

I: General Introduction

Introduction

At the beginning of civilization, men and women had equal position in the society. As the time moved, men started gaining much power and later, declared themselves superior to women. Different civilizations and religious groups started writing religious volumes, in which they depicted women as weak, submissive and moreover, the causes of many troubles. The story of 'Rama and Sita' to 'Adam and Eve' present women as inferior being to men. Nature created men and women equal but society believed men as superior to women. This attitude of society has placed women in a relegated position in almost all civilizations still today. So, the society for centuries believed that the different characteristics labelled on men and women were natural and unchangeable as well. All characteristics as masculine and feminine were thought to be the result of biological differences. It was thought that women were emotional and men rational. This deeply rooted thought has now become a global problem. Still, we have a challenge to uproot it and re-establish gender equality in the twenty-first century.

Gender inequality might differ from culture to culture or community to community. But what is similar in every culture or community is this tendency has fastened women's freedom and self-respect in one form or the other. Society's partiality for men has become an obstacle in women's overall progression. Many women's voices have been silenced in the name of protecting their chastity or honour. This self-assumed role of protector establishes the hegemony of men over women.

Many feminists have raised their voice for women's emancipation from the parochial prison of patriarchal norms and values. Feminists advocate that women are not mentally

different since birth but social treatment tends them to become 'women'. Gender has assigned certain roles to men and women, which is completely biased against women. Construction of gender has helped the male-world to dominate the female-world so that females ever remain at the service of males. Feminists strongly believe gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, and that could be changed as well.

Anita Desai, through her literary works, reveals the pathetic condition of women in patriarchal social set-up. She is a remarkable woman novelist who has contributed many significant novels to raise the standard of Indo-English novels. She started her literary career quite early at the age of twenty-six by publishing her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) with a theme of its heroine's struggle for a meaningful life. *Voices in the City* (1965) depicts conflicting, confusing, muddling sounds of a city where congestion has jammed the very thinking of its people. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971) shows that what we thought as more civilized society is all the more discriminative, ugly and conservative. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) revolves around the story of its heroine, a traditionally settled woman in every respect who is psychologically outraged. *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) presents a study of trauma of a housewife, the trauma that takes refuge in seclusion. The title symbolizes fire, which burns in the heart of an old lady, and her emotional world is the theme of the novel. *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is portraiture of an Indian woman who rebels against the tradition-bound old mode of life. *In Custody* (1984) portrays the protagonist's 'quest for identity' in his positive identification with the hostility of life and the existential problems of man. *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) depicts the protagonist's indomitable ambition to carve out a niche for himself in the face of an alien and hostile milieu. *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) presents the quest motif and the journey undertaken to reach the goal, though in the process characters get alienated from the world. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999),

juxtaposing East and West, exposes the characters' hunger for fulfillment. *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976) and *The Village by the Sea* (1982) are her child fictions, and *Games at Twilight* (1978) and *Diamond Dust* (2000) are collections of short stories.

Writing for Desai is "a process of discovering the truth" which lies beneath the surface seen as 'Reality'. Her writing evokes the difficult roles, problems and disillusionments of women. She is more concerned with the lives of women, the limitations and handicaps placed on them by society (Henderson 239). Desai is excellent in depicting the inner furies of women and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment. She also pays much attention to form and techniques in her writing.

Desai's latest novel *Fasting, Feasting* also follows her previous trend of depicting women's obligations and compulsions within the boundary of patriarchal set-up. She shows the frustrating entrapment and incarceration of the female characters in tradition, social mores and customs where conservatism and modernization are gender specific and serves dominant ideologies (Arora 63). MamaPapa, their two daughters, Uma and Aruna, and a son, Arun, are members of an orthodox Indian family. No compromise is tolerated in applying patriarchal norms and values in the family. It becomes a part of a male dominated society where each and every decision is taken in accordance with patriarchal ideology. Uma, the eldest child, has to leave her schooling to look after her newly born brother, Arun. Uma and Aruna are prepared as a 'woman'. After Papa's huge effort, Arun gets a chance to go to the United States for higher education. Gender discrimination changes Uma to an hysteric whereas Arun gets possibly the best education abroad. For women, the family is the site where they experience security and care, but it has become a place where Uma and other female characters have to suffer a number of tensions.

Gender-discrimination has become a serious problem to create a harmonious society. It has imposed its order upon the society in one or the other form. Even so called developed societies are besieged by this problem. In this limited study we will try to find out the causes responsible for women's degradation, especially concentrating on the central character, Uma. Problems arise here — Is Uma already Uma, or has been MADE? Who is responsible for Uma's failure in every step of life? Wasn't there any possibility except Uma be in the present pathetic condition? Her brother wins a scholarship to the U.S. but Uma is compelled to give up her study. What factor tends her life towards a tragic end? The thesis will attempt to find out answers to these problems.

Fasting, Feasting depicts women's gradual degradation within the patriarchal set-up. They have to give up their actual strength because of unequal treatment given to them by the society. If they get equal opportunity and treatment, no doubt, they could prove themselves efficient and competitive as well. But social injustice and discriminatory attitude have made them uncompetitive and failure. So this study will be centralized around the hypothesis '*women's potentiality gets stifled mainly because gender-discrimination either knowingly or unknowingly imposes its order upon the society*' because the deeply rooted patriarchal norms and values have affected every mind, at least, to some extent. To uproot this so called patriarchal ideology, every member in the society has to rethink over the significance of this dominant phenomenon and work together for gender equality.

This research aims to find out women's position in patriarchal society. The thesis writing will be intensively textual. The hypothesis demands to glance upon the issue of women's problem in male-dominated society. As feminists take gender as one of the main causes of women's oppression, the methodology of the study will be related to feminism and gender issues. The research will discuss upon feminism, feminism and gender, and gender in

present Indian patriarchal society. Application of feminist theory for textual analysis will help to derive a conclusion and it will verify the hypothesis as well.

Women's oppression in the male-dominated society is almost obvious. Social mores and customs are discriminative against women and the situation tends women towards their physical and psychic degradation. This research overviews upon the late twentieth century Indian society where patriarchy still has its strong effect even in an educated family. The study will be significant to observe how woman's potentiality gets stifled and how gender-discrimination is applied within the family and the society.

The study is directed only as an academic research. Though the novel *Fasting, Feasting* is divided into two parts — Part One and Part Two, the study will be focused on part one which is the story of Uma and the Indian patriarchal society. It will not focus part two and the Patton family in the U.S. The study mainly concerns on Uma's failure and her brother Arun's success. Anamika and other female characters' position will support arguments to prove the hypothesis. The thesis does not look at any separate study of language, design and other aesthetic qualities. It also does not see the problems in terms of theoretical assumptions of particular theorist.

Literature Review

Desai's Trend

Anita Desai as a novelist occupies a distinctive place in the realm of contemporary Indian English fiction. She appears to be a leading luminary on the literary map of Indian women writing. Her works present a satirical view of social change in post-Independent India, with a strong sense of waste, limitation, failure and frustrations. Critics have found supremacy of 'Idea' over 'Matter' in the works of this gifted novelist.

In spite of being a female writer, Desai is not biased towards the female circle. She lives in her mind and not body for she is a novelist almost totally free from the caging impact of body awareness. Subha Tiwari finds her one of the most 'misread novelist' and disagrees with the skeptical, cynical of the lesser gender's capabilities, the big brothers, for their 'circus-watching' approach to feminine psyche who have imprisoned this genius in terms of 'female, feminine, feminist' syndrome, foolishly ignoring the fact that whatever is feminine is at once human and universal (Tiwari 2). Therefore labeling Desai as a woman or female novelist would be a great mistake while finding the essence of her works.

Desai's novels have been interpreted in a number of ways. Critics have interpreted them from different perspectives — some from the standpoint of social criticism, others from that of economic and cultural crisis and some have discovered linguistic inventiveness in them, whereas others find psycho-moral delineations. A proficient artist as Desai is, her novels naturally offer a wide variety of social, cultural and psychological interpretations.

Her novels deal with urban life in contrast with Nature and the socio-psycho attitudes of man caught in the crucible of tradition and change. On one hand, we find deep psychological exposition in the world of Desai and also at the same time there is something very raw, primitive and pagan about this world. Her indifference to institutionalized religion is also viewed throughout her works as:

She believes in forces, natural symbols, hidden, dangerous push of Nature but she hardly has any respect for your rituals, and agencies of formal, disciplining so-called religion. This is absolutely adorable about Desai's world. It also creates a fabric where psychological truths are more near untamed Nature rather than the civilized world. Nothing can be more true. With her instinct, Desai has developed a vision where human beings have

been conceived as part of the larger organic life; hence the deep significance of locales in her novels (Tiwari 5).

This technique of Desai has released her women characters from the burden of social codes imposed on them. Certainly, it is a big task to liberate one's mind to such an extent where centuries of cultural conditioning fall apart and do not overlap the novelist's mind. She conceives women as primal creatures who are busy in pursuing their own motivations. This situation becomes highly unsettling for a society, which does not have any mechanism to deal with, accept or live with all aspects of womanhood. Desai's almost all works reflect this nature versus culture paradigm with "construction of binaries on man-woman, colonizer-colonized, slave-master, city-jungle, East-West etc. patterns" (Tiwari 7).

Beside this nature-culture aspect Desai's prime concern is with the feminine sensibility. Her concern is with "the lives of women, the limitations and handicaps placed on them by society and, [...] the difficulties they face in giving their lives purpose when they attempt to assert their identity" (Henderson: 239). Desai is found as a 'trend-setting novelist' for laying bare the inner recesses and the existential trauma of human beings who "makes known to us the unconscious motifs of human psyche, the problem of human relationships, the protagonist's quest for identity almost in all her novels from *Cry*, *the Peacock* to *Fasting, Feasting* [...]" (Budholia 20).

Her protagonists are caught by confusing situation, which is closely related to their existence. They get swayed by problems of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. The theme of existential predicament embedded in the social milieu where males and females are shown in contrastive terms - males being the ruler, females being ruled over, is her chief interest. At this situation, existential conflict sprouts from self's craving for fulfillment. Moreover, her female characters are beleaguered by males as well as the norms of society

finalized by them. The struggle of her characters gets a distorted shape because of this shift in focus. In her pursuit to find out the true meaning of existence her characters work as her mouthpiece. The characters are beset by the existential dread to such an extent that all of them directly plunge into this abyss to get at least an inkling of the affairs of life. As Robert Browning, she gets deep into the psyche of her characters and unscrambles their true nature lacerated by the forces of self, family, as well as society. Desai's oscillation between fascination for life and infatuation for death has put her in the tributary of those writers who show the existential anxiety and are on their way to trace the meaning of *existence* (Devika 240).

In fact, in all her major novels, she has dealt with the feminine sensibility more emphatically than the description of the man and his exploits. One of the striking features of her writing happens to be her typically feminine point of view, which is presented through her microscopic observation of life in a very subtle and lyrical way. In her novels, Desai creates a rich galaxy of characters, both male and female, although she articulates especially the feminine psyche — from childhood to old age. She is a close observer of the modern sensibility as confessed in an interview, "Of course I do write of the contemporary scene and therefore the characters must contain the modern sensibility" (Sharma 40).

