1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism in India is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending, social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. It is the pursuit of women’s rights within the society of India. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world. Feminist, in India seek gender equality, the right to work for equal wages, the right to equal access to health and education and equal political rights. Indian feminist also have fought against culture-specific issues within India’s patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws and the practice of widow immolation known as sati.

The question of women in India historically has always been linked to anti-imperialist struggles whether for nationhood or an ‘authentic’ Indian identity. The construction of a nationalist rhetoric that erased internal differences has been tantamount to emptying India’s history of all its internal conflicts. M. Chaudhuri asserts, “it is at once claim for a distinct non-western and brushing away of internal differences.”

A major development in the Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, an approach that seeks to project and present experiences from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensibility.

Feminists’ writings are gaining ground rapidly, in the realm of fiction. It has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the age-old patriarchal domination.

Women are by nature very sensitive and react to situations instantly. Feminist sensibility include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualistic choice and empowerment; the dominance of a paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference.

Tori Moil has defined three terms for the word Feminism: “Feminism as a political position, femaleness as matter of biology and femininity, as an art of culturally defined characteristic.” The other group who have opposed male dominated society and sought to establish their isolated world were Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath and German Grieve.
Women writers like Toru Dutt, Kamala Das and Sarojini Naidu from pre-independent India and have tried to find balance between two earlier groups.

A major development in the modern Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or women centred approach, an approach that seeks to project and present experiences from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. Feminism in Indian fiction has not developed suddenly but it has developed slowly and steadily. Kamala Markandaya in her novel ‘The Coffer Dams’ 1969, delineated the theme of East-West encounter in the form of a clash between the human values of India and the technological views of the west, as Nayantara Sahgal observes ,”A woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thing. She has to be ‘good’ and ‘good’ means virtuous in the sense of chaste. Women perhaps the last known ‘Colony ‘within the existing framework of society struggles hard to fight for her due honour, status and identity against her own intimate enemy man with and without the boundary of family’”.3

Manju Kapur describes through her protagonist i.e. Astha, “A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense”.4

As Shashi Deshpande in one of her interviews expressed her inner thinking about feminist movement as,” If others see something, feminist in my writings, I must say that it is not consciously done, it is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world”.5

A group of Indian women novelists in their in-betweens hybridity of thoughts and multi-cultural and multi-religious social dimensions have expressed effectively the women problems in general and upper middle class women in particular, While Genocritics they, too admit that many women in many countries speak the same language.

The leading Feminist women writers are:
1. Santha Rama Rau
2. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala
3. Kamala Markandaya
4. Rama Mehta
5. Arundhati Roy
6. Anita Desai
7. Shashi Deshpande

The post-independence writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala voice forth the human predicament vis-à-vis the negative social forces that subverts man’s progress.