her grandfather and father did not

want her to study, for what they wanted for her to be a good house wife, a good mother, a good caretaker. Her father a physician had a scientific outlook but was very domineering. He did not allow her the freedom to play, to go out, and to meet friends, to go cinema or theatre or to read any books that were not in syllabus. He wanted her to earn medical degree so he could say that one of his children followed his path. On the one hand, he wanted her to be independent, but on the other hand he wanted a good match for her in as much as educated man often desire on educated wife. In her house, she grew up with much fear, having to keep inside her heart all her desire for freedom and curiosity for the outside world. She was not allowed to step outside the house except her school. As a result, she developed a passion for reading practically any thing she could get in her hand on, including books, poetry, essays. And she had another passion to write poetry.

Growing up, she naturally had a belief that girls surely must be inferior to boys. For boys could play in the big field where as the girls had to play with their dolls in a corner of the house. Her brothers were free to go anywhere they wanted to play. But she and her sister could not. She was told that girls were not made for such, that there role was to stay at home, learn to cook, make beds, and clean the house. Her mother was not the only woman who was oppressed, for she saw her aunt, her female neighbors, and other female acquaintances that were playing the same roles, that of being oppressed. In their mind, torture of women was not oppression, but, rather, was tradition. They become accustomed to tradition. As she grew, she realized that she was a part of tradition but also that she was being oppressed the same as other women. Everywhere women are oppressed, and all because of the male devised patriarchy, religion, tradition, culture and customs.

Human being is facing a uncertain future. The probability of new kind of rivalry and conflict loom large in particular, the conflict between two different ideas: secularism and fundamentalism. She does not agree with those who think that the conflict is simply between two religions namely, Christianity and Islam. After all, there are fundamentalists in every religions community. Likewise, she does not agree with those people who think that crusades of the middle ages are going to be repeated soon. Nor do she thinks that this is a conflict between East and West. To her, this is a conflict between modernity and anti- modernism. While some people want to go forward, others are trying to go backward. It is a conflict between the future and the past, between innovation and tradition, between those who value freedom and those who do not.

In Bangladesh, Islamic fundamentalism has been on rise since the beginning of 1980. She has difficulty in accepting fundamentalism as an alternative to the secular ideas. The reasons are many: first, the insistence of fundamentalism on divine justification for laws, second, the insistence of fundamentalists upon the superior authority of faith, as opposed to reasons, third, the insistence of fundamentalists that the individual does not count, that the individual is immortal. Group loyalty over individual rights and personal achievements is a peculiar feature of fundamentalism. Women's suffering is increasing at an alarmingly rate because of the rise of fundamentalism. The panic is felt in the village where women are sometime stoned at death, the girl's schools are shut down or burnet by the fundamentalists and the girls are not allowed to study. Female workers are forced to quite the job –otherwise they are rejected by the society or her husband and are forced to divorce them. Writers and intellectuals at one time wrote against fundamentalists. She did so. In addition she wrote that other failed to write: she wrote that the root of fundamentalism is the

religion itself. So long as religion remains, fundamentalism will remain. To remove fundamentalism we have to replace religion with something rational. First, she emphasized that the state should be separate from religion. In her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as well as in news paper columns, she tries to make people understand that religion in no way gives freedom or equality or justice.

The fundamentalists talk about morality, alleging that being religious guarantees that people will be good, will be moral. She certainly believes in morality, for certain, but her believe is not religion based. Her belief was like that of the ancient Indian philosophy, of not doing any thing to others that you don't want done. That was all, and that was enough. Such an outlook became part of her conscience, and it made her an honest person. The biggest tragedy of the mankind is that morality is hijacked by religion. Actually, morality has nothing to do with religion.

The fundamentalist became angry upon hearing her views. They got furious when she said, let the provisions of religion be ground to bits, let the bricks of temples, mosques, churches be burned in blind fire, and upon those helps of destruction let lovely flowers garden grow, spreading their fragrance. Let children's school and study halls grow. For the welfare of humanity, let player halls be turned into hospitals, orphanages, schools, universities. Let player halls become academies of art, fine art centers, and scientific research institutes. Let player halls to be turned into golden rice fields in the radiant down, open fields, rivers, restless seas. From now on let religion's other name be humanity.

### **An Account of Marriage and Divorce Laws in Bangladeshi Patriarchy**

Bangladesh was part of Pakistan until 1971. Economic exploitation of Bangladesh by the Pakistani government led to the freedom movement and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. According to its present constitution, Bangladesh is a

secular country. Yet marriage, divorce and property rights constitute a realm which falls under the category of Muslim personal law or shari'a law. Shari'a law derives itself from the Quran and the injunctions of the Hadith (the prophet's way of life). According to shari'a law, a husband can divorce his wife by a triple pronouncement of the word talak (divorce). The woman has to observe a period of Iddat (three menstrual cycles) during which she cannot remarry, thereby also ensuring the paternity of a child if she is pregnant. The Family Ordinance of 1961, during the Pakistani period, introduces new guidelines into the shari'a law. For example, to initiate divorce, the husband has to notify the Chairman of the local municipal committee and send a copy of the notification for divorce to the wife. Within a month of that notice, a reconciliation committee is formed by the Chairman, and negotiation efforts start toward reconciling the two contending parties. If all attempts fail, divorce will take effect after a period of ninety days. But most women in the villages are not aware of such an ordinance; neither would women want to appear before committees for a hearing. In the villages divorce may still be performed by a triple pronouncement of the word, talak.

In post-independent Bangladesh one important change that has taken place is the 1985 Family Court Ordinance establishing the family court, for the first time, to resolve exclusively the issues of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Even now, however, the wife obtains the "privilege" of divorcing her husband only if the husband delegates it to her. As Mojibor Rahman has noted, a husband can divorce his wife on practically any ground, but a wife cannot divorce her husband at her will. However, a woman who gains the right of divorce or talak-e-tawfiz as set forth in the marriage document (at the permission of her husband) can dissolve the marriage following the same rules of notification through the Chairman as her husband. When

the woman is given no such rights of divorce, she can only initiate it through the family court (through a legal suit rather than a notification) and on appropriate grounds ranging from desertion by her husband to sexual impotence (The 1939 Divorce Act,10).

The family ideology of Bangladesh insistently glorifies women's suffering thereby exhorting a "good" woman to be heroic or stoic in the face of overwhelming obstacles in the marital relationship. For example, in Bangladeshi folk lore, a chaste woman is defined as one who surrenders all her needs at her husband's feet: "A chaste woman gives up her life for his [master/husband's] devotion/Her one goal is but her devotion/ In sleep, in dreams and when she is awake" (10). This is a mystical relationship of worship and surrender as if the husband is a god, and a wife his disciple. Religious values are very strong in the popular imagination as well. According to one Hadith, women's dedication to domestic life is equivalent to the glory of a Jihad or a holy war.

In Bangladesh, a family's honor or ijjat is dependent on the conduct of its women and their success in marriage. Virginity and chastity are the defining qualities of a good woman, and she can preserve her honor only under the guardianship of a man; the father is in charge of protecting her virginity, the husband her chastity. A divorced woman, no longer, having the guardianship of her husband, severely damages her family's ijjat (prestige). She is not only an economic burden on her family, but also a sexual threat to society at large. Considering the overwhelming obstacles that beset a divorced woman, it is unlikely that anyone will exercise the power of divorce even if she has that entitlement. Moreover, going to court for a divorce is extremely dishonorable for Bangladeshi women. Although an upper class

woman is somewhat free from the norm, divorce stigmatizes her all the same only to a different degree.

Taslima boldly violates the dictates of ijjat, and exposes the disempowering agenda of the ideology of women's dependence on man. She observes:

Women can't go anywhere without a male companion [protector] . . . If you want to board the bus, the conductor will ask, where is the man? In so many spheres of life, women are harassed if they are not accompanied by men. If there is a male companion who is neither a husband nor a near-relative, trouble is inevitable. Who is this man? And if you are alone, the issue is why you are without a man? (23)

A divorced woman is the prime target of such social harassment and she is likely to stumble against her single status at every step of her life irrespective of class. Divorce is more frequent among the poorer class who are ironically below the norm and hence somewhat free from the constraints of family honor. Yet divorce and desertion drive them to destitution often with children to support.

A married woman with children is normally entitled to one-eighth of her husband's property. But in the event of a divorce, she loses any rights to her husband's property. She is entitled to support from her husband only for the period of Iddat (mensuration). She can receive mahr, an amount of money specified in the marriage document which is payable to the wife upon demand or at the dissolution of her marriage. It is usually a very low amount, and inflation reduces its value even further. A divorced woman can fall back on her parents if they are alive because a daughter inherits half the son's property, but as Kabeer has pointed out, " most women waive their rights to the land in favour of their brothers. Dependent on male protection, they

bargain away their right to land in exchange for the promise of kin support in times of distress” (23).

It is important to note, however, that the enforcement of Islamic gender ideology has been weakened in Bangladesh by the political instability and economic crisis of the period after 1971. In the eighties, new economic pressures and the erosion of traditional refuge brought rural women to the garment factories in Dhaka for employment. As village women were gaining access to the industrial economy, women in the city were getting educated at an increasing rate. Consequently, they became more conscious of their dependent status (where the husband is the guardian), and of the deprivation of their rights.

At such a time, the formation and development of some feminist organizations such as *Mahila Parishad*, *Nari Shangoti* marked a breakthrough in the struggle of women against patriarchal oppression. In the rural sector, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) organized the village women towards improving their condition. Organizations such as *Proshika* and *Saptagram* succeeded in raising the consciousness of the poor women. As a result, there has been a definite increase in the number of wage-earning women, and in the number of women who have ventured outside the confines of their homes.

However, the ideology and the policy of the government have remained paternalistic. Although the Feminist movement in Bangladesh has fallen short of achieving its goal, certainly there has been a growing awareness of male domination which should be recognized. It is against the backdrop of such growing awareness of gender subordination as systemic, that Taslima emerges on the scene of Bangladeshi literature. A physician by profession, popular as a columnist and a poet but also known as a novelist, Taslima appears at this time with a voice full of energy and rage.



### **Taslima Nasrin and the Critical Reception**

Critics and reviewers sympathetic to Taslima have observed that the pain and anger of Taslima's writings are unique in the history of the literature of Bangladesh. These critics have equally emphasized that while Taslima's articulation is unique; her pain is representative of countless other women's lives in Bangladesh. Meer Nurul Islam, in his review, focuses on Taslima's rage as a crucial necessity to transform society. He argues:

Within the bounds of our closed society, darkness reigns so strongly, that there is no fissure to let in light or air. If one cannot make a chink through a needle or a nail on that wall of darkness, one can only use a spade, or an axe, or a hammer and a chisel to bore holes for light. (26)

The metaphors of enlightenment used by Islam are problematic. By defining darkness as negative and light as positive, he participates, either willingly or inadvertently, in inferiorizing the people of color. One of the major concerns of both postcolonial and postmodern discourse has been to foreground the failure of the project of enlightenment. Critics of enlightenment argue that in Western history, reason (which brings enlightenment) has functioned as a tool in the hands of the powerful against the disempowered. For example, colonizers have often justified their colonizing agenda by arguing that it will civilize the natives.