Desai's characters are not dumb whose problems are concerned with trivial matters as food, clothes and shelter. Instead, most of her protagonists feel alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents or other relations. They often seem to be alienated of their own selves for they are not ordinary people but individuals made to stand against the general current of life and who fight that current and struggle against it for the realization of an imagined world. Their inner world is revealed in Desai's work. She confesses, "Writing is

my way of plunging to the depths and exploring [the] underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things" (Henderson: 238).

A perfect balance of content and form is seen in Desai's psychological novels, which imposes harmony over different streams of feeling and sensibility, found in different strata of human society. These novels reveal us the meaning of 'life' as well as the best way to live it with the natural make-up. She often delves deep into the inner world of her characters and brings out many truths of psychological interest. This has helped her to mark a distinct break from the traditional themes and techniques used by the earlier Indo-English novelists who were much concerned with the social, political or moral problems that beset the characters. Desai chose new themes and characters whose presentations were more powerful than the earlier. Hariom Prasad quotes K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English*, "The inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lures or clears or rumbles like thunder on suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action" (Prasad 196). Literature, as Desai believes, should deal with the most enduring matters. Such matters are the psychic and the existential reality of the characters, their obsessions, eccentricities, tremors and traumas. "The enduring human condition" and "the emotional life" of the women characters hailing from an urban milieu are her chief concerns (Swain 204).

Part of the problems confronting her female protagonists is not peculiar, we realize, to fiction alone nor are they peculiar to the Indian women. They are part of the universal malaise afflicting women worldwide in fact and in fiction. Tensions in human relationships confined to both gender. These characters lack a sort of sensitiveness and liveliness as well. Devika quotes Dr. S.P. Swain in *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study* who observes Desai's lacunae as:

Her major novels tend to disappoint the reader due to their one-dimensional, turning the characters wooden and insensitive. They are not kaleidoscopic in their thematic projection. In most of them there is a repeated and dull harping on the isolation of the self. However, they are deeply moving in their existential and socio-psychic import. Microcosm of man's endless struggle for survival, they voice the anguished ennui of the caged bird that symbolizes the modern man. Emblems of remonstrance and psychic protest, they strive for the protection and preservation of their dignity and self-esteem in a patriarchal society (Devika 247).

Desai's attempt to underline the existential concerns that are so common to humanity, is vividly seen in her works. While trying to study the inner life of her characters she never allows them to forget about their social and familial ties. Having existential pangs, they are on a spree to find out the root cause and at least try to reach at some sort of realization about 'life'. Her works show this existential journey is spoiled by the advent of males into the lives of females. But rather than her personal opinion she is always interested in the 'Reality'. Gajendra Kumar quotes R.K. Dhawan, where Desai opines her essence, "It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels, thereby avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends on observation rather than a private vision "(Kumar 300).

Her novels reveal her involvement in the deep feelings of her women who are seen as the worst sufferers, highly suppressed by social 'tantalization' or marital discord. Such preoccupation seems quite natural on her part, for she, like her characters, is very sensitive that gives her an insight to make a very successful in-depth study of her women characters.

She illustrates, through these women, a spacious panoply of themes in her novels, ranging from leftwing politics, feminism, sexual licence, generation gaps, the persistent rivalry between marriage, career and self-fulfilment the polemics of tradition, change, religion, the ambiguities of personal and cultural liberation, the pulling tensions in familial relationships, lust, guilt, incest, female narcissism, the restlessness of intellectual women leading to self-delusion, fragmentation, schizophrenia and all the bedrock hurt connections between men and women (Krishnaswamy 239).

Desai's Style

Anita Desai is a perfect artist who makes balance between style and theme of her fictional works. Her attraction towards style is also of prime concern in her works - "[...] it is style that interests me most — and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol, word and rhythm" (Henderson 238), Desai confides. She has a marvelous mastery over language and style, fit to project feminine sensibility, her eternal theme. Her style is fit for all modes of thought and tension. Her novels as well as short stories present the thoughts, the modes and the tensions which have been brilliantly narrated with the force and deftness of a proficient writer.

Each novel of Desai is found as a masterpiece of technical skill. She gives equal importance to characterization and plot-construction. This skill has made her an 'original talent' who invents and narrates the stories as well. Here she is always aware of the suitable choice and use of the words and sentences. Her choice of suitable technique for projecting the isolation and alienation, and the spiritual desolation is always remarkable. Her novels show a great control over the imagery as well. Her craftsmanship has become effective to create certain image of the situation as:

Her diction changes from one passage to another in accordance with the changing moods and caprices of her characters. This method of psychological delineation is not entirely a new device employed by Anita, but the fact remains that the precision with which she does it is certainly a unique achievement. If her novels are psychological studies on a macro level, her short stories are certainly on a micro one (Sharma 51).

Her later novels are better structured, plotted and more implicit in psychology and characterization than the earlier one. The use of images makes the language symbolic and suggestive. Plot development is seen as a means of discovery rather than spatial progression. So fiction is a process of discovery heavily depending on simple plot elements that lead to complex situation, for Desai. As she explores the 'psychic depth' of the characters, her language tends to be situational and contextual. What is important, for her, is the appropriate use and association of the figurative languages either it be in any languages. Formal coherence and lyrical texture is one of the styles in her works. As she emphasizes, "[...] it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth, the feat of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them [...]. It can be done in any language at all only it must be done spontaneously, compulsively subconsciously, 'only connect'" (Desai 10).

The works of Desai are remarkable not only for their stylistic alchemy but also for their socio-cultural commentary on modern modes of existence. These works are an eloquent commentary on the predicament of man trapped in the human condition he cannot remedy. Her narratives dramatize the process of wounded personality as well as give shape to separateness and connectedness that emerge from a family saga. The narration is very much lively, containing verbal vibrations and closely connected as well. The scene is vividly seen for, "There is a series of flashlit scenes with vibrant nature as backdrop. Her books are

also studded with jump-cuts across place and time of extreme concision, flashbacks and flash-forwards. These qualities mixed together provide her books a film-like look" (Saxena 197).

The appropriate atmosphere, which is very helpful to the structure of the story, also provides a focus to the events and their unfolding. The presentation of physical environment works as an objective correlative, which reflects the psychological temperament of the characters. Desai's novels get a realistic depth through the coordination between the physical and psychological elements. The plot always leads the events, which are appropriately combined, as N. Pratima writes:

In the fiction of Anita Desai, the plot is not devoid of symmetry and harmony which pervade also the events of the story. No contour of the story appears disproportionate with the overall structure and pattern. In the development of the story as an organic unit, there is no mechanical juxtaposition of events. Though at some places her stories lack logical depth, yet she succeeds in creating harmony in the link of events. Taken as a whole, the plot and story in the fiction of Anita Desai do not suffer from disjointedness or unrealistic combination of events (Pratima 182).

Desai's Fasting, Feasting

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) also follows her trend of projecting the feminine sensibility and females' traumatic experiences within the patriarchal society. She focuses, here, on the incredible power of family and society, and the relationships between family members, paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society, at least.

The novel is divided into two parts. The first deals with a family in India comprising three children: Uma, Aruna and Arun, and their parents. The eldest, Uma, becomes a victim to the tendency of society to condition a girl-child to submit to the norms of the patriarchal set up. After the birth of her brother, Arun, she has to look after the child and give up her studies. Her desire to go to school and get educated remains an unfulfilled dream. Thus Uma's degradation begins. If 'happy married life' is the limit of success to the females, Aruna could be considered lucky. To fulfill his parent's dream, the only son in the family, Arun, goes to USA for higher education.

The second part deals with Patton family in USA. The family is made up of Mr. Patton, a 'barbecuing' disappointed father; Mrs. Patton, a nervous, uncertain mother; Rod, a body-obsessed, jock son; and Melanie, bulimic and anorexic daughter. They live a mechanical life where 'happiness' seems to be miles far away.

Fasting, Feasting, mainly, is the story of Uma.

Through dietary symbols Desai has effectively portrayed the spirit of two different parts of the world. Fasting symbolizes starving, or hunger of the insipid life which is certainly craving love, happiness, identity etc. closely associated to Uma and Eastern side. Feasting signifies overeating, excess enjoyment and freedom in personal life, especially of Melanie and Western side, which never bring peace and bliss. A great dilemma is created in a choice between these situations - "Of the two pointers, it is difficult to say that which one is fouler. The choice between Melanie's pool of vomit and Uma's hysteria caused by deprivation is no choice at all. We as readers can take these statements to be warning bells for cultures of extreme " (Tiwari 11).

Uma, the main protagonist of the novel, is a helpless member of an orthodox family that is again set in the parochial society. The patriarch holds the whole family in his grip and

directs them as he wishes. He wants to exercise his authority in the favour of patriarchy. Uma is the most victimized one in this set-up. Not only Uma and the females in the Indian side are oppressed by patriarchy but Melanie and her mother, Mrs. Patton in the U.S. also faces the same problem. Thus we find, " Though the culture, the setting, the socio-familial values are different, the reaction of the patriarch is everywhere the same. Mr. Patton's reaction to his wife's vegetarianism is one of indifferences, 'as if he had simply not heard, or understood'. [...] In contrasted affinity we find the subversive forces working against women both in the parochial Indian society as well as the comparatively free Western society" (Choubey 95).

Most of the women are born unlucky in the patriarchal society. Brilliant minds (of women) are forcefully crushed to enhance superiority. Choubey seems to be bitter for the situation:

The lot of women is no way better than that of tragic hero — even the most perfect of them is crushed and doomed. However, there is one clear difference — in women's case 'Hamartia' happens to be no fatal flaw of their own but the bare fact that they belong to the female sex. Anamika — the lovely, intelligent and modest cousin of Uma — presents an example of sheer sacrifice of young, talented lives at the altar of the norms of a male-dominated society (96).

Parents have lacked the sense of responsibility in *Fasting, Feasting*. Their indifference to the children and over self-indulgence in personal life leaves a bad impact on children. 'Uma' is the result of such a situation. But at the time parents are very sincere to bring up their son. The typical discrimination against a female child is clearly seen in the novel. Parents aim at promoting the education of Arun, later sending him to the U.S. for

higher education, whereas Uma's going to the convent school near to home is not permitted. The supremacy of the male child in India is one of the features of Hindu families.

J.P.Tripathi satirizes this tradition as:

The [...] adventures of the parents of Aruna and Uma lead to a delayed pregnancy and childbirth and luckily the child born is a male one. The daughters of the family are expected to help in childcare and house keeping; mother talks about the marriage of Uma. "Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house" (22). This is the lot of Indian female child, though not very bleak (Tripathi 116).

In the story of Uma, her parents are always biased against their daughters. This indifference leads Uma to be hysterical. Especially "mothers are such strong influences in the lives of their daughters that they have the power to make or mar their daughter's personality" (Choubey: 387). A good mother saves the children from emotional crisis whereas a bad one proves harmful and detrimental for the mental health of a child. The fundamental benevolence of mother helps a child to develop confidence in self and others as well. But here mother herself becomes an instrument to help patriarchy as Choubey observes:

In a patriarchal world, however mothers instead of protecting the interests of their daughters become instrumental in torturing them. Uma, a normal girl child grows into a dull, insipid shadow of a woman and going through various trials and tribulations finally attains a mental state which borders on insanity (387).

