

Chapter 3

Feminism in the Novels of Mamoni

Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai

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3.0: Introduction:

‘Feminism’ is a struggle for women’s social, economic, cultural, political etc. rights in the society. Feminism attempts to create a society where there is no difference between both the sexes. Equality between man and woman is the main issue of feminism. The feminists believe that in a patriarchal society women are treated as inferior to men in all spheres of life. Therefore they vote for the need of a movement for achieving equal rights for women.

The word ‘feminism’ comes from the French word ‘Feminisme’. Charles Fourier, a French philosopher coined the word feminism in 1837. But it was first used in English in association with the movement for equal rights for women only in 1890.

Mary Wollstonecraft, a British woman writer of the 18th century first demanded for the political rights for women in her masterpiece ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’ published in 1792. Wollstonecraft’s book was the first document where a woman writer had raised her voice for women. But feminist movement started practically in England with the publication of John Stuart Mill’s ‘*The Subjection of Women* in 1869’.

The history of feminism talks of three aspects of feminism – Individualist, Socialist and Radical feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill belong to the first group whereas Mary Angels and Virginia Woolf belong to the second. To mention Mary Angel's '*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*' and Virginia Woolf's '*A Room of One's Own*' are true documents of socialist feminism. The third one, radical feminism came into existence with the publication of '*The Second Sex*, 1949' by Simone de Beauvoir.

In India, some feminist social workers and politicians such as Medha Katkar, Madhu Kishwar and Brinda Karat have advocated for women's right in post-colonial India. Some Indian women writer's namely Amrita Pritam, Asha Purna Devi, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai etc. have brought feminist ideas to Indian literature.

In Assam, there are some writers who have expressed their concern for the position of women in a patriarchal society. These writers irrespective of sexes deal with injustice, torture, exploitation etc. done to women in their literary works. For example, Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Chandraprava Saikiani, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Homen Borgohain, Nirupama Borgohain, Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Rita Choudhury etc. expose the problems faced by women in society.

In this chapter a critical study of the selected novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai has been done from a feminist perspective. Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai have expressed feminine sensibility in their novels.

3.1: Feminism in the novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami bears a strong feminine sensibility that she conveys through her writings, especially fictions. Women occupy the central position in her fictional world. She beautifully portrays feminine sensibility in her novels. In this regard Malashri Lal, a renowned professor of Delhi University writes, “The common thread in Indira Goswami’s immensely diverse and rich oeuvre is the concern for women. In her person and in her work this is echoed multifariously.”¹ Definitely, Mamoni Raisom Goswami shows her deep concern for women but only as a humanist, not a feminist. Here, in this context Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s own idea of a feminist can be worth mentioning. In a discussion, when noted writer and journalist Chandra Prasad Saikia asked her whether it is the most essential for a woman writer to be a feminist or humanist, Mamoni Raisom Goswami replied that she must be a humanist first because feminism is only a part of humanism.²

Goswami’s novels can be discussed from this point of view.

3.1.1: Feminism in *Chenabor Shrot*:

Chenabor Shrot records the plight of the labourers working under a construction company. The labourers both male and female are engaged in an aqueduct construction on the river Chenab. The laborers, irrespective of gender, are exploited by the company. They work hard for the company. But the company has not provided

1. Malashri Lal, Indira Goswami and Women’s Empowerment, Nikumoni Hussain, ed.,

Mamoni Raisom Goswami Abha Aru Pratibha, page 313.

2. Chandra Prasad Saikia’s discussion with Mamoni Raisom Goswami (printed form), Hemanta Kr. Bharali, ed., Mamoni Raisom Goswami Rasana Samagra, page 553-557.

them with the minimum requirements for living. It can be considered as the exploitation of the poor by the rich section of the society.

Goswami has shown her feminine sensibility in this novel through her portrayal of the helpless condition of the women amidst all the exploited male and female labourers. Here in this context mention may be made of Soni, a female labourer working under the company. Soni is as helpless as the other exploited labourers who go to bed half-fed after a day's hard work. The labourers move from one place to another for their living. There lies deep a hope in their hearts that there will be sunshine one day. They hope for a fulfilled family life. But their present is unstable and insecure. They struggle for food. Soni, after the death of her second husband Gauri Sankar, lives a helpless life. Gauri Sankar was swept away by the current of the river while working. Now widow Soni has to earn her living by herself and also to feed her old father-in-law. On the other hand, she is pregnant. Soni subdues the agony of her husband's death in her heart and comes out in search of work. Looking at Soni at the work site all the other women workers feel pity for her. They ask her:

“When have you come and why?”³

Soni says: “Who will feed me otherwise?”⁴

Here, in this work place Soni meets her first husband Sibanna and avoids him first as she considers him a cheater.

3. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, *Chenabor Shrot*, page – 10

4. *Ibid.*, page – 10

The labourers live in temporary camps raised for them. They try to be happy with what they have. They have least idea of being exploited by the company. Then a pathetic accident happened in the camp has changed their mind set. Sadashiva, a worker dies in sleep when a blasting stone hit him on his belly. Here again the novelist draws attention to the forthcoming distress and insecurity in the life of Sadashiva's widowed wife and children. Sibanna tries to convince that the construction company is fully responsible for the unexpected death of Sadashiva. Therefore the company must pay compensation to the family. Sibanna plans of a strike. He thinks:

“Many people have lost their lives. The laborers are treated as insects. The proprietors are becoming millionaires. On the other hand the laborers are not getting even one tenth of the profit ---.”⁵

In this way the novelist has illustrated the problems associated with the life of the labourers.

The novelist's heart melts for Soni who is badly battered by time. She projects to show Soni a new way of life. Sibanna comes to propose Soni and apologises for leaving her to suffer alone. Sibanna is ready to accept her unborn baby. He is determined:

“---how to allow the company to prepare shoe from the new born baby's softest skin”.⁶

5. Ibid., page – 49

6. Ibid., page – 57

Sibanna decides to start his family life again with Soni. The novel has a positive message. The novelist deals with the exploitation of the labourers in the novel. At the same time she successfully exhibits the dominance of the haves on have-nots. So this novel cannot be rightly said as a novel dealing only with feminine sensibility.

3.1.2: Feminism in Nilakanthi Braja:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami explores feminine sensibility in her novel *Nilakanthi Braja*. Saudamini, the female protagonist is a young widow. She is a widow with all the human needs and weaknesses. She is also in the full bloom of youth. She craves to satisfy herself. Saudamini is not ready to compromise with her desires only because she is a widow. Eventually she falls in love with one Christian youth. But society and religions stand in her way. The orthodox Hindu society never allows a widow to fall in love. It is considered as a sin for a widow to love or to marry someone. If she does, the society labels her as a fallen woman. Saudamini's parents Dr. Raichoudhury and Anupama are orthodox Hindus who cannot accept their widow daughter's relationship with a Christian. Saudamini has to bury her desires however strong it is.

Saudamini's parents take her to Vrindaban with a hope that the holiness of it would touch her heart. They hope that Saudamini will change her mind and become a devotee of Lord Krishna. They are sure that spirituality will definitely reduce her earthly desires. But Saudamini is defeated by her desires. She fails to cope with her new environment. She fruitlessly tries to surrender herself to God.

Saudamini feels suffocated in the environment of holy Vrindaban. She has seen many distressed Hindu widows becoming Radheswamis for food and shelter in Vrindaban. Saudamini witnesses the horrible existence of the Radheswami's here.

Vrindaban fails to arouse a pious feeling in her heart that is already overwhelmed with emotion. She discloses to artist Chandrabhanu:

“Trust me, I am a woman of clay whose body and mind is still stained.”⁷

The very thought of being a Radheswami tortures her. Saudamini tries to be mentally stable. She hopes to listen to the echo of spiritual happiness at Braja. She joins her father’s hospital with a new enthusiasm as a nurse. She hopes to extract peace of mind from her work. Gradually she begins to lose interest in everything. One day in utter desperation Saudamini shouts at her parents:

“I cannot pass my whole life by the grace of others. I am not so great as you to spend my whole life doing social service. I am free. I don’t care ...”⁸

Saudamini is so desperate that she has forgotten her intuition of respecting her parents. Pointing to her father Dr. Raichoudhury, she shouts angrily:

“You are frauds! I can compare you with butchers.”⁹

Saudamini wants to escape from her pitiable condition by any possible means. She even wants to do a job in the temple to distract herself. Finally she decides to go back from Vrindaban. She says to Charan Bihari: “My time has come to go back. Are you going back?”¹⁰

7. Ibid., page – 76

8. Ibid., page – 54

9. Ibid., page – 54

10. Ibid., page – 57

Saudamini wishes to go to the Christian youth who is the inspiration of her life. She asks Charan Bihari if any woman even after having an inspiration outside has ever come to Braja in search of peace. Saudamini's question is the question of all the widows who are forced to live a lonely life against their wishes.

The novelist has used different techniques to bring out the continuous torment of Saudamini's heart. The novelist depicts another two female characters- Sashi and Mrinalini; equally deprived, desperate and frustrated. They are in search of life in Vrindaban. Both Sashi and Mrinalini are tired soldiers of life. Sashi and Mrinalini's tormented souls represent Saudamini.