Within the above context, the rhetoric of Islam's review is problematic. However, it is important to take into account his positive contribution. He does point out that the crucial gender problem in Bangladesh is that women are constantly objectified and sexualized. According to him, Taslima is sailing against the tide with extraordinary boldness--the boldness that most people lack<sup>2</sup>

In the controversy surrounding Taslima, critics who are unsympathetic to her have argued that Taslima is anti-Islamic, anti-male, and that she is too vulgar and commercial a writer in her representation of sex. Some have labelled her as "unscrupulous and market-oriented" (25).

While critics opposed to Taslima brings charges of obscenity, immodesty and anti-religious sentiments against her, her supporters praise the openness and honesty of the unvarnished mode of her representations. Her opponents cry foul and moral chaos when Taslima wants to shake the entire structure of patriarchy; her supporters praise her courage and honesty and welcome the tremor which causes cracks in the patriarchal defence. Underneath it all, what comes across is that one group considers gender inequality a given, the other sees it as a construction and calls for its deconstruction.

How Taslima's writings have drawn so much popular attention is one of the intriguing questions that poses itself for scrutiny. In his analysis of the Taslima controversy, Ali Riaz has aptly pointed out that "She [Taslima] earned a 'notoriety' for stirring debate and creating controversy often for raising issues which are considered 'explosive' by Bangladeshi society, and at times for her provocative style of writin"(23).The issues Taslima raises and the way she presents them call for our attention.

Taslima, at least initially, and on a superficial level, seems to be assimilable by Bangadeshi tradition. It is important to note that the system of veil and dowry and other socio-cultural practices subjugating women have been targets of attack in various writings long before Taslima's emergence. In that sense, one response of Bangladeshi readership has been to acknowledge Taslima and allow her the voice of protest. Yet she is too troubling for many readers' sensibility. She defies assimilation

into the Bangladeshi discourse of social criticism through her strangeness, so to speak, to the tradition of that discourse at least in two ways: by her provocative assertion of female sexuality leading to female empowerment, and through her uniquely aggressive style which is employed to celebrate the transgression of her writings. She writes:

I adore proclaiming that I am a fallen woman in the eyes of this society  
[. . . ]The first condition for purification of a woman is to become  
'fallen' (in the eyes of this society). Unless a woman becomes 'fallen,'  
there is no way she can liberate herself from the clutch of this society.  
She is the real sane and admirable person, whom people call 'fallen.  
(21)

By declaring herself "nastya" or "fallen" Taslima calls into question the patriarchal formulation of the categories of good and bad woman. Taslima builds an alliance with the downtrodden by giving herself the title fallen. A fallen woman in Taslima's economy is the one who initiates the agenda of claiming her rights (no matter how "immodest" it is), of defining herself and her sexual desire in her own terms as a subject, of rejecting male protection as oppressive and exploitative, of transforming society for her own emancipation. By the same token, a woman who upholds the notion of "purification" only contributes to her own subordination and self-effacement. Taslima makes it clear that it is self-deceiving to claim "purity" and maintain the facade of a "happy" family life when a woman knows that it is based on the ashes of her dreams. Taslima believes in pushing the prescribed parameters of modesty to reappropriate power from the Bangladeshi male.

Although no extensive study of Taslima's stories has been published in the existing literature, at least one of the critics, Ranajit Das, has offered an interesting

analysis. Das concedes that Taslima has largely been successful in identifying the problems of gender discrimination in Bangladeshi society. But simultaneously, he argues and cautions that the nature of the resolution of these problems as demonstrated by the heroines of Taslima's novels is unethical and morally degrading. In his critique of *Aparpokkho*, he contends that Jamuna, the central female character of the novel, through her choice of having a child outside the marital bond with her husband, violates the ethics of the family. Her ethical responsibility is towards her husband. Das argues that Taslima's female characters fail to uplift the reader's moral sense through their failure to follow the ideology of "ethical motherhood." What Das fails to acknowledge, along with other critics, is that ethical motherhood and morality defined by patriarchy are pillars to perpetuate female subjugation. While he agrees that there are some problems of gender inequality, he ignores that these problems are systematic. One cannot bring about changes by moving around some bricks and leaving the structure alone.

According to the patriarchal view of morality, women have to live a spiritual life and give over the material world for men to negotiate. Within this moral economy, women's suffering is ennobled, and is considered to be the foundation of family life. I depart from such a moral criticism of Taslima's work and engage in an analysis from a different set of concerns. It is the politics of power-deprivation of the female embedded in ethical motherhood which will propel my inquiry, and as a result my empathy is with Taslima's heroines.

The practicability of what Jhumur and Jamuna, the two heroines of her stories, do with their bodies may be problematic, but my study concentrates on the measure of challenge such heroines propose through their lives. Fatima Mernissi has aptly noted "Curbing active female sexuality, preventing female sexual self-determination, is the

basis of many of Islam's family institutions"(26). The pivotal importance of Taslima's novels is the heroine's ability to reclaim the power over her body, tearing apart the ethical cover-up of the subordinating practices of Bangladeshi patriarchy.

### **Patriarchy in Taslima's Stories**

In order to further explore and contextualize Taslima's works within the indigenous critical literature, we need to glance at her canon. Some of the important and popularly known writings of Taslima include poetical works such as *Aamar Kichu Jai Ashena (I am Fearless, 1990)*; *Baleekar Gollachute (Girls' Play, 1992)*; *Jabona Keno Jabo\_? (Why Shall I not Go? 1992)*; non-fictions such as *Nirbachita Column (Selected Columns, 1993)*, and fictional works like *Lajja* and *Chaar Kannya* (a collection of *Shodh, Aparpokkho, Bhramar Kayya Gia* and *Nimontron, 1994*).

In Taslima's representations, the female body, far from being mangled (as in "Breast Giver") is not only intact, but always a site of abundant energy and desire enabling us to ask whether it must be locked in a space of non-enunciation. At the end of "Breast Giver," Jashoda lay dying and "the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes"(26). Unlike Jashoda, the heroines of Taslima's novels experience ecstasy and pleasure simultaneously as they engage in subverting the agenda of their husbands. For example, in *Shodh*, Jhumur is transfigured by her sexual experience with Afzal, a man other than her husband. At the same time she makes herself pregnant by him in order to subvert patriineality.

It is important to underscore that in her novels, Taslima's attack is consistently directed against the middle class, the professional, and the power elite. She points out that we can no longer relegate the problem of polygamy and desertion of women to the village, its *peers* (religious figures) or the peasant men who inhabit a rather subordinate rank in the chain of patriarchy. Taslima attacks where the attack is

overdue. The middle class man, neither unenlightened, nor prejudicial, is brought to the spotlight as the practitioner of patriarchal oppression. In *Aparpokkho* and *Shodh*, the heroines' adversaries are such men-- they are not religious figures but rather secular elites.

Written in an epistolary form, *Aparpokkho* (meaning the opponent) traces the life of Jamuna who is divorced from her husband Saber, for allegedly having an illicit relationship with Saber's friend. Now reduced to the position of further devaluation, on account of her divorce, Jamuna remarries. Unhappy with her second husband, she becomes passionately involved with a lover and conceives. She boldly decides to have the baby and envisions a child outside of patrilineal descent.

The story in *Aparpokkho*, narrated by Jamuna to her sister, represents Jamuna's shifting predicament and her progressively intensifying struggle as she goes through marriage and divorce. Her story documents the failure of the institution of marriage to protect women in a culture which is based on a concept of women's dependence on the male protector. It also foregrounds the failure of the legal reforms on polygamy and divorce laws to empower women within the existing socio-cultural and ideological condition of Bangladesh. Finally, *Aparpokkho* uses the female body and the maternal womb (of Jamuna) as a site of contestation and challenge to the system of patrilineal descent which organizes Bangladeshi patriarchy. By transforming the womb into a material site, Taslima undoes the foundational basis of Bangladeshi patriarchy.

The text of *Aparpokkho*, through its chronology, creates a paradigm within which marriage is a sign syntagmatically connected to polygamy, and divorce and displacement of a woman foregrounds the exploitative nature of marriage and divorce. The narrative contiguity of directly discordant themes like marriage and divorce or the

juxtaposition of such opposing motifs creates a jagged feeling and brings to focus some discomfoting questions. Such a paradigm calls into question the sanctity of marriage by wrenching the sign out of its affective predication and idealization (super-adequation), example, the womb in this patriarchal economy is viewed as a site of reproduction through which patrilineal descent is perpetuated. Through her chastity, a woman protects the womb which is instrumental in ensuring proper descent and family lineage. In other words, a woman can (re)produce children by her lawful husband. Patriarchy's purpose of patrilineal validation through the female womb functions in conjunction with the ideological concept of motherhood celebrated through its cultural production as one of extraordinary affect and self-effacing love. Taslima abandons this patriarchally-delegated position, and contests its agenda by first foregrounding, and then destabilizing the patriarchal function of womb utilization for perpetuating proper male descent.

She questions the ideal of marriage which is considered a sacred institution in Bangladeshi society. The concept of marriage is sublimated as an eternal bond. In Taslima's writings marriage is represented as exploitative, and it inevitably ends in divorce preceded by the husband's polygamous marriage. It is through the perspective of a displaced woman (Jamuna) that the institutions and practices of marriage and divorce are examined and critiqued in Taslima's text. Taslima's strategy is to use the daily events in the micrology of the domestic as premises for a logical argument and as evidence for the conclusion that subordination and economic exploitation of women are embedded in patriarchal marital relationships.

One day Humayun, Jamuna's second husband, demands his food, but Jamuna remains motionless. Taslima offers the following dialogue:

Humayun asks, "Give me rice."

I said, "I didn't cook."

"What?"

"I didn't cook means I didn't cook."

"Why?"

"I did not want to "(29).

The above exchange between Jamuna and Humayun may have the appearance of a domestic quarrel, but it inaugurates a discourse for women that the conventional episteme has not allowed so far. Neither does a woman respond to the inequality in the domestic setting with such simple but bold language against convention. In other words, Taslima puts new words in the married woman's mouth that is purported to unsettle the sign of marriage which signifies that woman's desires are subservient to that of man. The renunciation of female desire is the prerequisite for a successful marriage. In her anger, she realizes that the Bengali word for husband also means god, a transcendental signifier. Humayun is a "shaami," not a friend and, therefore, is hierarchically superior to her. Such a position forecloses the possibility of equality between them.

During her first marriage, Jamuna wanted to have sole entitlement to her income. But such a proposal undermines Saber's authority, becomes counter to Jamuna's dependent status which is a precondition of marital happiness.

In Bangladesh, muslim marriage has to be registered by filling out a contract by both parties. In this regard, the Registration form of the 1974 marriage Act, with its twenty five columns provides an interesting insight. In column 17 of this marriage form, a list of conditions is documented that the bridegroom has to abide by during his



marriage. (Sometimes that column remains blank--meaning that the bridegroom disallows any rights to the bride at least in the formality of the contract.)