Uma develops a sense of alienation — especially maternal alienation — and finds solace in her treasury of greeting cards and later in the fantastic world of shadows with Mira-masi.

Beside the patriarchal discrimination against Uma, her own fate or destiny is responsible for the pathetic condition. Her clumsy looking, repeatedly failure in study, unsuccessful marital attempts etc. could be considered as the situation created by destiny.

Tripathi emphasizing 'destiny' writes:

Uma seems to be victimized more by her destiny than anyone else. She possesses an inferior and substandard brain, which is incapable of making her get through examinations. Her facial and bodily features are also not attractive enough to please men so that marriage offers do not fructify. When the marriage arrangement does take place it proves to be a fraud and her parents are shorn of their major part of income. They always offer a fair dowry to the aspirants for Uma's hand in marriage but in vain (118).

Unlike other women characters of Desai, who are the victims of society, Uma is not directly victimized by the society rather is made to appear a victim of her own circumstances. She is "a victim of her fate and as such she accepts her destiny quietly, ungrudgingly and tries to live like the dumb-driven cattle" (Khan 379). But she always seems to possess desires, imagination and expectation, which remain inexpressible. She is sensible as well as thinkable and aware of her existence. But she always has to tolerate all the humiliations, injustices, sufferings and miseries without raising any voice or making resistance. Uma's condition is the central theme of the novel, as Khan concludes:

Thus, the central meaning of the novel lies in the character of Uma, the woman who becomes the prototype of Sita and Draupadi in their sufferings

which they had undergone willy-nilly. Like the traditional Indian woman, Uma suffers quietly only to prove her great sense of endurance and stoic acceptance (380).

However hard Desai may try, she is seen inextricably intertwined in her concept of gender bias. She presents, here, Uma's failure in every step of life is directly or indirectly because of males and patriarchy. Her works also could be seen as gynocriticism i.e. the literature by the woman, for the woman and of the woman. Uma's existential concern is presented skillfully in the novel. She has, though, failed as a daughter, as a sister, as a student, as a perfect lady but is the only character who "wields the most desired thing in life, that is, realization" (Devika 255). Her characters have existential pangs and they are on a process to find out the root cause and reach at some sort of realization to complete their cycle of search of life.

Fasting, Feasting also is related to the 'power'. Males have exercised power for centuries upon females. Marriage for males is another opportunity where they can exercise power. Uma's parents, MamaPapa, lead a life of twins not because they love each other to such a great extent but because the father has completely overshadowed the mother. But marriage for females is the destiny traditionally offered to them by society (De Beauvoir 445). Mama, Anamika and Mrs. Patton become an instrument for their husband to enhance their superiority to other men. Asha Choubey quotes Kate Millett and clarifies the purpose of marriage as:

Marriage according to Kate Millett is a game of 'power politics'. Men marry, not because they need a companion or a soul-mate but because marriage gives them a licence to show power. Thus politics enters into marriages (Choubey 97).

Fasting, Feasting has become the story of frustrating entrapment and incarceration of the female characters. They suffer the conservatism, which is gender specific. The novel becomes a strong statement against male-chauvinism. It is also a strong voice of women for their freedom and emancipation from the patriarchal grip. Choubey sees the novel as:

Fasting, Feasting is an indictment against men who believe in holding their women in their grip, it is a statement against women who take pride in their servility, it is again an indictment against men who trade in marriages as a means of increasing money and power, it is a strong criticism against women who, like fish, devour their own frail sisters, above all *Fasting, Feasting* is a plea from a women in favour of her less fortunate counterparts (98).

Pamela Oliver finds Desai following the trend of her earlier works where family is the focused point. Oliver analyses the duty of family has become the promotion of patriarchal norms and values. Though this activity could harm the familial ties, they knowingly or unknowingly enhance the patriarchy. Oliver agrees with Shirley Chew and writes:

Anita Desai's latest novel *Fasting, Feasting* makes a return to her earlier subject of the family, "the role it plays in perpetuating a patriarchal society and the way it can blight the lives of its members both women and men" (Oliver 247).

Therefore, we can conclude that Desai's novels are psychic extravagant with compact drama within its framework. While exploring woman's predicaments:

Her prime concern is human relationship and theme is the existential pains and predicaments of women, an individual, presented in the novels as incompatible couples i.e. very sensitive wives, sensible husbands etc. (Singh 74).

II: Methodology and Tools

Feminism

The term 'feminism' indicates a socio-political movement whose objective is equality of rights, status and power for women. It also is the belief that women should have economic, political, and social equality with men. It also refers to a political movement that works to gain such equality. This movement is sometimes called the women's liberation movement or women's rights movement. Feminism, however, seeks its root from the Enlightenment (18th century) when the liberal, egalitarian and reformist ideals of that period began to be extended from the bourgeoisie, peasants, and urban labourers to women as well, its effect and prevalence was seen through 1960s which includes Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Civil Rights Movement inspired women to try to obtain better conditions for themselves through similar campaigns of mass agitation and social criticism.

Feminism sought to achieve greater freedom for women to work and to remain economically and psychologically independent of men. Feminist criticized society's prevailing emphasis on women as objects of sexual desire and sought to broaden both women's self-awareness and their opportunities to the point of equality with men. Feminism's another aim was to advance women's participation in political decision-making and all areas of public life.

The period's nascent ideas concerning women's rights were fully set forth in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in England in 1792, which has been called the manifesto of modern feminism. The book challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women receive the same opportunities as men in education, work and politics. She had described the state of ignorance in which society kept women.

Christine de Pizan may have been an isolated early voice, but Agrippa, Marguerite de Navarre, Thomas Elyot, Marie de Gourney and others were precursors of a considerable literature asserting women's rights to education, to positions of political and religious power, to all the material and spiritual benefits of civil society, and to freedom from men's domination. By the mid-seventeenth century many such arguments were based on a premise similar to Wollstonecraft's that women possessed just the same rational powers as men. Wollstonecraft began by echoing such reactionary views, which are apparent both in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and an anthology *The Female Reader* (1789). Timothy J. Reiss quotes Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* as:

"[Educate] women like men", says Rousseau, "and the more they resemble our sex the less power they will have over us." This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves. [...]. It is not empire, — but equality, that [women] should contend for' (Reiss 45).

Feminist movement, which was for the political, social and educational equality of women with men, occurred mainly in Great Britain and the United States. Feminist beliefs have existed throughout history, but feminism did not become widespread in Europe and the United States until the mid-1800's. At that time many people regarded women as inferior and less important than men. Humanism of the 18th century and the Industrial Revolution both contributed to the emergence of society from a feudal aristocracy to an industrial democracy, which also contributed feminism to be firm.

At the time, feminist leaders like Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren had demanded George Washington and Thomas Jefferson for the inclusion of women's emancipation in the constitution, in North America. The feminist movement found its track from 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Coffin Mott, and few others, in a

women's convention at New York, issued a declaration of independence for women. They demanded full legal equality, full educational and commercial opportunity, equal compensation and the right to collect wages, and the right to vote.

At first, the feminist movement concentrated on gaining legal equality —especially the right to vote, called *Suffrage*. In 1893, women in New Zealand were the first to win this right. Women in Australia, many European countries, and the United States, later, followed them during the early 1900's. The growing feminist movement sought to change society's prevailing stereotypes of women as relatively weak, passive, and dependent individuals who are less rational and more emotional than men.

A milestone in the rise of modern feminism was Simone de Beauvoir's book *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (1949, *The Second Sex*). This French writer's book became worldwide popular and raised feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for women was liberation for men too. The book narrated women's existential otherness where Beauvoir analyzes men's depictions of women in biology, psychoanalysis, history and literature. According to Catharine R. Stimpson, 'A mark of otherness is one's inability to shape one's psychological, social, and cultural identity [...]' (Stimpson 252).

The Second Sex revealed pathetic condition of women's history for the first time and gave human society a new revolutionary direction. When the book was written and for many years after, Beauvoir believed the transformation of society to be the most urgent project, on the grounds that it would bring women's full emancipation with it. The book dealt also with 'the great collective myths' of women in the works of many male writers. Beauvoir calls women, either rich or poor, white or black, to fight their battle by themselves. She argues that women have been deceived for centuries and if they have gained a little independence that is what the men gave in favour of their own comfort. Next, she explains the tragic fact

in women's life. From birth to old age, she tries to show that how a woman is made 'the other' in different roles. She analyses the view upon independent women, at last. Thus, Beauviour's errand for emancipation is for the half-world which is called 'the woman'.

In the 1960s feminism, or the women's liberation movement, experienced a rebirth, especially in the United States. The National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in 1966, advocated for such changes as abortion reform, federally supported child care centers, equal pay for women, the occupational upgrading of women, and generally removing all legal and social barriers to education, political influence, and economic power for women.

In the literary context, feminist criticism provokes a special kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice, which is committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. Its concern is not simply for gender in literature but relevant study of social, institutional and personal power relations between sexes. The deadening domesticity — the conditioning of women to accept passive roles and depend on male dominance is the concern of feminist criticism. Feminist literary criticism is closely interrelated with the political feminists movement.

The feminist movement of literary criticism is concerned with the literary representation of women and their position in the society. The movement is related with the question — What subjects, methods, and epistemologies have men used in constructing reality and how can we reveal the artificiality of their constructions?

In the United States Kate Millett published *Sexual Politics* in 1970, which according to Showalter, was 'the first major book of feminist criticism'. Millett refers 'politics' to the mechanisms which express and enforce the relations of power in society. She charges Western social arrangements and institutions for manipulating power to perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women. In the book, she attacks the male bias in

Freud's psychoanalytic theory and analyzes the texts from D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet in which the writers have degraded women as submissive sexual objects by aggrandizing their aggressive phallic selves. She uses the term 'patriarchy' i.e. rule of the father, to describe the cause of women's oppression. Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have — If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she is 'good' otherwise she is declared 'bad'. Millett reveals that power has been exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's master-piece *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) contributed much for feminism. The book appeared as a map of women writers in the nineteenth-century, their anxieties and resistances. One of their central arguments is that nineteenth-century women writers chose to express their own female anger in a series of duplicitous textual strategies. They presented both the angel and the monster, the heroine and the madwoman, for the author's self-image, which was the element of their (writers') treacherous anti-patriarchal strategies. Their work was a severe blow against patriarchy and its stereotypical presentation of literary creativity as an exclusively male prerogative, Susan and Gubar justify. The female stereotypes of 'angel' and 'monster' (madwoman) are simultaneously accepted and deconstructed in the book. Gilbert and Gubar glorifies the power of women's writings as Toril Moi sees:

[...] that *female* authors always experience anti-patriarchal rage in their hearts and that this *feminist* anger will create a typically *feminine* pattern of writing, where a shrewd strategy of disguise is used to make the message from the marginalised group acceptable to the patriarchal powers (Moi 217).