Dr. Raichoudhury feels helpless as his idea of bringing a change to his daughter has failed. Being an orthodox Hindu he can never allow his widow daughter to marry a Christian. But as a father he wants to give his almost broken daughter a chance to survive. He helps Saudamini to meet her Christian lover. Here Saudamini's life takes a new turn. She meets the man for whom she has been waiting impatiently but this meeting has brought a sense of guilt to her. As a result Saudamini welcomes death by drowning in the sacred river Yamuna.

Nilakanthi Braja is typically a feminine novel. The female protagonist Saudamini is seen suffering both mentally and physically from the very beginning of the novel. Saudamini's hunger for love is the hunger of all emotionally deprived women.

3.1.3: Feminism in Ahiron:

The novel *Ahiron* depicts feminine sensibility in Nirmala, the female protagonist of the novel. Nirmala is an educated widow with high self-esteem. She

shows her courage to face the world after being a widow by joining a high school as a teacher. She tries to obtain an identity by driving a jeep in third gear on public road. She does not want to live the life of a common widow being deprived throughout her entire life. Nirmala is strong enough to withstand any adversity. She writes in a letter to Harshul Sahib:

“Of course I am lying in the ocean of deep sorrow and if you come considering it as your duty to console me, then you are in the wrong. I was ready to face this tempest and one more thing is that now I can drive a jeep in third gear on public road.”¹¹

Though Nirmala tries to prove herself strong the dark circles under her eyes, tell us about her long inward sufferings.

Nirmala, in her girlhood was very beautiful and ambitious. She had so many admirers in the town. There was one boy in her friend circle who loved her secretly. When he heard the news of her marriage being arranged with an aristocratic doctor from the town, his jealousy reached its height. He challenged her and allegedly made her naked in the market place. With this incident Nirmala's destiny had changed and she had to become wife of Pandey a tuberculosis patient. Nirmala is a victim of ill-matched marriage. With Pandey she remained unfulfilled both mentally and physically. Harshul Sahib, the manager of the company showed her sympathy with a promise to help her in need.

11. Mamoni Raisom Goswami Upanyas Samagra: Ahiron, Vol 1, page -100

Now, Nirmala as a widow expresses her desire to marry Harshul Sahib as she feels that he really loves her. Nirmala says to Harshul:

“You love me. Because you know it well that I am your first and last love...”¹²

She adds:

“If you feel that I am frustrated then you are wrong and within these seven months I have slept with two persons. Only after meeting them I have actually discovered you.”¹³

Nirmala confesses that though she has enjoyed physical love her heart is still empty. She feels that only Harshul can soothe her love sick heart. She discloses that she does not consider herself a sinner and offers him a choice.

Nirmala gets married to Harshul with a hope that she will soon be blessed with motherhood. But the sad plight of Nirmala is that she has remained childless. Her dream of being a mother remains only a dream. Nirmala in utter frustration says to Mahesh Thakur, a young engineer of the branch:

“...after coming to Harshul everyday I wait upon being pregnant...but I think...”¹⁴

Here we can understand what actually she wants to say. Nirmala fears that she will

12. Ibid., page – 101

13. Ibid., page – 101

14. Ibid., page – 113

remain sterile as Harshul is unable to give her a child. We feel pity for that brave woman Nirmala who never wants pity.

Now a days, Nirmala prefers to be alone. She has lost interest in everything. A deep pessimism has occupied her heart. She unveils her heart to Mahesh Thakur:

“...after facing so much humiliation in life I have got life and thought of holding it tightly. I thought of being relaxed from my pain of loneliness. But see what has happened. Am I not a failure. After the death of one I thought of being happy with the other person. Isn't it ridiculous? Isn't it nasty? After getting peace in the long run it seems to be worthless.”¹⁵

Harshul feels a pain to see Nirmala's frustration. He wishes to see her fulfilled. He notices the growing intimacy between Nirmala and Mahesh Thakur. Harshul instead of getting jealous technically encourages them to grow a deep relationship. It is a very crucial moment for Nirmala. On the one hand she can never think of leaving Harshul. On the other hand, she feels a nameless attraction towards Mahesh Thakur. Actually it is her dream of motherhood that drags her towards Mahesh Thakur and ultimately she surrenders to him physically. Gradually Nirmala appologises for the wrong step she has taken neglecting her culture. She starts considering her unborn baby an illegitimate one. Thus Nirmala's most desired pregnancy has brought a sense of hatred to her own life. She starts hating her bulging abdomen. She is more tormented than ever before

15. Ibid., page – 119

. Finally one day she aborts her unborn baby madly hurting it with her fist.