In my survey of thirty marriage forms (from one county), the conditions listed in column 17 show that there is uniformity in the language phrasing these conditions. It says that the bridegroom will not abuse the bride, will support her every month, and will fulfill her rights (not specified as to which rights) and so on. Such a discursively framed legal treatment of the woman presupposes that she has no economic resources or no access to income.

In the context of Jamuna's plight, what then are Jamuna's rights regarding her income? The marriage contract has no guidelines for that. When Jamuna claims the right to her income, Saber considers such a demand on her part equivalent to her committing adultery, and tries to circulate the story that Jamuna has an illicit affair with his friend which may disqualify her to remain his wife.

At this critical juncture, a scene follows in which Jamuna witnesses Saber's return with a new wife for whom she had to yield her own marital bed. Saber's polygamous marriage duly prepares the scene afterwards for Jamuna's forced exit.

Polygamy, even today, is a legalized institution in Bangladesh. The attempt to modify such laws has only helped in perpetuating it. According to 1961 Muslim Family Law Ordinance, the husband has to obtain permission from his first wife before marrying a new woman. Since women are subalternized in the familial structure, this new requirement can be fulfilled through coercion, and violence or threat of violence. A subaltern or subalternized woman will rarely want to undergo divorce, desertion or defamation, and may agree to her own devaluation by allowing her husband to be polygamous. Furthermore, an unregistered marriage is not considered void in Bangladeshi society.

In the context of this story, we see that for Saber, law poses no barrier against his polygamous marriage. First of all, for Jamuna, the immediate concern is to secure an alternative space now that her position is more unstable. Divorce for her may be imminent as well. In such cases, a woman would rarely initiate legal battles about the violation of Marriage laws by her husband. A subaltern woman normally would stay in the marriage along with co-wives (she cannot support herself independently). Although polygamy is not a dominant practice, it certainly strengthens male control over women of all classes. In one of her essays, Taslima challenges the Bangladeshi law-makers to raise a bill so that there can be "No marriage, contracted by any male person of the 'Muslim' religion, who has a wife alive" (31).

Renewed by his polygamous marriage, Saber declares his divorce intentions at this point. Polygamy makes it possible for one woman to police the eviction of another. One's coming is syntagmatically connected to the other's going. Once divorced, Jamuna is driven to marry Humayun as she says: "I yielded my guardianship to man [through marriage] so that no one finds a chink to fix their suspicious glance at me"

Aparpokkho is ultimately Taslima's vote of no confidence to the patriarchal institution of marriage, and a bold critique of the institution of divorce. Jamuna, in the absence of Humayun, experiences ecstatic pleasure with Pasha, and she decides to have the resulting child. The political significance of her choice lies in her refusal to abort the baby and in her bold articulation of that choice to her sister. Through initiating such an agenda, she offers a challenging alternative to the system of descent that controls the legitimate space of Bangladeshi society ensuring the subordination of women. At the end of the story, although she already apprehends the gloom of ostracization approaching her from all sides; she ends by appealing to her sister for an

alliance against societal judgment. Jamuna announces with determination: "I want a child over whom man has no entitlement. . . . Like me, my child will be free of the offensive control of patriarchy"(63). Jamuna's reply to the intrusive inquiry of her neighbor about the paternity of the unborn child is: "I'm nobody's land for cultivation, nor can a man use me as he wishes. . . ." (66). This is Taslima's deliberate violation of the dominant episteme of which religion constitutes an important part. The Quran recommends to men: "Your women are a tilth (to cultivate) for you, so go to your tilth as ye will, .(55) . ."Taslima directly opposes such male privileges through her articulation.

In *Shodh*, Taslima's resistance to patriarchal marriage "rites" is brought into focus. Illegitimate pregnancy still figures as a key theme in this story. But the politics of such a pregnancy is covert as opposed to her overt position in *Aparpokkho*. *Shodh (Getting Even)* is the story of the compulsory transformation of a girl into a wife and her angry revenge. The story explores the institution of marriage, its regulatory structure of surveillance and subordination. In this story, Taslima provides a critical examination of the initiation "rites" of marriage, and the effacement of the female subject through those rites. Jhumur, the central character in *Shodh*, subverts the patriarchal agenda of appropriation and effacement of the female by conceiving a child outside of marriage, and passing him off as her husband, Harun's legitimate son. Through her covert strategies, Jhumur tries to undo the Bangladeshi patrilineal society by planting deceit at its heart.

One of the recurrent themes in Bangladeshi literature is the transformation of a girl who initially embodies the spirit of freedom, into a "normal wife" through the rites of marriage, so that the girl happily relinquishes exploration of life on her own terms and follows the new program of renunciation to achieve the status of a good

wife. Taslima in *Shodh* calls into question such marriage rites and turns them into an object of deconstructive challenge to foreground the politics of that program (of rites). Naila Kabeer has very nicely summed up the itinerary of a new bride as programmed by the patriarchal agenda:

[In marriage] she is sent as a young and inexperienced bride into a stranger's household where her behaviour is viewed with suspicion until she has been successfully integrated into the new household and has learnt to identify with its interests(33).

So Jhumur finds after her marriage that her relationship to her parents has suddenly altered. According to the patriarchal norm "she is called not by her name, but bou (bride) of a certain man, a certain bari (house) or a certain poribar (family)"(34).Harun says with complacency:

Your name has changed now! You're Mrs. Harun Rahman. You're now bhabi of Hasan, Habib and Dolon, and a bou of the house. Your address is no longer Waree but Dhanmondi Residential Area; since you are the bou of this house, you cannot hang around the city as before.  
(135)

These initiatory "rites" of marriage also require that Jhumur be alienated from her natal family. Harun wonders annoyingly, "Why do you need to go to Waree [Jamuna's parents live in Waree]? You now belong to this place; this is your habitat. It is not right to insist on visiting your parents,so often" (147).

Marriage for Jhumur takes on the characteristic of penance for being a woman. In return, patriarchy will legitimize her position as a good wife. Taslima in her denunciatory discourse against such practices has named such patriarchal strategies as *sangsartantra* (257). *Sangsartantra* can be translated as domesticism or familiarchy.

Sangsar is a very material term, and it has a complex signification. It may mean a family; it also signifies the material world or mundane life. Sometimes it is associated with worldliness which fetters the spirit. It may also mean a wife through her association with the mundane life of the domestic sphere, but never a husband. A sangsari who can postpone or sacrifice immediate satisfaction for future prosperity is prized for her thriftiness. Taslima, in her oppositional discourse, by calling sangsar a "tantra" or "ism" identifies the systematic oppression of women imbricated in the ideology and practices of Bangladeshi marriage "rites." In such a reading, the story of Jhumur's subordination in the Harun family becomes representative of the system rather than an isolated incident. By foregrounding the mechanism of patriarchal supremacy in the family, Taslima brings to scrutiny areas of subjugated knowledges.

Affect plays a contingent, tentative, and conditional role in such marriage. Making the in-law family happy is instrumental in gaining the affection of a husband. In one scene, Harun says in a tender voice, "try to win their [my family] hearts. It will be your success. Isn't it your obligation to make this sangsar your own?" (148). In this regard, Spivak's theorization about the effacement of the female subject is important. In her critique of the Subaltern Studies work on communal modes of power, Spivak has pointed out how a programmed effacement of the female through marriage structures patriarchal power in Indian society. Although her context is the Subaltern history of India in the pre-capitalist world, her theorization has relevance for Taslima's work. In Spivak's language, "the figure of the woman moving from clan to clan, and family to family as daughter/sister/wife/mother syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity." Patriarchal power, she argues, bases itself on "the dissimulation of her discontinuity, on the repeated emptying of her meaning as instrument"(35).

In *Shodh*, by removing the veil of affect from the marital relationship, Taslima engages in foregrounding the politics of that relationship and that institution. The dubious status of affect in this story underscores the power relations that underlie the Bangladeshi ideology of marriage. It is important to note here that in Mahasweta's "Breast Giver," mothering is exploded out of "affective coding" through Jashoda's gruesome death which remains unacknowledged by any of her children. But in Taslima's stories, marriage itself is divested of the romanticism utilized to seduce the imagination of Bengali women. The focus on the structure of domination and exploitation in marriage destroys the affect that mystifies marriage for Bengali men and women.

In a patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal marriage in *Shodh*, the surveillance of Jhumur's chastity is crucially important to Harun in order to ensure proper descent. After one and a half months of marriage, as Jhumur finds out that she is pregnant, and turns to Harun for affection, and approval, he responds with displeasure and distrust and denies that it is his child. A pregnancy immediately after marriage, in Harun's view, is the result of pre-marital relationship with someone else. (Didn't Jhumur attend the University with other young men?) He decides that the baby should be aborted. As a male, it is Harun's prerogative to define and institute what is licit and illicit as it suits his paranoiac fear of the educated woman and her will to autonomy.

Driven by anger and pain, and determined to take revenge, Jhumur secretly makes love to an artist named Afzal (her neighbor) and appropriates the right to her body. She describes with passionate intensity her love for Afzal. Jhumur becomes pregnant again, but on her own terms (this pregnancy Harun considers late enough to be caused by him), and establishes her legitimacy by giving birth to a son. The affect of a mother or the prospect of a boy or a girl does not move Jhumur, as she says, "this

is not my desired baby. This is the baby of protest and revenge. . . . The foetus of pain and agony" (181).

Thus, Taslima has challenged the unassailability of Bangladeshi patriarchy by instituting fear in the system, and by introducing terminologies of revenge and oppositionality in the realm of domestic relationships. Taslima has shown that the patriarchal institutions and customs of Bangladeshi society constitute the armor for the contending male rendering the female helpless. By unveiling the patriarchal agenda of subordinating women, and by introducing overt and covert strategies to subvert this agenda, Taslima has pioneered the feminist discourse in Bangladeshi society. Simultaneously, her work opens up areas for new exploration and debate in postcolonial feminist studies.

## **II: Feminism: A Struggle for Equality**

### **Introduction**

Feminism conjures up various images and ideas regarding the women's issues. In spite of diversity feminism is often represented as a single entity and some how concerned with, gender equality and freedom.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary, feminism is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men (466). It is a struggle of women for the womanhood. Different feminist's writers stress the women's rights and their emancipation. It is a movement for the liberation of women from the patriarchal society which rejects the tradition of masculinity. All the social norms and values are male-oriented, where women are treated as subordinate to males. But all the feminists' writers struggle for equality and wish themselves to be treated as men.

From the beginning of the civilization, women were regarded inferior. All the representatives of patriarchal society dominated women politically, culturally, and in some case mythologically too. They treated women as biologically weak and intellectually inferior. But feminist's aim is to eliminate the discrimination and deprivation on the basis of sex, race, class and religion.