In 1983, Elaine Showalter exposed the indifference and hostility of male compilers of surveys of modern criticism who consistently exclude feminism from their anthologies. She simultaneously took Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton and charged them for what she saw as their appropriations of feminist criticism for critical theory. Showalter coined the term 'gynocriticism' to denote the study of women *as writers*. She takes this approach in *A Literature of Their Own* (1986), which examines the socio-economic conditions of British women writers and the expressions of their self-awareness.

Showalter distinguishes between two kinds of criticism: 'feminist critique' and 'gynocritics', the first dealing with women as reader and latter concerning with women as writer. She suggests that gynocriticism should illuminate every aspect of women's writing as well as develop a specific female framework for dealing with works written by women. Gynocriticism concerns with identification of distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women, for example, the domestic world including special bodily experiences. Its another aspect is to reveal the literary history of female tradition. Gynocritics want to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or "subjectivity", in thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world (Abrams 237).

Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1986) examines British women novelists since the Victorian period from the point of view of women's experience. There is not any fixed or innate female sexuality of female imagination, Showalter argues, there is nevertheless a profound difference between women's and men's writing. The system is set that male critics have been neglecting women's writing. Women write differently, she clarifies, because of their different social experiences from those of men. She divides female writers into three phases. The first, the 'feminine' phase, 1840—80, represents writers

imitating and internalizing the dominant male aesthetic standard. Next, the 'feminist' phase, 1880—1920, represents radical feminists protesting against male values. And lastly, the 'female' phase, 1920 onwards, develops the idea of specifically female writing and female experience in a phase of 'self-discovery'.

Feminist literary criticisms have a subject of their own, subject matters that are aspect of that subject, as well as a rehumanized epistemology. The subject of feminist literary criticisms appears to be not directly literature but the feminist study of ideas about sex and gender that people express in literary and critical media. Here, we should understand that sex refers to those features thought to differentiate biologically between people classified as male and female, and gender to those features thought to differentiate culturally. These nature/culture dimensions of humanity have been discriminated with the development of modern disciplines, especially the social sciences, since the seventeenth century.

The entities that populate feminist literary study are sex/gender ideas, people who express them, their effects, their media and those who study them. Feminists don't deny the biological differences between men and women. In fact, many feminists celebrate those differences. But they don't agree that such differences as physical size, shape and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women: for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders. Feminism, therefore, distinguishes between the word *sex*, which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word *gender*, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are the categories created by society rather than by nature. Thus, the object of feminist criticisms is to reveal, not additionally create, the sex/gender ideologies expressed in cultural strata.

Feminists in all fields criticize traditional methodologies for radical disjunction, objectification, dichotomization, hierarchical arrangement, faulty universalization, and effacement of important qualities. Feminism, hence, is an essential element to form the cultural epistemology as:

[It] is not merely an aspect of cultural studies, but one of its structuring principles. For example, feminism provides a model for a new way to organize cultural studies through its strong sense of the collective (Shumway 109).

First half of the seventeenth century, though, heard some voices demanding to judge women and reason closely, there was not any significant progress for almost three centuries. Throughout the period every social, political and literary efforts were made in the dominant discourse to depict women as naturally subordinate to men. It was assumed that lacking those very qualities essential to the dominance of the culture in which women might therefore only, participate but which they could never hope to 'direct' or 'lead'. The understanding that human 'nature' is largely the creation of social action and the result of particular socializing practices was now realized only at second half of the twentieth century. Timothy J. Reiss, on this context, writes:

[...] It is important to emphasize the fact that this debate respecting the status of women, the origins of which lay in the late seventeenth century, was 'not about their exclusion from culture, but about their exclusion from certain functions *within* that culture' (Reiss 14).

Male-dominated culture has been subordinating and erasing women and their lives for centuries. The patriarchal ideology even forced many women writers in Victorian England to publish their work under male pseudonyms. The society accepted the male

fabricated goods as superior and female's as inferior one. Patriarchal society has always discouraged females while male's activities are blindly supported. As a result, "This phenomenon implies that whenever patriarchy wants to undermine a behaviour, it portrays that behaviour as feminine. It is important to note, too, that the patriarchal concept of femininity — which is linked to frailty, modesty, and timidity — disempowers women in the real world" (Critical Theory Today 87).

Western philosophy has also helped to promote patriarchal ideology. Among these Freud's psychoanalysis has been castigated for its bias against females. Freud talks about female sexuality, which is, he argues, shaped by 'penis-envy'. Feminists have reacted bitterly to a view, which labels woman as passive, narcissistic, masochistic and penis envying. They wish to escape the 'fixities and definites' of theory. Those theories treat woman as nothing in herself but only measurable in relation to a male norm. Feminists argue that there is no matter of 'penis-envy' in women because women themselves have some experiences which male does not have, for example, ovulation, menstruation, gestation, parturition, and female bodily as well as psychological experiences. However, some feminists have emphasised that Freud's 'penis' or 'phallus' is a 'symbolic' concept and not a biological actuality, the dominative strategy is found in the theory. Deepa M. Ollapally is to be remembered here as she writes, "A major criticism of feminist critiques that range from liberal feminism to postmodern feminism is that the dominant realist theory has constructed an approach that builds on assumptions and explanations based on behaviours associated with masculinity" (Ollapally 12).

Jaques Derrida's deconstruction is found to be useful to feminists. It shows us the ways in which patriarchal ideology is often based on the false opposition of categories. Deconstruction refuses the sexist belief that men are naturally rational or women are

naturally emotional. For Derrida, meaning is not produced in the static closure of the binary opposition. Rather it is achieved through the 'free play of the signifier'. This logic helps feminists in the deconstruction of patriarchal metaphysics.

The French feminists have made a different identity regarding their contribution to feminism. Julia Kristeva, the French-Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst, challenges Lacanian symbolic order of language and culture based upon the phallogocentric idea (dominated by phallus logic). Femininity, for her, is that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order, as she argues that men can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order. In principle, Kristeva finds the oppression of women same as other marginalized or exploited groups. She gives emphasis on *positionality* rather than essence arguing that what is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies. The position of all *women* is marginalized to the symbolic order and to society by the patriarchal powers, which posit all women as necessarily feminine, and all men as necessarily masculine (Moi 213). Thus Kristeva's emphasis on femininity as a patriarchal construct enables feminists to counter all forms of biologicistic attacks from the defenders of phallogocentrism which defines femininity as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness — in short, as non-Being.

Helene Cixous, a prominent figure of French feminist movement, tried to produce 'feminine' writing, which could truly speak upon the woman. Her essay, 'The laugh of the Medusa' (1976) became a celebrated manifesto of women's writing. She calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing. 'Write yourself, your body must be heard', she invites women, 'only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth' (Selden 150). Influenced by the Derridian Deconstruction, Cixous suggests women to be aware of their own pleasure, libido, identity and existence to establish female superiority over males.

According to her, the transgression of the laws of phallogocentric discourse should be the women writers' special task. She bitterly criticizes phallogocentric tradition which has interrupted women's say and asks to reveal her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories, uncensor herself and finally, throw off her guilt. Helen Cixous and Julia Kristeva both argue that female sexuality is directly associated with poetic productivity.

Luce Irigaray, another star of French feminist movement, illuminates an interesting illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of an analysis focusing on femininity. Her *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974, *Speculum of the Other Woman*) is a critique of patriarchal discourse from the presocratics to Freud where she argues that throughout history the feminine has been repressed by and excluded from Western philosophical discourse (Moi 218). Whenever they tried to speak women have found themselves in a difficult position, i.e. as imitating male discourse. Gilbert and Gubar describes this difficult situation as:

[...] Like most women in patriarchal society, the woman writer does experience her gender as a painful obstacle, or even a debilitating inadequacy; like most patriarchally conditioned women, in other words, she is victimized by "the inferiorized and 'alternative' (second sex) psychology of women under patriarchy [...]" (Gilbert 1237).

Irigaray finds women's writing special for they find pleasure in touch while men are oriented to sight. Thus, women's "style" resists and explodes all firmly established forms, figures, ideas and concepts. Her assumption tends to reveal that "women's writing" challenges male monopoly for its diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure, including erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and distinctive nature of female sexual experiences. Irigaray glorifies women's situation enough for their emancipation, as Patricia Yaeger quotes her in 'When our lips speak together':

Why aspire to the heights of a worthier discourse? Erection doesn't interest us: we're fine in the lowlands. We have so many spaces to share. Because we are always open, the horizon will never be circumscribed. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves, we must invent so many different voices to speak all of 'us', including our cracks and faults, that forever won't be enough time. We will never travel all the way round our periphery: we have so many dimensions (Yaeger 192).

Both the French feminists, Cixous and Irigaray, try to invent, for women, a vocabulary of ecstasy and empowerment, a new way of reading feminine experience. They 'invoke and enact in their writings the empowering access to sublimity' (Edelman 213). Cixous and Irigaray's texts give passionate articulation to women's still brutally silenced desires for the love of other women.

Patriarchal ideology has succeeded to keep men and women in traditional gender roles, which has helped to maintain male dominance. Even in the United States, women could get an equal educational opportunity but they could not occupy the same cultural space as men. Feminists' issue might differ according to the cultural construction they are trapped within. There is a great deal of disagreement among feminist theorists and literary critics. Their views differ at — how and how much women are programmed by patriarchal ideology, whether or not there is a distinctive way of writing that might be called feminine, the ways in which various cultural factors intersect with gender in creating women's experience, just to mention a few. Though feminists disagree themselves on all the issues on feminism, they have agreed upon these common assumptions:

1. Patriarchy has oppressed women economically, politically, socially and psychologically.

2. Women are defined only by her difference from male norms. Patriarchy believes that masculine behaviour is the perfect and ideal model where woman's self is measured in relation to a male norm.
 3. Almost all civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology. From the story of Adam and Eve, traditional fairy tales and the canon of great literature, all are produced in favour of patriarchy.
 4. While our sex (male or female) is determined biologically, gender (masculine or feminine) is determined by culture. All the traits we associate with masculine and feminine behaviour are learned, not inborn.
 5. All feminist activities, feminist theory or feminist literary criticism aim to change the world by promoting gender equality.
 6. In every aspect of human production, gender issues play a vital role. Every social activity or literary creation has an impact of gendered aspect.
- (Critical Theory Today 90-91)

Thus, the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the women's movement. It is the struggle against patriarchy and sexism which advocates for women's social, economical, cultural and political freedom. David R. Shumway argues — "This position is crucial for feminism as a post-political project which seeks not merely to replace the king with a queen, but to change the behavior of men and women towards each other in all areas of human life" (Shumway 114). Feminine and masculine characteristic are not biologically determined but culturally constructed and therefore susceptible to change. Modern feminist theory and practice, however, starts from women's experience of oppression within male-dominated society but it is more than an expression of female experience as:

Feminism, then, is something *more* than the effort to express women's experience: it is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women (Moi183).