In the ancient myth and scripture, women subjection by men can be traced. But even in that period, different women rejected oppressions imposed by males. According to a Jewish mythology, Lilith was Adam's first wife who supposed herself as his equal and objected lying beneath him. She probably was the first women who claimed her equality with male. Lilith defied the authority of patriarchy and proved that women are not just submissive but valiant enough to revolt against the male authority. Even in Hindu Mythology, women are subjected and questioned in their



fidelity. The greatest epic, The Ramayan shows the authority of male upon women. Sita's chastity is doubted which in itself is the act of male superiority. But to prove her chastity Sita becomes ready to be swallowed by the earth, which in itself is a silent revolt against patriarchy.

The representatives of patriarchal society idealize women as per the situation that benefits them. M.H. Abrahms in his *The Glossary of Literary Terms* remarks: On the one hand we find idealized projections of men's desires like the Madonna, the Muse of the arts, Dante's Beatrice, the pure and innocent virgin, 'the Angel in the House' that was represented by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore. On the other side we find the demonic projection of man's sexual resentments and terror like Eve and Pandora as the source of all evils, destructive sensual temptresses such as Deliah Circe, the malign witch, the castrating mother etc. (236)

It is a generally accepted trend in a male-dominated society that these females who try to revolt against the male authority are taken to be insincere. Medusa, Scylla, Circe and Deliah are the monstrous representative of women by male, who tried to defined themselves by dauntlessly confronting the power of authority. From the male point of view, all these mythical figures are terrible figures that they spoil the domestic harmony but from the female perspective, the monster women are simply the women who seek the power of self-articulation.

Chris Beasley notes often as tracing the history of the word. Until recently, feminist criticism has not had a theoretical basis; it has been an empirical orphan in theoretical storm. Feminist thinkers regard feminism as somehow different from the mainstream- as innovative, inventive and rebellious. Beasley points out that the point of view of feminists writers is that the western thought is 'male stream' and thus its authority needs to be questioned (Beasley 3). It is relevant to see some definitions

regarding feminism in order to arrive at the basic clear cut concept of the term. Chris Beasley has collected some Definitions from some dictionaries and other related books. They are as follows.

Dictionaries usually define it as the advocacy of woman's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and its broadest use of the words refer to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination in any way and for any reason. Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. (Encyclopedia of Feminism, 1987) (Beasley 27)

E. Porter defines feminism as a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex (Beasley 27). R. Delmer says:

It is certainly possible to construct a base line definition of feminism.....Many should agree that at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change.....in the social, economic and political order (Beasley 27-28).

Delmer asserts that the early woman's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s largely lacked a developed theoretical approach. Hence the movement could assert without much detailed analysis a notion of unity among women and feminism as a framework which reflected that unity. The intention was to find the explanation for women's oppression which could express women's commonality and thus bind all women together politically. However, pluralism and diversity have perpetually

occurred between women as regards the issue of woman as subject and the challenge to the woman's oppression. Feminist theories have in fact developed at something of a remote from mainstream social and political thought. Feminists have argued that mainstream thought is simply a part of there ongoing processes: excluding, marginalizing and trivializing women and their accounts of social and political life.

More recently feminism has been defined not simply as a particular frame work set of ideas or social analysis or form of critical questioning around a focus on women and power, but also as representing a specific way of experience.

Thus it is clear that all feminists call for changes in the social, economic and political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome these discriminations against women. The bottom line of all this subordination is the lack of freedom. Of course, several theorists, writers and scholars have underlined this issue from varied perspectives. Marriage has become one of the bondages that restrict women from realizing her independent self. It has been defined by men as a legal authority over women. Feminists address this issue to instill a sense of human existence which is devoid of sexual biasness.

M.H.Abrams in his *Glossary of Literary Terms* mentions some issues indicated in feminism which are briefly mentioned below: western society is pervasively patriarchal, male centered and controlled and conducted so as to subordinate women to men all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. What is feminine and what is masculine are merely the cultural constructs generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization.

Chris Beasley has been more concerned with mentioning the significant issues that the field of feminism attends to or includes: a critique of misogyny/ sexual

hierarchy; a focus on consideration of women as the subject of the analysis; an expanded account of the altered orientation to may be discussed within analysis of social and political life-compared with traditional thought; diverse perspectives, manifestly represented by certain forms of debate.

Activists in the feminist movements are anxious to see how far the imaginative literature has misrepresented women through the ages or contributed to imposing on them a falsely limited notion of their role. Writing is not an area of activity from which women have been excluded or in which they have failed to gain equality to men.

The notion of difference has only recently emerged as a focus of feminists' criticism. Initially feminist theorists bolstered claims for equality with claims of similarity. This perspective found expression in literary criticism which focused primarily on blind spots in male texts catalogued rigid and exaggerated notion of sexual difference. Feminists' theorists began to reconceptualize sexual difference to women's advantages; however feminist literary criticism shifted its focus to the reading of texts by women. Female literary genealogies jostled male traditions. Literary studies emphasized the distinctive features of female texts and traced lines of influence connecting women in fertile and partially autonomous tradition. Feminist critical attention has shifted from recovering a lost tradition to discovering the terms of confrontation with the dominant tradition.

Judith Kegan Gardiner points out about the main explanation of female difference. It posits a female consciousness that produce styles and structures innately different from those of the masculine mind. Though feminist activists have been voicing out not only their dissatisfaction of male biases and inferiorizing, dehumanizing practices in the patriarchal society but also their thrust upon building

their own history and society, there have been sufficient arguments as regards their orientation. According to Porter, usually two notable views appear to define the position of women: one partial help mates in which women are characterized in terms of men's needs regarding pleasure, provision of services, children and so on; and another, women found in mainstream thought is different but complimentary. Here women are defined not so much as for men but as in relation to men. Feminism asserts that women pose a special problem for traditional theory, since traditional thought is founded on frameworks dependent on women's subjection. It therefore envisaged as highly innovative, non-conformists and subversive and yet simultaneously and integrally intertwined with that which it critiques. To view these issues, feminists have adopted three basic approaches:

First inclusion/addition approach: It emphasizes the necessity of fitting women writers and thinkers in the canonicity from which women have been omitted since long past. This approach stresses on the equality of sexes and the necessity of harmonious relations between them.

Feminists embracing this approach want participation of women in every area and reject unanimously decided matters. (np)

The second is critique, reject and start again approach: That points out that the traditional political theory is utterly bankrupt in the light of present feminist perspectives. This approach doubts the traditional thought which it considers has been built upon assumptions regarding sexual hierarchy. This approach is even called 'go back to the drawing board' which means to omit the inscribed or already sketched figures and create by yourself because as long as one accepts the tradition however verbal they might appear to be, these are underlying images which reflect male interests explicitly or implicitly.

The third is 'deconstruct and transform approach': which argues that we cannot escape our social and intellectual context because it would be impossible to develop a theoretical framework completely uncontaminated by past perspectives or by the history of male domination. These feminists expect that they can rather develop the intended study and concept on the rupture the hierarchy of male/female relation and show there can be society without primary and secondary values.

Feminism has grown into a complex theoretical stream with numerous diversities depending upon multiple orientations. It can therefore be sketched in a continuum in order to provide a generalized overview of its internal dimensions and to explore the possibilities. The positions within feminism stretch from those adopting more explicit and specific political commitment which demand less widely inclusive conception of feminism's defining qualities, to those stressing flexibility and diversity related to an emphasis upon historical, local and contextual specificity. In the left of the continuum, we find feminism defined as a definite set of ideas or social analysis. This is a relatively closed approach requiring a commitment to a revolutionary politics. In the middle of the continuum are board definitions offered by dictionaries and other accounts. This is some what less likely to attend to political commitment described by the definite view. The most open definition of feminism's scope is the right of the continuum. Provisional definitions believe that feminism is open to changing content and hence rejects a singular political view point. Feminists have offered widely different accounts of the ways in which they are divided. For example Karen Offen divides feminism into two

1. Relational
2. Individualistic

The first is to include feminist prior to 19<sup>th</sup> century who have focused on

egalitarianism and liberalism in heterosexual familial settings. They are concerned with the notion of equality, which focuses on women's distinct position as women should be able to do what men do.

Individualist feminism includes a group of feminists who focus on a quest for personal individual independence and downplay sex-linked qualities. According to Elizabeth Grosz, feminists labeled under difference are concerned with autonomy and they support conceptions of difference without hierarchy. It is difficult to outline so many viewpoints that may be included under the term without reducing them more to slogans. Although the various traditions do become more established over time, newer feminist trajectories are quite often messy and are not so straightforwardly summarized.

Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist, formulates three categories to adjust British women writers in the past and present according to their intensity of female voice. They are 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female': the first dating from 1840 to 1880, second from 1880 to 1920 and the third since 1920 till now. The first phase marked the female voice rising in literature though buried in so-called feminine substance and got immensely affected by male pedagogy. In this phase, women writers like G. Eliot and Brontë sisters imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic tradition and standards, which required that women writers remain gentle women. The main area of their work was their immediate domestic and social circle.

The second phase clearly demonstrated the determined efforts for political and social equality and women's literature was able to advocate minority rights and protested against the unjust treatment of women. This includes writers like Elizabeth Robins, Olive Schreiner who however remained dependent upon the prominent masculine aesthetics.

The third phase was Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf who ventured to counterbalance the male dominated literary sphere and realized the historically sex-polarized tendency in literature. In this phase the dependency on opposition is being replaced by a rediscovery of women's texts aesthetics. However they could not dispose the blame put upon them by male writers nor could they explore the actual physical experience of women. It was only with the coming of postwar novelists such as Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble that we see Female aesthetics and the distinct female view of life. They have countercharged men for their taboos stamped on women and have focused on all areas of female experience.

As the term feminism covers a broader scope and embraces different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women, several dimensions have been shown ranging from liberal attitude and the demand for equal rights for sexes to the radical one voicing out the extreme ideology that tends to theoretically turn the patriarchy upside down. Liberal and Radical feminism are distinguish in terms of their intensity of demand and arrogance. While alongside them, other feminists have developed with their affiliation to certain theoretical backgrounds. They include political feminism, Marxist/ socialists feminism, psychoanalytic, French feminist (*écriture féminine*), bio-feminism postmodernists/ poststructuralists feminism, postcolonial feminism and others. To move into the brief study of these dimensions, it is relevant to first deal a little with liberal and radical feminism.

**Liberal Feminism-** It is a moderate or mainstream face of modernism that explains women's position in society. It addresses the problems of unequal rights or artificial barrier to women's participation in the public world, beyond the family and household. It shows a critical concern with the value of individual autonomy and



freedom from supposedly unwarranted restrictions by others. Public citizenship and attainment of equality with men in the public arena are central to liberal feminism. Naomi Wolf who represents this school directly rejects strategies which might be less acceptable to main stream women and men and dismiss critical and revolutionary agendas. Liberal feminism draws on 'welfare liberalism', though it started as a form of liberal political thought influenced by writers such as J. S. Mill. They put forward their main agendas as collective responsibility for the formation and development of liberal society, which supports equal opportunity between sexes. They do not want to either prove women as superior to men folk or voice their slogans against men. They believe in reform not revolution.

Radical feminism appeared in Elaine Showalter's reinterpretation of gender studies and nourished by her followers. It has been established as a feminist's literary criticism, an extreme religious stream which appears as hostile to patriarchy unlike liberal feminism. It offers a real challenge to and rejection of the liberal orientation towards the public world of men. It gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating into arenas of activity associated with men. They arrogantly focus on women's oppression as in a social order dominated by men. The notion of sexual oppression is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women. Chris Beasley reports Johnson as Defining it as "one of the basic tenets of radical feminism is that any woman..... has more in common with any other women- regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, nationality than any woman has with any man" (Beasley54). It encourages some degree of separation from men because it recommends putting women first making them a primary concern. This approach is inclined to accord lesbianism an honored place as a form of mutual recognition between women. Radical feminism describes sexual as the or at least a

fundamental form of oppression and the primary oppression for women. They state the most strongly of feminist traditions that men as a group are the main enemy. This approach wants to bring about radical changes in the social configuration in which the position of women is not only redefined but also reestablished as a respectable and important, commonly suggesting that the position of man be in a position of power relative to all women, and possibly some men. Elizabeth Grosz calls it a feminism of difference. Radical feminism usually presents a historically continuous clear-cut difference between men and women. This theory generally advocates a revolutionary model of social changes. The agenda of radical feminist writings is to counter women's supposedly natural, biological inferiority and subordination within patriarchal society by asserting their at least equal (or superior) status in relation to men. A crucial aspect of that agenda is for women to gain control over their own bodies, biology and to value and celebrate women's bodies.

The acting out of the roles in the unequal relation of domination and subordination is what Millett calls 'sexual politics'. In the earlier phase of modern feminist writing on literature, the emphasis was often quite political in the sense that writers expressing angry feelings of injustice and were engaged in raising women's political awareness of their oppression by men. Roman Sheldom says that in political theories ideology is reduced to a completely one-dimensional weapon of domination. He notes Millet as believing that ideology is the universal penile club, which men of all classes use to beat women with (Sheldom 138). There are many strands of feminism depending upon their different orientations. Some of them are discussed below.

Feminism has always been concerned in some way with women's participation or non-participation in paid employment, the activism of women in

nineteenth century radical and socialist movements was principally for women's right to work and to be treated fairly and paid equally to men. Karl Marx underlined that the consciousness is the product of being which is determined by the socio-economic realities. Feminism embracing Marxism was developed as Marxist feminism in the western feminists' world in the 1960s and 70s. These feminist thinkers saw the main reason of gender inequality in the unequal distribution of capital. Starting from the issue of the underpayment of women, sexual harassment of female workers by male workers at factories and limited employment of women in income-generating sources, Marxist feminists go to the point of defining the position of women in terms of socio-economic basis. They argue that the secret of sexual oppression lies in the unanimous authority of men over property and capital. They place women as proletariat and men as bourgeois and propose to wage a war against that unequal distribution and disrupt the socio-economic structure and configure new which will institute equal opportunity to both sexes and economic hierarchy would be dismantled. According to a feminist, Rosebush Moss Kanter, who after a study of men and women in large corporations in the United States points to many ways in which the organizational culture of corporation hinders women's advancement? She argues that the management ethic is primarily masculine. Jane Freedman refers to Mariaros Dalla Costa And Selma James's book *The Power and the Subversion of the Community* and notes that women are exploited by the capitalist system as unpaid workers, undertaking all the domestic works: childbearing and caring which are necessary for the continuation of the capitalist system. By asserting that the class power and class oppression predate sexual oppression, Marxist feminists attack the prevailing capitalistic system of the west and advocate a revolutionary approach in which the overthrow of capitalizing is viewed as the necessary precondition to

dismantling male privilege. Thus they combine the study of class with that of gender. They wish to focus on class along with gender as crucial determinant of literary production.

Socialist feminism has combined Marxists and radical feminism; the former emphasizing the causal role of labor and capital and the latter believing that sexual hierarchy is independent of economic class hierarchy. This theory offers therefore a dual system of social analysis: patriarchy and capitalism. Sometimes it describes a unified system referred to as capitalist patriarchy.

Published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century but widely discussed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was Freud's psychoanalysis that centered on the issue of human neurosis. He has massively brought gender issues as he talks about the formation of unconscious of women. He further seems to discover the fundamental differences in dream images seen by man and woman and attributes egoist, ambitious dreams to man and erotic dreams to woman. Freud's analysis is gender based. Later influenced by the poststructuralist terrain of thought, Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst objected to traditional Freudian concern of repressed desire and sexual drive in human unconscious. He has hinted at the impenetrability of definiteness of psychic process in human being. His arguments though framed with male formulae defy some male centric notion in psychoanalytical study. Psychoanalytic feminism draws from the Freudian and Lacanian arguments and argues against their depiction of woman psyche as neurotic, vulnerable to slightest stimulation and lacking rational faculty. Psychoanalytic feminists analyze the formation of (sexed) identities (masculinity) and (femininity). To oppose Freudian belief that 'the father' shapes the psychic (unconscious) life of the child, they stress the prior importance of the mother. They take a more positive conception of feminine sexual identity unlike Freud himself.

Carol Gillian in her *In a Different Voice* (1982) responds to Freudian statement that women have weaker moral development by challenging the sexism implicit in many psychological studies of moral development- a sexism that takes male moral development as the norm for human moral development. Nancy Chodorov in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) sets out to explore why women choose to become mother. She rejects the idea that mothering is an innate, natural instinct, and equally the idea that it is merely the result of social conditioning. Chodorov argues that men and women ought to become more alike. She believe that the shared-rearing would have a dramatic effect on the organization of sexual oppression by undermining the current constitution of masculinity. Freudian signified 'repression of desire' is countered with a replacement of another idea i.e. the structuring of unconscious in the form of language. This analysis of unconscious is in the form of language. This analysis to some extent disrupts the penis-centered ideology postulated by Freud.

The French Feminist School(Ecriture Feminine) who are concerned with feminine writing from the position of woman accept Lacan's account of language/culture as a masculine order but do not accept his positive affirmation of that masculine order as equivalent to civilization or sociality. They question the assumption that femininity can only be seen from the point of view of phallic culture. For the ecriture feminine writers, the notion of 'woman' exemplifies the cultural and linguistic principle of rendering inferior that which does not fit the masculine norms. They believe that femininity offers a possible procedure for subverting the marginalizing mechanisms of power, thereby breaking it up. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* mentions,

French feminists who follow Lacan, particularly Helene Cixous propose a utopian place, a primeval female space which is free of symbolic order, sex roles, otherness and the law of the father and which the self is still linked with what Cixous calls the voice of the Mother. (204)

Jane Gallop considers that the application of Lacan's categories to sexual difference seems inevitably to involve a subordination of female sexuality. She opposes the concept of man is 'castrated' by not being the total fullness promised by phallus, while the woman is 'castrated' by not being male. *Ecriture feminine* disrupts the unities of western discourse pointing to its silences. One of the prominent French feminists Julia Kristeva describes a Mother- centered realm of expression as the semiotic as opposed to the symbolic law of the father.

Many psychoanalytical Feminists have adopted myth criticism and have transformed it for the purposes of feminists' criticism. Anit Pratt criticizes Jung for his lack of discussion of female psyche. Feminists' myth critics tend to center their discussion on the Great Mother and other female images and goddesses some of them being Medusa, Cassandra, Arachne and Isis. Feminist myth critics even criticize Northrop Frye for ignoring gender in his classification of myths. These critics reject Greco-Roman myths as male constructed and want to go to the study of pre-Greek myths which have abundant examples of matriarchal norms and values in the societies. Feminists myth critics oppose forming of myths which have been shaped for welfare of men and with the view of dominating women. A number of French feminists like Chantal Chawaf, Xaviere Gautier and Luce Irigaray have argued that sexuality is a subterranean and unknown entity. Cixous writes "write yourself, your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring

forth” (Sheldon 150). She claims that female imagination is infinite and beautiful. Luce Irigaray in her *Speculum de L'autre Femme* (1974) considers that patriarchal oppression of women is founded on the type of negative constructions associated with Freud's theory of female sexuality. The concept of 'penis-envy' is founded upon a view of women as man's 'other'; she lacks the penis which he possesses. She concludes that women have been taken invisible to men's eyes and her existence has been relegated into hysteria and mysticism. Thus even within the range of psychoanalysis, we can see several strands of ideas put forward by feminists. But their common aim is to scrutinize Freudian and Lacanian perception of female psychology and give their independent ones.

As Helene Cixous' pronouncement 'sisters, write with the white milk of your mothers' marks the importance of women's body not only as a subject of writing but also the energy and the instrument of writing. This statement amplifies a call for independence and the necessity of rejection the male way of writing. In her famous essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing. She says, "A woman's body with its thousand and one threshold of order..... will make the old singlegrooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (Sheldon 151). The bio-feminists raise the issue of women's body as an essential part of women's writing because women for them have more biological experiences than men do. Experiences like menstruation, gestation, ovulation and childbirth are the mere women's and there lie several important things which are terra incognita for men. Bio-feminism is often defined as corporeal feminism also. Elizabeth Grotz and Moira Gateus, Australian feminist thinkers, propose a corporeal feminism suggesting that the body can be understood as the primary site of the embodied and sexually differentiated social practices which produce social life and

relately, as constituting the form and lived experience of the self (Beasley 77). They include arguments around bio-political issues such as reproduction, sexuality and sexed/bodily subjectivity mostly associated with radical feminism. Corporeal feminists assume that the formation of the body- self of subjectivity occurs through the child's internationalization of sexual differentiation. They express a renewed interest in the problems associated with integrating the body into social analysis linked to both the long history of the body's marginalization and separation from the social in western thought.

In 1960, a revolutionary phase emerged in literary arena to counter the age old Western Philosophy and linguistics, led by a French Philosopher Jacques Derrida. He posed a Challenge to the western metaphysics and logo-centrism with an arrangement initially grounded in linguistics. Calling the western philosophy a stagnant, center seeking and presence-oriented, Derrida ruptures the hierarchy of primary and secondary. Feminist thinkers took advantage of this poststructuralist's theory to argue against male-centrism [male (centre) vs. female (margin)]. Some extremists started calling phallogocentrism [phallus (penis)+logos(word)+centrism] to signify that men have dominated the word and have defined the world the way they like and thus they define women as subordinate and secondary. Poststructuralist feminists like Cixius, Showalter propose to rupture the hierarchy of male/female. Derrida challenged the idea of truth, essence, existence, being and said all of them are mere tools which become irrelevant in different paths of history. Poststructuralist feminists stress therefore on plurality rather than unity by rejecting conception of women as a homogenous category. They disavow universalizing and normalizing account of women as a group because the universalizing principles are viewed as intimately connected with domination and subordination and censorship of that which does not



conform. They concentrate upon the destabilizing of the manifold operations of power. They challenge the fixity and hence the very statuses of established categories like sex, class and race/ethnicity. As postmodernism rejects the notion of fundamental truth or essence in favor of recognition that meaning /truth is not eternal or impartial but constructed through exclusion and repression, post modernists feminists object the so-called fundamentalism as being constructed by masculinity and suggest this be ruled out. They understand that the social norms are perceived from the point of the male so they appear true to them but no norm is universal or essentialist when it is formed to dominate others. Ideology is constantly being produced within particular contexts though fragmentation and decentering.