Therefore feminist movement of literary criticism, concerning with the representation of women in literature and their position in society, aims at freedom of women from the cultural restraint of society where women are captured within narrow boundaries. Feminists are not necessarily 'anti-men' but against any social system which produces female subordination. Feminism is both a political theory and practice to break the social bondage of deep-rooted patriarchy, so might be difficult in practicality. It recognizes patriarchal structure, of the society and strongly opposes the suppression of women by patriarchal domination. For the betterment of the human society, feminists argue, the equal position of men and women is the fundamental necessity. If this could be made possible then only the society would progress in a cordial atmosphere. In patriarchal society women are victimized by the parental discrimination, cultural discrimination and overall, social discrimination. Until and unless such discriminative attitude is abolished, women's equal and dignified position in the society will remain merely a daydream.

Feminism and Gender Issue

Feminism and the issue of gender are interrelated. Feminism could not get its completeness apart from gender issue. Feminist critics hold 'gender' as their primary matter for discussion. It is obvious that gender is primarily a social construct where certain roles are assigned to each gender. We could say that the sex/gender system is a literary, critical, and cultural totality as Simone de Beauvoir writes, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman [...]. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature[...]which is described as

feminine". Gender, of course, does not have any relation with human anatomy but is completely a social construct. Feminists' issue, regarding the suppression of women, is that the attitude of the society (which is biased towards men) labels certain abilities and responsibilities to each gender, where men are thought to be superior to women in every aspect. Thus, most [feminist] theorists agree in rejecting the view that gendered traits are essential aspects of being a biological male or a biological female and treat gender difference as a socially constructed mode of organizing society and culture (Longino 24).

Women in almost every culture are subordinated to men and are responsible for domestic life. This situation has stifled the actual potentiality of women. Feminist critics see this predicament as the product of gendered society and calls for women's equal position, equal opportunity and equal treatment in the society as well. Feminists believe that masculine or feminine features are merely a social construct, which could be removed in favour of gender equality. Helen E. Longino clarifies this situation as, "This constructivist conception of gender contrasts sharply with that, still characteristic of our culture, which specifies that there are two basic types of human being, male and female, and that certain traits, behaviours, and occupations are appropriate for each type: masculine and feminine are natural kinds" (24).

Feminist criticism proceeds in the traditional disciplines and in women's studies constitute a single inquiry regarding how the sex/gender system organizes every aspect of our lives, why, and what we might do to change this unwholesome situation. Mary Wollstonecraft also argued that people were products of a socio-cultural environment and tried to reconceive the culturally determined sexual division of reason and pity.

Human beings make "structure" and they themselves are trapped within it. Social structure directs every member of the society. Of course, it is very difficult to be released of

this social trap but not impossible. Feminist critics are always optimistic for the situation where gender equality, between men and women, consists. The methods of feminist literary study include specifying, patterning, and approximating systems that include us, which are employed to discover and change the gendered literary-cultural system. In other words, feminist literary critics study the manifestation of sex/gender ideas in literature and criticism. Sherry B. Ortner's *Making Gender* advocates gender as constructed phenomenon — "Within a practice framework, there is an insistence as in earlier structural-determinist models, that human action is constrained by the given social and cultural order (often condensed in the term "structure"); but there is also an insistence that human action *makes* "structure" - reproduces or transforms it, or both" (2).

The prevailing gender inequality is, in fact, an obstacle for a harmonious society. Both the suppressor and suppressed should recognize the situation. To bring women within the mainstream of the society, feminists, always, have been struggled. Both the genders' commitment as well as determination could finally be able to achieve this goal for:

[We] have "making" from the actor's point of view. The question is how actors "enact", "resist", or "negotiate" the world as given, and in so doing "make" the world. This making may turn out to produce the same old social and cultural thing — "reproduction". Or it may turn out to produce something new, although not necessarily what the actors intended (Ortner 1).

Feminist criticism is related with new subject, which was ignored by the traditional formal criticisms. It shares a subject, subject matters, methods of reasoning, and epistemology that differ from those of traditional ones. Traditional philosophies include in themselves the masculinist idea of man as self, or normative, and woman as other, or deviant. Feminist critics apply these ideas to the text to challenge the basic masculinist

assumptions behind them, in other words, challenges the weight of Western tradition.

Gender is so conspicuous in feminist criticisms precisely because it is not, yet, a recognized aspect of literature. Therefore:

Feminist critics' antipathy toward formal criticisms for precluding discussions of gender, their endowment of the linguistic medium with gender traits and their insertion of gender into discussions of authors, readers and characters confirm trouble in borrowing the traditional subject (Messer- Davidow 70).

Feminist literary critics study ideas about sex and gender that people express in literary and critical media. Gender traits, actually, originate in idea not matter. Feminist literary critics study the idea expressed by people about sex and gender. Feminist critics' subject matters are mainly — ideas about sex/gender, people who use these ideas, the effects of these ideas on people, the media of language, literature, and critics where these ideas are expressed, our self-reflexive feminist study of subjects, subject matters, methods and epistemologies, just to mention few.

Feminist study has been defined as the study of the dynamics of gender definition, inequality, oppression, and change in human societies. Gender could be the central matter for discussion in feminist studies as:

To the extent that gender is thus at the definitional center of feminist studies, "gender studies" can sometimes be used as an alternative name for feminist studies, euphemistic only in not specifying, as the "feminist" label more than implicitly does, how far inequality, oppression, and struggle between genders may be seen as differentially constituting gender itself (Sedgwick 271).

The Gender Theory, which is the most developed form of feminism, in the late 1980s tried to study sexual difference and its impact upon men and women. To provide authority to

women's writing, French feminist projected the *writing the body*, in the eighties. It was based on genital and libidinal difference of women from those of men. But "by positing the body as the source of everything French feminists return to the old myth that biology determines everything and ignore the fact that gender is a social rather than a biological construct" (Christian 233). Gender Theory emphasized that every writing, either by women or men, could be gendered and widely believes that males writing also could be feminist writing. It opposes to those feminists who believed that only women's writing to be feminist writing. Toril Moi also supports this subject as she writes, "I see no reason why a man should not proclaim himself a feminist" (181). Feminist criticism as an analysis of gender opens the textual field in discourse. Gender theory, unlike traditional feminism, brings men as theorists, critics and scholars into feminist criticism. Gender theory struggles against sexism and racism, and brings feminist criticism from the margin to the center into literary analysis. For Gayle Rubin, as Eve K. Sedgwick put it, "[...] the question of gender and the question of sexuality are inextricable in that each can be expressed only in the terms of the other, they are nonetheless not the same question "(Sedgwick 275).

We are brought up in patriarchal society, where each and every activity advocates the male's superiority and female's inferiority. So, to understand the social organization of gender it is to be remembered that we are all psychologically sexed and gendered, thus, we do not have a self apart from our being gendered. We cannot understand the psychology of men and women apart from the social organization of gender in which this psychology is produced. It is very difficult to think or speak differently where our modes of thinking and our language are patriarchal. And also, where the fabric of our existence is patriarchal it needs great effort to become non-patriarchal. Feminist critics' aim is to re-examine society's

assumption on the issue of gender. This firm construction has captured us so firmly that we need a lot of cautious attempt to talk upon this issue as Messer-Davidow reveals:

[We] could say that the sex/gender system is a literary, critical, and cultural totality. We cannot understand literature and its study apart from the fact that we as authors, scholars, and critics are gendered, nor can we understand ourselves apart from the cultural organization of gender that produces us (83).

Indian Society: A Gendered Society

The history of women has faced numerous obstacles, so it is neither linear nor well-organized. It is, in fact, an integral, though mostly invisible, part of the saga of civilization. Its threads are closely interwoven with those of culture, society, state and above all, with the lives of the people. It was only in the second half of the 19th century, when women started raising their voice for equal rights with those of men, which disturbed the deep and silent waters of Indian tradition, for the first time. Today, though there is progress in education and economy, gender discrimination and gender injustice still prevail in the society.

The Indian society could be a typical example of a gendered society. We know that gender is largely determined by one's rearing and may or may not conform to the individual's biologically determined sexual identity. In the Indian patrilineal society, while a son is treated as a permanent member of the family, a daughter is viewed as a transient member. This discriminative attitude starts with their birth and remains until the end. The Hindu law, which has its origin in ancient Sanskrit texts and old customs, also assigns special role to male and female (husband and wife) subordinating females to males.

In the Indian patriarchal society, women's duties, for example, good daughters, good wives, and good mothers, are well defined. They are supposed to behave as a candid

domestic creature where "wifedom and motherhood are accepted as pivotal roles for women: by implication, these roles complete in themselves and women need not pursue any specialized discipline of knowledge, art or profession. The good woman is sweet, gentle, loving, caring and ever sacrificing" (Desai and Thakkar 1).

Daughters in such a gendered society are regarded as a few day's visitor who will soon leave the house. Investment in daughter's education is thought to be extravagance. Girls' education is a low priority, the cost of education works as a deterrent and thus, the first casualty begins with their education. Girls have to look after the household works along with their education (if provided). They are expected to help their mothers at home whether they are going to school or not. Girls have to perform various mental, physical and social tasks as:

Many of the girls get married early and perhaps become mothers; Many girls are involved in household work, working in fields, looking after younger siblings or working in the unorganized sector. The socialization which both boys and girls receive emphasises that the home-oriented tasks are to be done by girls (D. and T. 61).

The cultural emphasis on the marriage of the daughter and her nearly permanent departure is well entrenched. There are numerous proverbs suggesting that girl is not only a temporary member, but also a bundle of anxiety, as she had to be married along with a large dowry. The growing prevalence of female foeticide and declining sex ratio show that girls are not received with pleasure in most of the families. But a son is thought to give continuity to the patriline and who could only fulfill the dreams of his parents. Both the places, either in father's home or in husband's, they are treated as outsider and do not belong to either side. They swirl in the cyclone of two families and grow up with a notion that they are temporary

members of the family. They are hardly accepted as significant member in the family. The predominant cultural value is that daughters should not make any legal claim to paternal property:

This pattern of thinking has its roots in the notion that a daughter is an outsider — someone else's property (*paraya dhan*) — and if she is given the right to inheritance, the property will go to someone else's family. This feature of patriliney leads to a number of problems which women have to face (D. and T. 74).

Girls are not only socialized into their future role, the process also distinguishes between son and daughter. Girls are invariably entrusted with the duty of looking after the younger siblings, a task not allotted to boys. Girls must regularly assist in household chores even if they are busy at outer works. They are punished more frequently than boys. In short, girls have to follow strict rules and regulations of family and society. Family is the site where one should experience security, care and happiness, but it has also turned into a place where women suffer a number of tensions. Women's work is of tremendous value to family, society and State, but it has always remained invisible.

In a gendered society, males have control over each and every vital decision, but females are given the rights to decide upon trivial matters. It is a predicament that females are compelled to thought to own those limited rights. The decision on marriage alliances of daughters and sons, buying, selling and maintaining family property, day-to-day behaviour are controlled by the patriarch in alliance with other male members. The domestic front, especially household maintenance, is in the charge of the eldest female member. It is her duty to look after the day-to-day domestic needs of family members and also to control other younger female members and teach them to follow the patriarchal rules and regulations.