In the recent era, woman voices have not only come out from white, educated European women but also from minority groups as well as non-western woman thinkers and writers. Of minority groups appear more discerningly black (ethnicity) and lesbian minorities, while the non-western feminism has been an organized feminist study under post-colonial feminism which will be mentioned a bit later.

Black and lesbian feminists are more concerned with their experience of ill-treatment in the white and heterosexual societies and speak for their rights and identity which are at stake. Each of them analyses the problems of its either group and strongly protests its marginalization in society. Their work, both artistic and critical tends to use irony as a primary literary device to focus on their self definition-their 'coming out'-for they often reject classic literacy tradition as oppressive.

In 1970s and 80s, several black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and started voicing out their agonies as marginalized, doubly oppressed (as black and women) in their works. Black feminists have challenged white women's ability and Eurocentric and essentialist nature of some feminisms. Bell Hook's *Ain't I*

*a Woman* (1981) relates the history of black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism, Hooks argues that the rape and brutal assaults on black women during the period of slavery in the United States led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans. “Even now US society still perceives and represents black women as ‘fallen women’, whores and prostitutes” (Freedman 77) says Jane Freedman in her book *Feminism*. Bell Hooks argues that racism has taken precedence over sexism, which is evident in the behavior of white women who turns their deaf ear to severe assaults upon black women. Black feminists accuse other feminist critics of developing their ideas only in reference to white upper-middle class women who oftentimes practice feminism only in order to become part of the patriarchal power structure. For black feminists, majority of feminists want to be counted as men and share the bounties of the dominant society such as equal wages, child care and other accepted social rights, while black women have been marginalized within a paradigm in which “they are ignored, romanticized or ghettoized” (Beasley 108)

Some of the black feminists like Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Tony Morrison protest the ‘massive silence’ of feminist criticism about black and third-world women writers and call for a black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual politics. Audre Lorde asks us to see “the black mother in each of us” (Handbook 209). They celebrate black culture, tradition and their genesis and believe that they possess rich cultural and sexual properties as black and as female.

Some feminists are concerned with sexuality to define their reproductive freedom and the control of their own bodies. They believe that men characterize woman sexually as vulnerable, erotic and always demanding male to satiate their sexual lust. They believe that heterosexuality in another way of male dominant over

women. For them, men treat women as sex objects and usurp them without trying to understand woman's desires and needs. Those who emphasize lesbianism point out that lesbianism are not necessarily the woman-woman sexual intercourse but it is the avoidance of male. Women must be sexually independent to establish their independence of their bodies, because they locate the emergence of domination in female sexuality when it is defined by men. Lesbian critics sometimes counter their marginalization by considering lesbianism a privileged stance and a testament to the privacy of women. Some lesbians define lesbianism as the norm of female experience, seeing heterosexuality as abnormal for women. They argue that only lesbians can offer an adequate feminist analysis. Bonnie Zimmerman describes 'lesbianism' as a kind of relationship in which two women's strongest feelings and affections are directed toward each other. There may or may not be sexual contact but the preference of the women is to spend their time together and to share most aspects of their lives with each other (A handbook, 211).

Feminists concerned with sexuality have gone to the extent of discussing the pros and cons of pornography as regards woman's freedom and social equality. Dworkin and Machinnon consider it a construction of male oppression for sexual exploitation representing women as lustful, disgusting sex object presented in different postures while some others see it as an outlet of woman's sexual repression and an indication of her sexual freedom. The function of reproduction and the role of motherhood are for feminists one of the highly contested sites. For some, reproduction and mothering are a burden of a woman whereas some others consider it an impetus to woman's strength and essentially a great pleasure of being a woman. Shulamith Firestone supports the former while Adrienne Rich favors the latter. The first serves

as an alternative of scientific technology to reproduction while the second charges the scientific act as an encroaching apparatus developed by men.

Both feminist and post colonial theories alike began with an attempt to simply invert prevailing hierarchies of gender / culture / race and they have welcomed poststructuralist invitation to refuse the binary opposition upon which patriarchal / colonial authority constructs itself. Postcolonial feminist theories have laid focus on the ‘double colonization’ of women under imperial conditions. Third-World women become victims par excellence of both the imperial ideology and native and foreign patriarchies. The third world woman is arguably housed in an ‘identifiable margin’. Leela Gandhi in her *Post Colonial Theory* mentions some post-colonial feminist writers and critics like Trinh T. Minha-ha, Talpade Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak Chakraverty. Gandhi says,

Trinh T. Minha-ha in her book *Woman, Native and Other* describes that wherever she goes the ‘native woman’ is required to exhibit her ineluctable ‘difference’ from the primary referent of western feminism: it is as if everywhere we go, we become someone’s private zoo.

(Gandhi, 85)

Third world women are ghettoized and secluded from the mainstream culture. Native woman suffers in contrast with her western sibling. Trinh is aggressive towards the European feminist attitude as she says:

by claiming the dubious privilege of preparing the ways for ones more “unfortunate sisters”, the western feminist creates an inseparable division between ‘I who –have-made-it and you-who-cannot-make-it’.

(Gandhi, 85)

Postcolonial theory tends to regard liberal feminism as a type of neo-orientalism. Liberal academic feminism is said to silence 'the native women' in its pious attempts to represent and speak for her. Gayatri Spivak in her "Can Subaltern Speak?" elaborates some contexts wherein contesting representational systems violently displace / silence the figure of the 'gendered subaltern'. Non-western women suffer from a sense of isolation and have hard time to express their identity. They are sandwiched between two trends of dominations. Gayatri Spivak puts it as between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (Gandhi 89).

White feminists are accused of Eurocentrism in their attitude towards women in the countries of the third world, trying to impose western model of feminism some times inappropriate to the particular condition of third world countries. White feminist hesitate in legitimizing the other feminist appraisals in non-European or non-American societies or countries for they consider the non-western feminist trends as mere copies of the west. Non western feminists hardly approve the western feminism as the theory speaking in favor of women of all ranks and race. White feminists are more of imperialist than of feminist. They speak more for the right of white upper middle class women's interest than for women in general. True feminist spirit or sentiment lies in the marginalized non-western societies. White Eurocentric feminists are challenged for their essentializing and universalizing theories of women's common oppression.

Though the idea of feminism itself seeks to study the existence of women in the patriarchal society, existentialist feminism founded and elaborated by Simone de

Beauvoir primarily focuses on Sartrean notion of existentialism (just reversed dictum of René Descartes): existence precedes the essence (Critical Theory 998). Beauvoir raises this issue regarding woman who has been essentialised in the society with certain stereotypes like woman as a flesh, related to nature, vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, the fertile soul, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. Several essentialist thinkers believe that the woman is doomed to immanence but has a passivity to bestow peace and harmony. Beauvoir's central attack is on the attitude of the scholar and writers towards woman's position. According to them, woman is a 'privileged other'. Her work the "Second Sex" is the narrative of women's existential otherness. A mark of otherness is one's inability to shape one's psychological, social and cultural identity. Men believe that women cannot transcend because transcendence is a spiritual sublimity which can only be attained by men. They project woman as an inherently demure creature and man powerful and verile so that the latter can achieve transcendence. Some male critics attribute mystical value to woman. Myths are overwhelmed with an idea of femininity, eroticism and seductiveness. Beauvoir discloses the ambivalence of man's nature towards woman as he calls woman a Muse, Goddess or Beatrice on the one hand while he associates her with demon, death, cruel stepmother on the other. Paternalism claims woman for hearth and home and defines her as sentiment, inwardness and immanence. Women are projected as 'other' subordinate being. This 'othering' according to Beauvoir mystifies woman's qualities and pushes her into isolation. The categories with which men think of the world are established from their point of view as absolute. Myth has been utilized for man's purpose i.e. to look at woman as luxury. It is a snare of false objectivity. It is a 'mirage', and one of those snares of false objectivity into which man makes his ready-made valuations. Woman oscillates

between one and the other. Finally Beauvoir realizes the bondages obstructing a woman's free path so it is difficult for them to accept their status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny. Yet this is a source of 'blundering' and 'restlessness' when men realize the situation that is coming into existence, woman will be a full human being, a free.

Gender discrimination is practiced even at the level of language use. A woman's socialization process teaches her a distinction between male and female in language. Several feminists from America, France and Britain have drawn attention to the philosophical linguistic and practical problems of women's use of language. The linguistic feminists tend not only to discover the sexism in language but also to attack the sexist aspects in the language where they oppressive aspects for women. Some go to the extent of willing to introduce feminist language system. Carolyn Burke writes about the French feminists' intention of finding and using an appropriate female language. They advocate a revolutionary linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech. Shosana Felman finds the challenge of women today in "reinventing language, to speak not only against but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure" (David Lodge 340). Robert Graves believes that women's language existed in the prehistorical time. When matriarchy was overthrown by patriarchy along with the beginning of historic era, woman's language went underground. Women's languages among American Indians, Africans and Asians were reported by travelers and missionaries in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet there is no evidence of genderlect spoken by female population in a society which differs significantly from the dominant language.

The task of feminist criticism is to concentrate on women's access to language in the lexical range from which words can be selected on the ideological and cultural

determinants of expression. The main problem lies in the fact that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism or circumlocution (David Lodge, 341). Showalter refers to Woolf as saying that women ought to express mind and body ought to fight to open and extend it. Women's literature is said to be haunted by the ghosts of repressed language and until those ghosts are exorcised women world would never feel a sense of relief. Language seems to have paralyzed their gestures, including their verbal gestures. As adults they no longer have any mobility. Feminism is a way of discovering forgotten, misrecognized gestures and also verbal gestures other than those of mothering.

Gilbert and Gubar present the dilemma of a woman writer in a malecentric authorship and make a clear position of the woman writer who is quandering without fixity. The woman poet has an anxiety of authorship a radical fear that she cannot fight a male precursor on 'his' terms and win. Her battle is not against his reading of her. "The woman writer is victimized by the inferiorized and 'alternative' psychology of women under patriarchy" (Critical Theory 1237). Gilbert and Gubar observe the psychosexual problem of female writers who feel disturbed, distrusted and insecure since they have derived the literacy genus from the stern literary 'fathers' of patriarchy in comparison to the male tradition of strong, father-son combat described by Bloom as "Anxiety of influence" (Critical Theory 1235). The contemporary female writers can exude the energy from the struggle their 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century fore-mothers did in isolation. Women suffer from mental illness because of the patriarchal socialization since they are likely to experience their education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness as in some sense sickening. Those early female writers undertook a terribly difficult path to overcome the 'anxiety of authorship', to repudiate the patriarchal prescriptions and to recover and remember the lost



foremothers who could help them find their distinctive female power (Critical Theory 1242). Their focal thesis lies in creating a space for woman literature or creating a subculture unaffected by males and attacking male ego and in struggling against the effects of socialization. Juliet Mitchell also studies women novelists as trying to establish 'the subject in process' to create a history from a state of flux in which a new bourgeois society. Women writers wrote novels to describe that process; domesticity, personal relations, personal intimacies, stories etc. "The novel is the prime example of the way women start to create themselves as social subjects" (David Lodge 427)

The way women think and the psychological complexity inherent in women is intricately linked to their cultural environments. The female psyche can be studied as the product of cultural forces. In cultural theory, class, race, nationality and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Showalter views women's culture as redefining women's activities and goals from a woman-centered point of view. The term implies an assertion of equality. Women's culture refers to the broad-based communality of values, institutions, relationships and methods of communication.