Now, it is not astonishing that male members of the family have fully dominance over the female members, but females also help patriarchy to be exploited. After marriage, though all special ceremonies have been performed to incorporate a newly married bride, she is still an outsider. She has to be controlled and to be trained into the life style of the husband's family. The mother-in-law, who was once an outsider, exercises dominance over the new female entrants. She, perhaps, takes revenge of her being exploited, so repeats the same behaviour that was once shown by her mother-in-law. It is, in fact, the worst situation in Indian society.

Violence upon women, in various forms, is seen far and wide in Indian society. Its wide prevalence and pervasiveness has disturbed the society, which is also damaging women's health, psyche and perception of self. The cases of rape, dowry violence, adultery and prostitution have appeared as major problems in the society. A data shows that most of the murdered women are killed by their husbands and others by their own family members. It is extremely difficult for a wife in a traditional Hindu society to go to the court against her husband or family because of her financial dependence, lack of education and information and above all, social pressure.

The subordination of women in society acts as a structural constraint and stops women from participating in political/social or outdoor activities. Due to gender based division of labour in the family, women have to bear the full responsibilities of household chores, for example, looking after the family, management of fuel, fodder and water, cooking, rearing and education of children, entertaining guests as well as other social functions. Thus, their involvement within the house acts as an obstacle in their involvement with the outer world. Besides this chain of hurdles in women's life, they are expected to compete with men, otherwise charged to be inferior, weak and passive. It is very difficult for

women to balance between various roles. They find themselves being judged by two main standards. The first is that of femininity in the private world where she is regarded as nurturer, passive, emotional, home oriented and subordinate to men. The next is that of her modern role in the public world where she is expected to be rational, active, achievement oriented, ambitious and competitive.

In the 19th century women activist pleaded for the education of women to make them better partner for their husband; in the last century education was for their empowerment, and today they are pleading for their right to education as citizen. Educational awareness has provided better opportunities to the woman than before, but problems are precisely the same:

The modern educated Indian woman is neither happy nor contented nor socially useful. She is a misfit in life. She is highly suppressed and needs opportunities for self-expression. The new education must provide this opportunity (D.and T. 47).

During 1960s discrimination in wages, unemployment of women and health hazards were seen everywhere, but neither social scientists nor policy makers in India were alert to the increasing devaluation of women. Leela Dube, a scholar of gender socialization, disagrees with the social scientists who gave inadequate attention to the process of socialization. She tries to seek answer to the questions — What does it mean to be a girl? When and how does she learn the content of roles appropriate to her? How are women produced as gendered subjects? In short, how does the famous observation of Simone de Beauvoir , 'one is not born rather becomes a woman' gets operationalised? Desai and Thakkar further quotes Dube, "It should be kept in mind that gender differences that are culturally produced are, almost invariably, interpreted as being rooted in biology, 'as part of

the natural order of things'. However, gender roles are conceived, enacted, and learnt within a complex of relationships" (81).

Studies on different aspects of women's lives are being conducted in academia too. Now, it is expected from the researchers that they should highlight women's potentiality which has been appeared in spite of male dominance, "[There] is a feeling that researchers should not merely examine the oppression of women but also locate the areas where women have shown their strength, the spaces they have carved out for their assertions, and the empowerment they have exhibited"(D. and T. 165). And also, the time demands women to fight their battle by themselves. The knowledge, awareness and potentiality should be used to stand themselves in a dignified position in the society. Desai and Thakkar quotes Susan Faludi as she elucidates:

A backlash against women's rights succeeds to the degree that it appears not to be political, that it appears not to be struggle at all. It is most powerful when it goes private, when it lodges inside a woman's mind and turns her vision inward, until she imagines the pressure is all in her head, until she begins to enforce the backlash, too — on herself (170).

Thus, the Indian society is bounded within gender phenomenon. The discriminative attitude between men and women has become a major problem to form an egalitarian society. A woman's entire life is spent in maintaining and sustaining the family physically, emotionally and psychologically, but it is always undermined. Even now, after so many years of independence, women suffer inequality, domination and exploitation. Fundamental rights and progressive laws are limited within papers, which are almost ineffective to change the status of Indian women. Women are sometime said to be equal to men and consequently judged by the same standards, and again said to be different from men, and hence deserve

different treatment. This issue is seen more complex in post-independent Indian society 'where the legal system has evolved from a colonial system to independent rule, resulting in a curious mix of traditions, religious practices and principles of equality and rights' (D. and T. 144).

The Indian society needs reformation from the grass-root level. Gender relations in the family have to be transformed into egalitarian norms so that a woman is not sacrificed at the altar of suffering and service. It is the necessity of time — the constant challenging of the premises, the ideology and strategies, which reinforce subordination of women. The conscious formulation of a positive ideology and practices has become the primary task for the reconstruction of equality.

III: Textual Analysis

Fasting, Feasting is a novel which can be a good work of feminist reading. It is, somehow, obvious that female characters have to face many obstacles and problems in such an Indian Society of *Fasting, Feasting*. Here gender discrimination also treats males and females separately where males are always 'absolute' and females are 'subjects'.

Uma is the eldest daughter of MamaPapa in an orthodox Indian family in a small provincial town. Her marriage attempts are thrice turned in fiasco. Uma now at thirty-three, is giving her service continuously to her parents since her childhood, in accordance to patriarchal norms and values.

The series of mental as well as physical exploitation of Uma is seen throughout the opening scenes of the novel. Mama and Papa order her:

[...] Get the parcel ready for [Justice Dutt's son] to take. Get it ready, Uma'.

' First go and tell cook, Uma. Tell cook fritters will not be enough. Papa wants sweets'.

[...].'

'Yes, must be sweets. Then come back and take dictation. Take down a letter for Arun[...]' (4).

The series of orders has become a routine for Uma. She has been performing the role given by her parents for a long time. There isn't any alternative before her except going after her parents.

Papa, in the novel, has become a representative of the patriarchal empire. He examines the cases and gives verdict, which should be obeyed by other family members. A family outing on Sunday evening turns out to be more of an exercise under the strict control

of Papa and less of a pleasure trip. He has developed a superiority complex within him, so knowingly or unknowingly exercises his authority at every little opportunity. Papa gets into the front seat of the car beside the driver and waits for Mama and Uma to climb into the back (11). His place is in front of the car. This, perhaps, makes him dignified. Papa always expresses his position as a boss. While returning back to home he couldn't keep himself directing the driver who has been driving them for a long time. He orders the driver all the way home:

'Turn here. Take this turning, not that one. Faster now — stop! Don't you see the bus in front of you? All right now, quick. Faster. Oof ,so slow, so slow!'(13).

Papa and Mama have their own demarcation, which is not interfered by each other. Papa talks upon election, parliament and other high affairs. Mama is given to talk upon buying towel or the price of silver and other speck matters. They both accept and exercise their roles given by the patriarchy. MamaPapa both are contented with their roles:

If Papa gave his opinion of their local member of parliament or the chances of the government in the next election, Mama said nothing because he had spoken for her too. When Mama spoke of the sales at which she planned to buy towels or of the rise in the price of silver that made her wonder if it was time to sell her plate, Papa made assenting grunts because his thoughts were one with hers (14).

Uma and her sister, Aruna, know that the males in the family should get 'proper attention' as well as 'proper service'. Even while eating orange, Papa needs 'peeled and freed of pips and threads till only the perfect globules of juice are left' (23). He has placed himself as a 'special person' with some special rights:

The finger bowl is placed before Papa. He dips his fingertips in and wipes them on the napkin. He is the only one in the family who is given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status (24).

The decisive role is given to the elderly male member in such a patriarchal society. Females have to accept and support the verdict or decision made in the family. No excuse is granted to the member, especially female, who oppose the verdict:

The girls had learnt not to expect divergences and disagreements, and these occurred so rarely that they might not have recognised them when they did — if they had not been so acutely tuned to the temperature and the atmosphere of the house, so trained to catch the faintest inkling of any jarring, any dissonance (14).

Girls are of no significance in the patriarchal social system. They are brought up as temporary member in the family. MamaPapa also always expect to be the parents of a male child. Suddenly Mama gets a late pregnancy. Mama is frantic to have pregnancy terminated but it has to be accepted. In a male-dominated society women must always be prepared to allow their husbands to use their bodies for whatever purpose they desire. Papa is not ready to let the chance of 'a son'. After a long suffering, Mama gives birth to a son which, too, makes her happy as well as proud:

Mama's face, still tense from the difficult delivery, began to relax and broaden into long-suffering pride (17).

Papa has got his successor to perpetuate the patriarchal empire. How much eager was he to become a father of a son is vividly seen from the speech he delivered after seeing his long awaited son. Though Papa's craving for a boy hurts the daughters, he celebrates the birth of Arun:

'A boy!' he screamed, 'a bo-oy! Arun, Arun at last!' It turned out that when a second daughter had been born, the name Arun had already been chosen in anticipation of a son. It had had to be changed, in disappointment, to Aruna (17).

After the arrival of Arun, the girls, Uma and Aruna, become busier than before. Mama starts teaching Uma 'the correct way of folding nappies, of preparing watered milk, of rocking the screaming infant to sleep when he was covered with prickly heat as with a burn' (18). Uma's education has become of low priority for she has to look after her baby brother. Mama declares there is no more use of study for Uma. While she requests Mama to let her complete the school's homework she is harassed:

'Leave all that', Mama snapped at her. Uma had received such directions from Mama before; Mama had never taken seriously the need to do any schoolwork, not having gone to school herself (18).

Uma is forced to leave the school and stay at home to help with Arun. Mama, though being a female, helps patriarchal set-up to present female as a domestic creature. Not only men but women are also responsible for the degradation of their own-kind. The environment Uma gets at home tends her towards 'an abject scholar'. Her failure is enough for Mama to stop her schooling:

So now Mama was able to say, 'You know you failed your exams again.

You're not being moved up. What's the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother' (21).

Mama gets a reliable maidservant, in the form of Uma, to look after her son. Mama starts thinking upon the marriage, the destiny traditionally offered to women by society (De Beauvoir 445), of Uma and prepares her as a *woman*, who 'should learn to run the house'

proficiently. There is ayah who could help Mama to look after the baby, but Mama looks for more reliable one:

'You know we can't leave the baby to the servant', [Mama] said severely. 'He needs proper attention'. When Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies, Mama's expression made it clear it was quite a different matter now, and she repeated threateningly: 'Proper attention' (30).

After the end of her schooling, parents are in search of a suitor for Uma. Mama is unhappy with Uma for she is not able to prepare 'samosas' or 'barfi' to serve the young man. Mama, also, questions Uma's education:

'[You] were at the convent, singing those Christian hymns. You were playing games with that Anglo-Indian teacher showing you how to wear skirts [...]. Play, play, play, that is all you ever did. Will that help you now?' (76).

Uma faces terrible humiliation in the sphere of her marriage too. The first suitor is interested in her younger sister, Aruna. He behaves as if the girls are goods to consume and he has a right to choose as a consumer. The second attempt goes through with an engagement but breaks it off refusing to return a huge amount of money as dowry from Uma's Papa. At the third attempt, she is married to an aged man, Harish. At her husband's house, women start judging Uma as if she is a toy. She is stir to be judged before them:

They spoke to each other, making remarks about her complexion, her hair, her jewellery, her sari, the size of her hands and feet (91).