The above discussed feminist discourse has helped us to generate arguments and justify the protagonist of Nasrin's novel *Shodh*, Jhumur's behaviors amidst male-dominated society. The discourse has given us a perspective to observe and analyze the novel in a meticulous and a scrupulous manner. It has enabled us to understand the psyche, the intellect and the feelings of female and their urge to bring about significant changes in the society so that a woman will live as an independent human being.

### III: Textual Analysis

#### Synopsis of the Novel, *Shodh*

“Women spend half of their lives picking stones from the rice, stones pile up in their hearts, there’s no one to touch them with two fingers.” (Taslima Nasrim). The statement explains the plight of women in Indian sub-continent. they have very poor condition and they are regarded subordinate to men, that is their husbands. They have very narrow boundary of life. They work for their family, but what do they get in return? A dogged life. They spare their life by fetching water, bearing and rearing children and largely as the non-paid domestic servants. The actual and real condition of women, in general are shown in the above lines.

*Shodh* begins in the house of Haroon, the responsible member of his family and husband of Jhumur the protagonist of this novel. Jhumur is there with her husband Haroon, father and mother-in-law including some other members of the same family. Haroon is an engineer and has his own farm. Jhumur as an ideal daughter-in-law (the word 'bou' is used for daughter-in-law in the text) and does what is expected of her as a possession rather than an individual.

While in campus, Jhumur falls in love with Haroon. They go to the beach for driving to share their love, and sometimes she goes to his office too. She begins to realize that she is an individual when her first child in her womb is destroyed by her husband when he accuses her by saying that the child is not his, but some one else. After this realization, Jhumur changes, but she does not disregard anyone in the family. She does not show any change in behavior, but she makes up her mind that she is going to have a child soon from Afzal rather than Haroon. She wants to take revenge for hurting her pride. She was qualified and educated, and was motivated to

be independent from early age to feel and decide anything/everything independently. She was independent and strong enough to make decisions on her own.

Jhumur ignores sexual relations with Haroon pretending that she has abdomen pain. She starts coming to meet Afzal, brother-in-law of Sebeti, a tenant of her house. Everyday after purifying herself with shower water in bathroom, she goes to have sex with Afzal, breaking the socio-cultural norms. She carries a child in her womb of Afzal. Haroon, with all the family members of her house believed that the child she is carrying is of Haroon and cares her a lot. Everyone in the family is very happy getting a cute child after nine months. Haroon himself cares for the child a lot. Jhumur doesn't have much tension about the child.

One day, she requests her husband to call her old friends for dinner. They sit together, talk, laugh and enjoy themselves. In the middle of all her friends, she discloses a secret that she has got a very good job as a school teacher in Bhikharunnisa Noons' School. Here she has taken revenge on her husband by doing these things, which were not allowed to her in the beginning. She says, "You didn't allow me to work after we got married. For me it was like a slap on my face. Now after an interval of a few years, I have given you this surprise of taking up a job. I have given you the proof of my capabilities. It's like slapping you twice over" (224).

Later, she spends her life in the same family very happily, but not as a ball who can be tossed around but she has her own identity as Zeenat Sultan, Jhumur, a teacher.

### Depiction of Suppressed Desire in *Shodh*

If you are human,  
 you will smash  
 your chain to stand tall.  
 Smash the chain  
 with your hands; these  
 hands are yours.

(Taslima Nasrin, *Shodh's* cover page)

The leading laureate of women advocacy, Taslima Nasrin, always talks for the selfhood of women in her writing. In the above extract, she puts her revolutionary feeling to evoke women for the selfhood in the Indian sub-continent. In her view, one should not have any kind of restriction to use their own things. Women are really the humans, but the real humanness of women is crushed under the bondage of traditional patriarchy. So, Taslima says that women should struggle to break such inhuman patriarchal milieu. If they are human they should be able to explore their potentiality to prove themselves qualified and competent ones.

Taslima Nasrin has poignantly demonstrated the age-repression of women and has allowed the gust of rebellion to stir the castle modeled of male selfish ego. So, many things might look unpleasant at the superficial sight, but a deeper contemplation finds easy justification of the so-called unfavorable step taken by protagonist in the novel. The character of Jhumur has been portrayed in the novel amidst the restrictive cloistering, traditional, socio-cultural circumstances. Other female characters in the novel, one way or the other, comply with the situations and appear contented with the responsibilities they are given. They seem to be oblivious about the social, cultural and conceptual injustice as regards individual freedom. Jhumur is not an odd woman

attempting to get undeserving, absurd freedom, she is the epitome of thousands of women representing the unexpressed desires, wishes and ambitions and the one trumpeting the music of Ego lying beneath thousands of female socials even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's South Asian World.

Jhumur, a revolutionary woman and the victim of socio-economic realities, is juxtaposed to other women who take submissiveness; motherliness and even the nullified existence for granted and appear happy to live the life they have. Jhumur cannot go away from the responsibilities and social norms so easily. She is mindful of her role as a social and moral being. Thus, she is torn between the impulses: social and individual. Individual impulse becomes more important than social one for her.

Dorothy Anne Dunmore, a prominent critic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, appreciates her “for unveiling the tumults of woman's soul.” Similarly, Salman Rushdie calls Nasrin “a difficult woman and an advocate (horror of horror) of free love” (7). The development of soul is an awakening of the possibilities of life, an emancipation of the whole being from the trammels of conventionalism. The central character Jhumur is struggling to free herself from obligations in order to develop her strength and expand as an individual. This is universal struggle that exactly mirrors Jhumur's generations.

Actually a woman's decision is an important event like marriage is unheard of. Marriage is managed by parents. But here in this novel marriage is done against the parents wishes. Haroon and Jhumur have a love marriage which was going against wish of the parents. Love marriage was done but Jhumur was limited within household. She had more restrictions than a parrot in a cage. She is not allowed to speak loudly, neither should she laugh loudly, so that others may hear her, can be seen in the narration:

It doesn't behave a house wife to stare at people. The neighbours would surely disapprove. She had reported the incident to Haroon at once. 'Jhumur, you have no sense at all-----most of the time you seem to forget you are the bou of this house!' He said. Haroon, couldn't have been more wrong. I know I was the bou of the house only too well, hadn't dared to think otherwise even for a second, not since the time I had come to the house, I knew I had to lower my voice, reduce it to a murmur, keep my eyes fixed on the ground so that they didn't catch the eyes of any other person. (7)

What is very disappointing is how society starts suspecting a woman if she defies the constraints. Women are taken as the one to be swayed by whims. Patriarchy cannot digest individual thinking of women. We can see how deeply gender discrimination has been seated in male psyche. Woman is not supposed to show any dissatisfaction. Acting not according to the commands of the male is dementation in the eye of patriarchy.

Thus, Haroon, who represents a deeply seated male chauvinism, remarks:

Your life has changed Jhumur; [. . .] your new life must not bear traces of the old. [. . .] Why can't you make out the difference? [. . .] You no longer carry your old name. You are now Mrs. Haroon Ur. Rashid. You are Hasan, Habib and Dolon's Bhabi. Your address is Dhanmundi, not Wari. You can't gad about the whole day; you are the bou of the house. (9)

The above extract exhibits the stereotypes formulated by the male members of the society about woman. A woman does not have her own identity in the society after her marriage. Her name is joined with husband. She becomes a wife, a daughter-in-

law, and bhabi. Her name, identity and birth place, everything is lost. She is known by her husband's name. So every new behavior, innovation or creativity is viewed through the spectacles of suspicion and scrutinized to a large extent. Woman is stigmatized as peculiar and delicate and mysterious to understand. She is branded whimsical and moody. This is a deep insult to the sentiments of a woman. Haroon has created a wide hierarchy between male and female.

*Shodh* displays other socially scrutinized woman characters, who do not dare to think, argue and rebel beyond the parameters assigned to them. Jhumur has to set out her adventurous journey amidst the scything thorns and hurdles of life at any cost. She cannot even envisage whether that journey will have a safe landing or an utter doom.

How a woman's self respect is doomed and she is relegated into insignificance sans name, status and identity, and how she is supposed to be a possession of male can be pictured in Haroon's treatment of Jhumur. He believes that she is his property and entitled to care for it. He seems to think that she will be less valuable if she does not retain her beauty because to him the external beauty is the only thing that counts the most. He is not so happy to see his wife walk with a boy. He is not expected to be asked when he returns as if a wife's duty is to remain within the four walls of the house and obey what the husband dictates. In the male dominated society, woman is not supposed to develop her own interest; she should rather enjoy what her husband enjoys. Woman has been essentialized as the one born to be a wife or a mother. Though she is born to be a wife or a mother, she is stripped off her motherly rights because motherly rights are also overpowered by fatherly rights. A wife's duty is to be in the bed to gratify the husbands' lust but the husband is not aware whether he is

gratifying the lust of wife. The love of husband to his wife remains there as long as the wife is submissive, dependent and emotional.

Haroon lying close to me, losing himself in my body was not aware. Haroon had started making love to me four days after the abortion, ignoring medical advice. I did not discourage him or try to put him off. How could I, a wanton woman stand in the way of the legitimate desire of a successful and morally correct person? I was pollution free! A woman as chaste as some vestal virgin now rose from white sheets, and walked feebly in the bedroom. (91)

It is really very pitiable condition when male members take women as subject of sexual satisfaction and they should be confined to kitchen. Thumuer tolerated the pain of abortion of her first child. But, Haroon could not feel her pain and started making love with her just after three days, though doctor advised them not to do so. Thumur bears this pain too thinking it as a part of her duty to provide sexual satisfaction to her husband.

Duty of a family should be self realizing and husband dictating the duty to his wife again and again may irritate his wife. Here, Haroon makes Jhumur realize her duty toward husband, father and mother-in-law, sister and brother-in-law gives psychological tension to Jhumur. His way of dictating the duty without realizing the feeling and desire of his wife is always counter productive. When Jhumur tries to convince Haroon for work, he remarks:

At this, Haroon took me into his arms, and then making me sit on the bed held up my chin, So that I faced him. My darling, you're responsible for my parents, take care of them. You are elder bou, they all depend on you. Your success lies in winning their hearts,



understand? And have you ever given a thought as to how happy you would make me if you look after my family? (53)

Social surrounding shapes the mind of the people and their behavior. Most of the members of the society are over-whelmed by the old conventions and stereotypical notions. Only some of them struggle in which they may either perish or extract a new thing. Most of the women of South Asian Society are suppressed, by their family members, husband and other. Not only in the household affairs but also in physical sexual satisfaction. When a boy gets married, he loses himself in wife's body and if she becomes pregnant within a short period of time he puts question marks on her character. Haroon doubtfully remarks when he hears Jhumur is pregnant.