Uma is deceived again. Harish is already a married man. When Papa realizes that he has been duped, he brings her back and gets her divorced. Uma's disgusting life starts, henceforth, as an 'ill-fated':

Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off (96).

Humiliation is only what Uma gets from her family members, including Mama and Aruna. Aruna persuades Papa to organize a cocktail party to welcome her suitor, Arvind. Uma is appointed to fetch a fresh trayload of party snacks but she stumbles at her knee, perhaps, having an inferiority complex before the relatives and the guests. Nobody pays attention to Uma instead they are dissatisfied with her. Moreover, Aruna gives a blow:

She had spoiled the party, the cocktail party. What would Arvind's family think of them, of Aruna who had a sister who was an idiot, an hysteric? She should be put away, locked up [...] (102).

At the latter part of her age Uma gets some eye problems. The local optician suggests her to see an specialist, preferably at Bombay. When she asks Papa to let her get checked at Bombay, he bursts out:

'Harumph. No need, no need. Why waste money on a trip to Bombay? Our optician is good enough, good enough. No need to go to Bombay, no need at all. Harumph' (108).

Investment upon daughter is thought to be extravagance in a patriarchal society. Uma has spent her whole life at the service of her parents but she has no right to get a good treatment. Patriarchy has captured the thoughts and feelings of females as well within its cob-web. So, they blindly support it. Aruna also falls within this category as she supports Papa— "A specialist — in Bombay! [...] Do you know what that would *cost*?" (110).

Papa has always remained cruel towards Uma. He always wants her to behave or act as he wishes. He has tried Uma to jail within the boundaries of households, but again

charges Uma for not earning any money. This contradictory nature of father is not the matter of wonder because he thinks that he is the supreme power of the family and could argue as he wishes. Papa insensibly warns Uma for a phoning:

'Costs money! Costs money!' he kept shouting long after. 'Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend, on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I'm ruined, till I am a pauper—' (146).

MamaPapa have blocked Uma's all paths to the school. But she couldn't save her from going to the school and asks Mother Agnes, the principal of St. Mary's School, to help her re-join the school. Uma, though being an introvert girl, 'dares' to disturb Mother Agnes in her rest-room for she has 'no alternative' to it. Uma pleads with a determination before Mother, as a final attempt to re-join the school:

'But I will work very hard!' she yelled. 'I will pass next time. Please tell [Papa], Mother—I *will* pass next time!' (28).

Though Uma is seen as a submissive girl, her courage is also seen throughout the novel. A visit to the river nearby, with her brother and sister, shows her courageous nature too. In spite of boatmen's warning she tries to examine the depth of the river:

Only Uma tucked her frock up into her knickers and waded in with such thoughtless abandon that the pilgrims, the washerman, the priests and boatmen all shouted, 'Watch out! Take care, child' [...] (43).

Uma has to give up her schooling because she frequently fails the exams. But she has a determination or optimism that she '*will*' pass the exams next time. Of course she is a slow-learner but not an idiot. Her determination is, certainly, praiseworthy while she speaks after having sweets on Mrs. O' Henry's party — 'One day I will try to make it. Papa is fond of

sweets' (116). And also her curiosity is considerable while she wants to learn making Christmas cards at the party.

In the patriarchal society, females are always discouraged and underestimated. Uma never gets encouragement either from her family or from the society. Even her cousin Ramu, who himself is a club-footed, declares—'Ladies cannot carry bags for gents' (46). Of course, she has become a frog in a well who is completely banned to link with the outerworld:

She has never been to [any restaurant] in her life; how can she think of starting now when her hair is already grey (49).

This treatment has really choked women's potentiality and stopped them to compete with men. MamaPapa, in a single voice, try to stop her within the households. She has become a caged bird who always lives a fearful and depressed life. She feels freedom when MamaPapa are out of the house and amuses herself playing with the collections of cards, saris, and boxes full of matching bangles or the lace-edged handkerchiefs. Her psyche is clearly seen when she fears Papa, while making a phone call:

She fears Papa might spring out of the shadows and grasps her by the shoulder and demands an explanation for her deceit, or payment for the call (99).

Uma is living in such a fearful environment where each and every moment threatens her. MamaPapa's fearful thought warns her to feel any freedom. Aruna, as a modern lady, proposes Uma to have her hair cut, but how could she accept it:

Uma gave a shriek and ran[...]. 'Cut my hair? You can't! Mama will kill me -' (104).

The life is panic for Uma. There is neither life nor death for her. She is compelled to live a life within a quick-sand where her wishes and desires have to be chained. Dinesh, Uma's nephew, shoots off a pigeon, which struggles between life and death. Uma resembles the incident to her life where Dinesh was representing the entire patriarchy and the pigeon Uma herself and the female world:

She found Dinesh standing there with the air gun in his hand, looking down at a pigeon he had shot off the skylight ledge and which now lay dying in a tumult of bloodied feathers on the floor. It was not wounded badly enough to die and made helpless efforts to bring its wings together and rise to its feet (106).

Uma is trained for a *woman*. She has to remain within the boundary of household and learn 'how to pour a little oil on her fingertips and then massage it into the baby's limbs' (29). Her dream to re-join the school and pass the examination remains unfulfilled. Her parents are worried only upon the rearing of their son:

[Papa] would ask the questions about his son's rearing and care, [Mama] would supply the answers: all her duties and responsibilities neatly accounted for like so many laundered sheets back from the wash (31).

Before Mama and Papa 'Arun appeared to be the glue that held them together even more inextricably' (30). Both the parents are happier than before because now they have become parents of 'a son'. This achievement has helped them to gain a high class dignity in the society. Mama has become a servant to serve the patriarchal set-up who is proud of being a mother of a son. She is grateful to Papa for:

He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son.
What honour, what status. Mama's chin lifted a little into the air, she looked

around her to make sure everyone saw and noticed. She might have been wearing a medal (31).

Uma observes all the activities of MamaPapa towards her brother. She and her sister, Aruna, are not paid any attention, for they are supposed to be many times inferior to their baby brother. After the birth of Arun, MamaPapa have developed a subject of great contentment:

Uma also noticed how Mama and Papa looked upon Arun with an identical expression: a kind of nervous, questioning, somewhat doubtful but determined pride. He was their son, surely an object of pride (31).

Arun is given a special care by all the family members which was never seen before. Mama, Uma and ayah spooned mouthfuls into him, though he is not interested to eat. As he grows older he learns to exercise his power upon his sisters. He enjoys playing with Uma at the guava tree and eats green guavas but at last threatens his sister:

'Shall I tell MamaPapa what you gave me to eat?' he retaliated craftily.

'What will MamaPapa do if they know what you gave me to eat?' (34)

Papa wants his son to be a well educated one. So, he is given a 'special' care as much as possible. Arun is sent to a good school. Tutors are appointed at home in a regular sequence. Uma and Aruna are warned to keep away, not to provide the faintest distraction. But Uma often peeps Arun sitting at Papa's desk and getting tuition. Only Arun is allowed to sit upon Papa's desk because he only deserves the authority for being a male. Arun is seen as the successor of Papa's clan as well.

Arun is given all the facilities and cares available at the moment. His parents leave no stone unturned to nurture him, while his sisters are thought a few day's guests, who will leave them soon after their marriage. This sort of discriminatory activities are common in

such a male-dominated world, though it leaves a bad impact upon the life of a woman.

Fasting, Feasting shows such discriminatory acts as:

[Arun's sisters] were, after all, being raised for marriage, by Mama, competently enough, or at least as well as she could manage considering the material at hand — if there was one thing Papa insisted on in the realm of home and family, then it was education for his son: the best, the most, the highest (118).

After Arun's last examinations of the school, Papa is too much worried and tries his best to admit his son into a good university, preferably abroad. He knows that good education would make his son a competitive one. It is seen like Papa wants to fulfill his own dream, which he had under the streetlights or in the shabby district court, through his son. Papa's hustle and bustle continues rapidly for his son, his only beam of expectation:

[...] and it was Papa's busiest time, bustling around to the club, meeting old friends he had not seen in years, gathering advice, references, information, [...], filling in applications: there was no end to the paper-work involved, if Arun were to go abroad for 'higher studies' (120).

Perhaps Papa is most excited for the first time in his whole lifetime because his son could get admission abroad. He finds his dream come true. Papa is overexcited when the letter of acceptance arrives:

[He] collapsed from sheer exhaustion. He was not even able to rise to a celebration, [...]. He lay back weakly on the swing, his face grey, and allowed Mama to take over and have her way (121).

Uma has a rebellious nature too. Once, at the restaurant she enjoys a shortly freedom where 'she takes [...] shandy Ramu has insisted; she drinks and hiccups like a drunkard in a farce about fallen women' (51). She courageously tells Mama how she enjoyed at the restaurant:

Still, she insists on turning around and telling her mother, 'I had shandy to drink, Mama — and the band played — and Ramu and I danced — ' (52).

Sooner or later human instinct needs outlet if it is forcibly suppressed. Mrs O' Henry's invitation to Uma for a coffee party again becomes a matter for discussion among her parents. They object it but Uma could not save her from accepting the invitation. She flares up:

'Papa has retired — he doesn't have any work,' [...],' and still you go to dinner parties and to the club. And I don't go running after Mrs O' Henry — she invited *me* — you heard her' (113).

But Mama opines that it is not good to run around and better stay home and do her work.

Uma again argues:

'I do my work all the time, everyday,' [...]. Why can't I go out sometimes? I never go anywhere. I *want* to go to Mrs O' Henry's party' (114).

Uma's maturity adds a rebellious nature within her. She quickly accepts Mother Agnes' invitation though Papa is extremely reluctant for it. She accepts it happily for she has developed a capacity to distinguish between what she should do or not:

Uma was so wiling that she was able to ignore Papa's glare totally as she shouted into the phone, 'I'll come, Mother, I'll come' (127).

The same Uma who was charged of being submissive, inactive, hysteric, uncompetitive and so on, has developed a capacity to deny her Papa's order if ignorable or postponeable. When Papa asks her to spread out his winter woolens she simply denies it:

She gives her nose a hard rub with the palm of her hand for extra emphasis.

'Not today', she tells Papa loudly. 'Can't do it today' (134).

There is Mira-masi, a widow and a distant aunt to Uma, whom Uma trusts very much and feels free and satisfied with her company. She goes with Mira-masi at her ashram, where she enjoys freedom for the first time in her life. She is seen contented and joyous at the ashram because 'she had never been more unsupervised or happier in her life' (57). But her psyche is almost affected by the terror of patriarchal set-up. At the ashram she fears the appearance of priest as the ghost of MamaPapa:

Uma tried not to look into the priest's face, or listen to the words of the hymn either: there was an air of abandonment about them that made her feel uneasily as if MamaPapa, those enemies of abandon, were standing behind her and watching her and all of them, with scorn (58).

At the ashram she feels the marrow of enjoying freedom. She even doesn't like Mira-masi's guidance or supervision over her. Most of the day Uma spends wandering down to the river, eating green berries and enjoying the eagles soaring into the vast sky. She wishes her free and contented life as of eagles, where barriers and limitations do not exist.