Because I am not the father, how would I know [. . .] how can I tell whose baby you had in your womb when you stepped into our house.

You were in such a hurry to get married, gave me no time to think.

Now every thing has become clear. (74)

Jhumur becomes pregnant within six weeks of her marriage. Haroon becomes upset that she has become pregnant so fast and so makes her the cause of his upset. Even her mother-in-law, being a woman could not understand her problem and abused her for disturbing her son without knowing the real cause. Haroon himself is well-knowing that Jhumur is not allowed to go anywhere. She even does not go down to talk with the tenant. She always works at home and returns to her cage like room. She is neither allowed to talk and laugh loudly nor allowed to go anywhere and so her face. She has to cover her face all the time. It is the culture of Muslim society and she has to adjust herself with this environment. Most of the women have tolerated these things. They have tolerated to sit inside home even after being capable of doing official works. But for Jhumur this cage has made her decide to cross the limitations.

She speaks nothing in the beginning even when she is accused of carrying other's child in her womb. She tolerates the abortion of the child without speaking a word against husband. She consoles herself with tears after abortion and expresses her feeling when Rosuni, a daughter-in-law comes to console knowing she is sick:

Rosuni, her bum stuck on the cold floor, declared loudly I would recover if I got hold of a plantain leaf, brushed it against my belly and then destroyed it in fire. Nothing is going to be the same Rosuni; I murmured, 'Nothing-I've lost whatever I had to lose. Now only the pain remains. (87)

Jhumur is an educated woman having university degree. She is not allowed to go and work any where. She is confined to household only, though she has a very leading and logical capacity. But she is tied with the tradition and cultural belief that a woman should not interrupt the decisions made by male members of the family. She should not go against the decision of her husband. That is the cause that without any question she is ready to abort her own child. Though she knew that if she had questioned, she would have won, but she didn't, just to keep the family's discipline and also for fulfilling her husband's desires.

Had I reasoned with him, that even single day was sufficient to make a baby then I'm sure he would have lost the argument. But I didn't as I felt he had become so deeply distrustful that he would have never accepted that the child was his. (97)

Marriage between Haroon and Jhumur was not an arranged marriage. It was love marriage against social practices. According to Hindu and Muslim culture, marriage of their children is arranged by parents. If they do so, they can get sufficient dowry. But Jhumur brought nothing as dowry. Their marriage was held in shrine. For this,

she is blamed by her mother-in-law that it was she who diverted Haroon and didn't let him marry with a girl, who was bringing sufficient dowry. She remarks: "Haroon had had such a rich proposal. The girl would have come with furniture, a Frigidaire and even television and such a lot of gold they had promised- 12 tolas of it" (103). In patriarchy, women are suppressed not only because of the male domination. They are even dominated by female members of the society. Thumur is dominated again and again by her own mother-in-law. She was demoralized as she did not bring any dowry in marriage with Haroon.

The suppression of woman in patriarchal society has developed as culture, tradition and civilization. In patriarchy, male people always think themselves superior to the female. Female are taken as the marking and child producing machine. They are the slave of male orders in the family. They are not allowed to work any where outside the four walls of house. They are made prisoner inside the four walls. The girls who do not bring sufficient dowry have to suffer a lot in our society. It is frequently heard in news about the killing, beating and burning of girls as they do not bring dowry. They are physically and mentally tortured. Here in this novel also Jhumur is physically and mentally tortured as she has to face abortion, has to listen to unnecessary things from husband and mother-in-law and also not allowed to go out for work even if she is capable. She expresses her inner feelings in this way:

I become a prisoner in my own house, powerless to step outside to visit friends or relations. I didn't hold a job although I was qualified. I put up with it all as had I become pregnant while I went about everywhere, Haroon would have accused me of carrying on with someone. He would have alleged, all over again, I was with someone else's child, and I was unwilling to burden myself with guilt or submit my body to

the operations of those ruthless, sharp-steeled instruments. I speculated if Haroon would ever know how unfair he had been to me, how cruel. How he had destroyed my faith in the truth of the purity of my love. I waited endlessly for him to change his mind, to come round to my side. No such miracle took place. Haroon suffered horribly from suspicion and without a shred of evidence while I felt weak and exposed. I shriveled up in pain when Haroon was cold and distant.

(111)

It is general law of nature that if there is repression, revolt will follow back. All the human beings want to remain independent in life. There is a limit to tolerance and if it crosses the boundary, revolt can't be blocked even by supreme power.

Jhumur, the educated town woman is dominated, discriminated and repressed from the beginning of her marriage life. Though she has acquired good education, she is discriminated and deprived of the rights of doing job because of her feminine gender. After marriage, she comes with her husband to settle her life, but her youthful dreams are shattered by continued suffering, grueling toil and pain. Though she is devoted to her husband as a pure Muslim wife, her husband doubts her chastity. As a result, she has to abort her own first child. Though Jhumur becomes the perfect Muslim wife after marriage, the unbalanced behavior of her husband and other members of the family, and society, impose restriction upon her freedom. Haroon's weakness and immaturity, brutality and distrust and superstitious beliefs make her life more and more miserable.

Patriarchal Muslim society dominates women in all the sphere of life. Male plays dominating role, and they can do whatever they like. But females have to follow all the strict rules and regulations developed by their male partners. Traditional

Muslim society demands women to be gentle, submissive, coy and morally upright. It confines women just in household activities and women are deprived of outward experiences. Their development is blocked by the strict moral code of patriarchy. Hiding face with Dupatta is the common practice of the married women. They are treated as an object in male chauvinist world. They are suspected even when they talk with other males. They are charged as being disloyal to their husbands if they talk and smile with others than their husbands.

Education is powerful weapon to fight against patriarchy. To fight against social injustices and get financial independence education is a true weapon. As an educated woman, though Jhumur suffers a lot in the beginning of the novel and tolerates to keep the morality of bou, she realizes her own condition and becomes a matured woman. When she has to destroy her own innocent foetus in the womb, she becomes furious and makes her mind to be pregnant not by Haroon, her own husband but by other person, Afjal, an artist staying in ground flat to take revenge from Haroon. For this rigid decision, she remarks:

Couldn't I have remained content with Haroon? I could have if I had tried hard enough; I was sure of that. Struggling day and night with my conscience, I came to the conclusion it was Haroon I loved. Thus, one afternoon, washing away all my bodily impurities under the stream of cool water I made up my mind to be pregnant with Afzal, and not with Haroon. (147)

Jhumur does not keep silent after being pregnant from Afzal and getting a child. Seeing the child everyone including Haroon in the family is happy. But Jhumur being an educated woman wants to break the house hold chain and go out for job. She wants to show Haroon that she can get and do any job she likes. She wants to take revenge

of the suppression, she suffered in the family. So without disturbing anyone in the family, she secretly searches a teaching job for herself and makes Haroon dazzled saying:

It's a copy of a letter I have written accepting a job offer. [. . .] you didn't allow me to work after we got married. For me it was like a slap on my face. Now after an interval of a few years I have given you this surprise of taking up a job. I have given you the proof of my capabilities. It's like slapping you twice over. (223-4)

It is very difficult for women of patriarchal society to fulfill their desire. They are not actually allowed to express their desire too. But, here Taslima is successful in creating an ideal woman who is able to depict and fulfill her desire. Thumur has really proved herself not only an ideal daughter-in-law but also a capable one to get a job and an independently. Lastly she is able to take revenge breaking the bondage of patriarchy and establishing her own identity as Zeenat Sultan, Thumur, a teacher.

Though Jhumur becomes the perfect Muslim wife after marriage, the unbalanced behavior of her husband and other members of the family and society impose restriction upon her freedom. Haroon's weakness and immaturity, brutality and distrust and superstitions make her life more and more miserable.

Because of the repressive patriarchal social order, Jhumur is forced to take her own initiatives. Her revolt is implicit at the start and explicit at the end. She refuses to have sex with Haroon after destroying her first foetus pretending to have pain in lower parts of abdomen and becomes pregnant with Afzal. Not only that but also she takes up a job of a school teacher without letting anyone know in her family.

Jhumur's decisive walk out and the choice of a non-domestic profession in the context of woman's predicament in Bangladesh is a tremendous act of revolt or

depiction of her suppressed desires. When and whatever decisions she took they were rigid and she did at last. Suppression for her just became an episode in her life. Her bold walk out is a great success and revolt of Bangladeshi woman.

The way of depiction of the suppressed desires of Jhumur is a symbol of hope and her way to free herself from the cruel chain of patriarchy.

#### **IV: Conclusion**

The textual analysis leads to the conclusion that Taslima Nasrin, while dealing with the problem and position of Bangladeshi women, reveals how this manmade patriarchal social system has become an obstacle in the path of women's progress and dignity. Taslima not only presents the problems of Bangladeshi women in their patriarchal tradition but also presents the way out of their bondage. She shows how Bangladeshi women are becoming commodities and are forced to live an animalistic life.

Taslima shows her protagonist not as defeated and passive; rather daring and developing. The protagonist in the novel suffers physically and mentally but never loses her love. Taslima wants to impart the idea that in creating a happy and just society there must be a mutual harmony between men and women. He also gives the lesson that by the domination of men it is not only women that suffer but in the process of domination men also suffer a lot. This novel revolves round the problems and suffering of Jhumur, the protagonist and her bold effort of revolting against gender discrimination of Bangladeshi society.

Though Jhumur suffers through out the novel, her misery is compounded when she becomes pregnant and informs about her growing foetus to her husband. The pathetic predicament of Jhumur becomes more heart-rendering when her own loving husband doubts her chastity and refuses to adopt her foetus. His recurring ill-treatments and doubts pushes her to a horrible situation. Though she was well-educated woman, she is deprived of her working rights as an officer or teacher outside the home.

Jhumur suffers much because of the socio-economic structure. The patriarchal social system is male-oriented of which Jhumur is victim. She becomes a doll in the



hands of her husband. It is because of the patriarchal social system, she cannot go out to do any job and raise her voice against social atrocities and repression. But because of the knowledge and education which she obtained from school and colleges, she herself is encouraged to revolt against all types of domination and discrimination. She is well-knowing that one's life is not destined by fate or 'Karma' but by action he/she does.

Taslina presents the idea that gender- discrimination is a result of patriarchal social system patriarchal social system subjugated women in their every sphere of life. Taslima has the view that Muslim religion favours male because in it a man believes that it is his duty to chastise his wife by dominating as done by Haroon in this novel.

Due to the discrimination, crisis of identity and alienation Jhumur struggles hard and gets tortured, but finally succeeds in her aim by taking revenge from her husband. She becomes pregnant by having sex with Afzal a tenant of her house and by searching for a job for herself was also going against her husband's will to live an independent life. This is a story of an urban Bangladeshi woman who struggles against the society dominated by male chauvinism. Thus, if we analyze this novel from the feminist perspective, we come to the conclusion that continuous domination, discrimination and repression evoke resentment and revolt, as Taslima has shown here.

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