Uma is a sensitive girl. In the ashram, at night, she listens the barking dogs and weaves various thoughts within her. The dark nights bring her on the surface of realities — the patriarchal society, the world of MamaPapa and her insignificant existence. The night helps her to feel herself:

Gradually the barks sank into it and drowned. Then it was silent. That was what Uma felt her own life to have been — full of barks, howls, messages, and now — silence (61).

Every human being loves freedom the most. Whether at Mira-masi's ashram or at her neighbouring aunty Mrs Joshi's, Uma is happier than at home. She was a frog in a well at her own home. She needs to be cautious at every moment, either to talk, smile or do this and that. The fear of Papa and Mama strikes her all the time. In search of freedom Uma sometimes visits Mrs Joshi where she is at her own free-will:

[...] Uma would put her arms around Mrs Joshi, nuzzling her freshly powdered neck, and tease, 'Won't you adopt me, Aunty? Won't you let me be your daughter [...]?' (131)

One needs opportunity, encouragement and the right environment, to express his/her potentiality. Uma has to give up her schooling because nobody encouraged to continue her study. Though she is labelled 'an idiot', she learns many household works within a short period, at her husband's house — "In those weeks she learnt how to cut vegetables in pieces of exactly the same size, how to grind spices into a wet paste and how to tell one dhal from another " (93).

Her courageous and challenge accepting nature is also regardable. Her trip to the river becomes much exciting to her. In spite of the boatman's cautioning she goes to the deep river where she is almost drowned but:

It was not fear she felt, or danger. Or, rather, these were only what edged something much darker, wilder, more thrilling, a kind of exultation — it was exactly what she had always wanted, she realised (111).

Every person has some weaknesses as well as some special abilities. If abilities are highlighted and encouraged she/he becomes a successful person but if weaknesses are highlighted and tried to disappoint, of course his/her potentiality is collapsed. As Dr. Dutt, in her Institute, proposes a job for Uma, Papa and Mama become suspicious and uninterested at the proposal. Dr. Dutt was 'confident' at her choice of Uma for the job:

Dr Dutt still clasped Uma's arm. 'Don't look so frightened', she urged. 'I know how well you look after your parents. I know how much you helped Mrs O' Henry with her work. I am confident you can do it' (142).

The proposal of Dr. Dutt was what Uma never aspired so high in her life, and finds the idea as novel as that of being launched into space (142). In spite of Dr. Dutt's thousands of efforts Papa and Mama do not let Uma to accept the job. Dr Dutt gives some time to rethink MamaPapa upon the proposal. Uma is enthusiastic to get the job. She has a courage to accept the challenge, so requests Dr. Dutt, 'But will the job still be there? If the Institute gets someone else — then? Couldn't you tell Mama to be quick so I can get the job?' (145).

Despite the fact that Uma is a normal child who could become a successful person in future, MamaPapa and others treat her as an idiot and humiliates her every attempt to show her actual potentiality.

Patriarchal domain not only devours, for example, a normal child Uma's potentiality and freedom but a brilliant one as well. Uma's cousin Anamika is "simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal-skinned, bumblebee-eyed, pink-lipped, always on the verge of bubbling dove-like laughter, loving smiles, and with a good nature [...]"(67). Not only her beauty is superb but she is "an outstanding student as well", moreover, a perfect combination of beauty, brain and behaviour. She does so brilliantly in her final school exams that make her win a scholarship to Oxford. But her scholarship is misused in search of a husband to her.

There is not any chance of sending her Oxford because she is a *woman*, who is compelled to be chained within the boundaries of patriarchal norms and values:

The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her, and it was what won her a husband who was considered an equal to this prize of the family (69).

After a short period of Anamika's marriage, her mother-in law and her husband start giving tortures to her. What would be the greater irony than this, where such an exemplary personality has to suffer? A brilliant mind is collapsed within the boundaries of households. Anamika becomes another victim of brutal patriarchy:

[...] Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved — or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, [...]. She herself ate the remains in the pots before scouring them (70).

Sequences of tortures against Anamika are heard again and again. Uma is shocked from all these news about Anamika, so wishes Anamika to return back to her own parents. But this is almost all impossible because a married daughter sitting with her parents is not welcomed easily in an Indian patriarchal society. The society accepts the torture upon a daughter-in-law but does not interfere the situation. This is how a patriarchal (Indian) society views a woman. Mama clarifies Uma's wishing of Anamika's return back to her parents as:

'How can she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they think?'(71)

The patriarchy lets the women only to serve the men whenever they wish. The women have been grown up in such an environment, which deeply imposes patriarchal

norms and values in their psyche. As Aruna tries to show a rebellious nature and says — "Who cares what they say? Who cares what they think?"(71), Mama scolds Uma and Aruna for their "modern ideas". Freedom of women is intolerable for Mama because she has also been a great co-operator to patriarchal norms and values.

Anamika, a brilliant mind, is jailed within the four pillars of her husband's house. She is never allowed to go out of the house except to the temple with other women. Sequences of tortures continue upon her from her husband and mother-in-law. But the society remains 'a dumb-viewer' at Anamika's sufferings. Lastly, Anamika dies at forty-five after her troublesome twenty-five years of marriage. She is burnt alive by her husband's family. But the people and the society do not try to find out the guilty, rather make an excuse that it is Anamika's 'destiny'. Even her parents say that it is 'fate' and 'God has willed it' (151).

Uma is shocked to hear Anamika's death, so says nothing upon the incident. When she is near to Anamika's ashes, she finds no difference between herself and the ashes in the jar, representing the predicament of entire female world:

Uma, clasping her knees, can feel that she is still flesh, not ashes. But she feels like ash — cold, colourless, motionless ash (152).

Hence, the first part of the novel shows Uma, Anamika, Mama, Mira-masi, Mrs Joshi and Aruna, as well, are compelled to sacrifice their private pleasure and freedom at the altar of patriarchal tyranny. Aruna is seen in a better position than others. But winning a suitable coveted groom for herself by dint of her beauty and coquetry, perhaps, doesn't stand her on a dignified position.

The second part of the novel deals with the Patton family in the United States. The Patton family also suffers from the same problem of gender discrimination as of Indian one.

Mrs Patton, an ardent vegetarian has meekly taken to non-vegetarian food because her husband thinks that is the best kind of food. She delights in filling her freezer with different cooked materials. Pattons' daughter, Melanie, becomes the victim of parental indifference. In the name of 'freedom', Melanie is ignored at home by her parents. Her insatiated desire, for parental affection and attention, makes her a victim of anorexia and bulimia. She remains hungry biologically as well as emotionally. Apart from Uma, all these female characters have made the feminist study complete by presenting various aspects of feminism.

IV: Conclusion

Gender is not biologically determined but socially and culturally constructed. Male and female's sexual difference is determined by nature or by birth, but femininity and masculinity are stamped by society and culture. Society, culture, traditional norms and mores assign certain roles to each gender. So, gender is largely determined by one's rearing. Social bias has relegated women to an inferior position in the social set-up so that they should serve the entire male-world. And also most of women are born with a stamp of ill-luck on their foreheads. The tragedy of such women is caused by the fact of their birth in a patriarchal society, which fails to respect women as individuals.

Feminists emphasize that women are not mentally different since birth. The female-child is only biologically different but the patriarchal society conditions it into being a *woman*. Such a society burdens many responsibilities on woman as Uma and even reduces a promising life to ashes as of Anamika. Uma is prohibited to dream about her freedom. Anamika's brilliance is choked after her marriage. Women have to tolerate various forms of violence within the family or outside. Though woman's entire life is spent in maintaining and sustaining the family physically, emotionally and psychologically, she is always treated as 'the second sex'.

The woman's position in the society still has not been significantly promoted. Before hundreds of years they were considered as passive and meant to fulfill male desires, which still exist in one form or the other. Even today women suffer inequality, domination and exploitation. A girl child is not only less preferred but also burdened with much responsibility right from her childhood. Her wings are so badly and pre-maturely clipped that she remains fluttering for her whole life but could not fly.

Discrimination between males and females is so much deep-rooted in patriarchal society. This discriminatory act acts as an energizing element for a male child whereas a female child finds herself in a relegated position. Arun is allowed to go to the US for the best education but Uma's going to the convent close to home is not permitted. Ramu, though is a club-footed, freely travels over the country but Anamika has to shrink within the boundary of her husband's home. Her brilliance is crushed within the burdens of households. Mama leaves all thinking and decision-making part for Papa and simply obeys him and takes pride in her servility. So females are given such a treatment in patriarchal society, which transforms them into 'inferior creature' who should find their happiness in the satisfaction and happiness of males.

Girl's education is not given any priority in a patriarchal society. Even educated parents show their primitive, rustic face today when it comes to choosing between daughter and son. The lack of any role that society accords to women except in marriage has been poignantly articulated in the personal stories of Uma and Anamika. Uma has to sacrifice her schooling to look after her baby brother and Anamika's scholarship to Oxford becomes an effective means to search her a husband. MamaPapa forget that Uma is not merely a body but a soul as well. Uma's wishes and desires never get fulfilled. Anamika's mother-in-law and husband treat her as a non-paying servant.

Uma, a normal child, becomes a patient of hysteria. Her parents' attitude never becomes positive towards her. They always want her to engage within households so that she could not 'dream'. Uma's potentiality remains hibernated because no sun-shine prevailed in her personal life. She never gets any encouragement and suitable opportunity to express her actual potentiality. Anamika, an extraordinary mind, is compelled to live a hellish life after her marriage. Mrs Joshi was regularly tortured by her mother-in-law. Mama does not

have any right over her own body. These women characters have some unique speciality and potentiality but the society never accepted them as an individual. Their potentiality has been stifled mainly because gender- discrimination either knowingly or unknowingly has imposed its order upon the society. Violence on women has also disturbed the society, which is also damaging women's health, psyche and perception of self as well.

The familial environment within patriarchal set-up is fully responsible for Uma's degradation. It is obvious that the environment and the treatment given to Uma and her brother Arun differ absolutely. Uma becomes a complete failure whereas Arun wins a scholarship in the U.S. What was needed for a successful Uma was encouragement and respect to her 'self'. The family and the society, where females are treated as inferior beings, have to bear the responsibility of Uma's transformation from a normal to a hysteric one. This is not only Uma's story but also every woman's story in the patriarchal society. In such a society she has to suffer much and compelled to give up her actual potentiality. Thus, Uma and other female characters in *Fasting, Feasting* have become the victim of so called patriarchal norms and values.

Finally, we can conclude that if society wants to progress harmoniously, it should value the woman's potentiality. If women are given non-discriminatory treatment they could contribute a lot for the society. Now, it is the time not only to examine the oppression of women but also to locate the areas where women have shown their actual potentiality. The time also demands women to fight their battle by themselves. The knowledge, awareness and potentiality should be used to stand themselves in a dignified position in the society. Lastly, gender relations in the family have to be transformed into egalitarian norms so that a woman is not sacrificed at the altar of suffering and service.

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