This is the plight of woman. Nirmala has believed that a woman has the right to choose the father for her baby. But now she suffers for her decision. Nirmala's madness to conceive is a real feminine problem. The novelist deals with this problem very sensitively.

3.1.4: Feminism in Mamore Dhara Tarowal:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami shows women's position in her novel *Mamore Dhara Tarowal* through feminine perspective. She has presented feminine sensibility through the character of Narayani in this novel. The novel depicts the daily life struggle for survival of the labourer in the course of the labour strike at the branch.

Narayani, the female protagonist of *Mamore Dhara Tarowal* is an exploited woman labourer. She works as a sweeper in the company. She is the worst victim of the strike. Narayani passes a very hard time as she has to feed her sick husband and her baby. Narayani has already lost her five years son when once they are driven away from the work place. She has seen the dreadfulness of life and death.

Narayani has lost faith in both love and life after being betrayed by a young Engineer whom she has loved as a young girl. Narayani's beauty has attracted the young handsome Engineer and they have enjoyed many intimate moments together. Suddenly, one day the Engineer has left the branch without informing Narayani. Narayani has felt like an empress who has suddenly lost her empire. She drops from her imaginary heaven again to her real hell. This incident has brought all the miseries to her life. Thenceforth Narayani is considered as a fallen woman. At this crucial time of her

life she has been married off to Sibu Dhasla, a sweeper. Here begins the sad journey of Narayani.

Narayani is somehow making her both ends meet when the strike starts. The strike has come as a havoc to the life of the daily paid labourers including Narayani. She thinks:

“Again the same situation has come, where will they go with the ailing person and her infant? How will she go to and fro in the summer heat along with her ailing husband and her infant.”¹⁶

A sudden depression and fear has made her feel freezed. Narayani has thought of suicide to put an end to her miseries. While taking a bath in the river Sai, she thinks of going to the deepest water from where she can not come back. She thinks:

“...water, up to the chest. Should she proceed? Should she go forward to the deepest water where there will be no trace of her existence.”¹⁷

Suddenly she feels as if her long hair started hissing like a furious cobra. Narayani is occupied with a strong sense of living. She has decided to live rather die in mere poverty. The strike has brought immeasurable miseries to the life of the labourers. The fire of hunger has started burning everyone. Narayani, to support her family takes her final resort to prostitution. One night, when she is caught, a few pieces of bread along with some coins are found wrapped in cloth with her. When two persons pick the

16. Ibid., page - 39

17. Ibid., page - 39

money Narayani cries:

“Give me my money you bastards”¹⁸

When they complain against her prostitution she says:

“It’s my choice if I be a prostitute. Give me my money.”¹⁹

This is the plight of Narayani, a helpless woman. She finds no way out except selling herself for some bread. She is badly beaten by her community people for bringing illfame and also for making physical relation with one manager Thakur Sahib of the company against which the labourers are on strike.

Narayani may be a sweeper or a prostitute but she has self-respect. She meets her former lover Engineer Choudhury at the time of her destitution. Choudhury offers her money as a help but she refuses him directly. She refuses to accept help even at the time of dire need from the person who has once betrayed her. She recalls:

“Yes, this is the man who once betrayed her. Isn’t for this man she has dropped from the heaven to the hell?... should she estrangle him ...”²⁰

Life becomes impossible for the laborers now due to strike. At this crucial moment of life Narayani discovers that she is pregnant. She is shocked as her sex partner Thakur Sahib is impotent. But now Narayani understands that Thakur has

18. Ibid., page - 47

19. Ibid., page - 47

20. Ibid., page - 87

deceived her. Actually Thakur is not impotent. Narayani, frustrated and enraged, one night murders Thakur with an axe while sharing the same bed with him. Narayani's act of murder is a revenge on the system which gives birth of prostitutes like Narayani for a piece of bread.

The novelist shows deep sympathy for Narayani. Narayani becomes a prostitute when there is no way left for her to support her family. Narayani's struggle is a struggle for survival only. Union leader Yashuwant understands Narayani's condition and decides to marry her after the death of her husband.

Thus *Mamore Dhara Tarowal* presents the suffering and struggle of a woman.

3.1.5: Feminism in Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* has some qualities that bring it close to a feminist novel. But it fails to be one as it lacks all the characteristics of a feminist novel. Therefore it is better to discuss it as a novel with feminine sensibility. The female protagonist Giribala is a sensitive and aggressive young widow. She raises her voice against the exploitation of woman in a patriarchal society.

Giribala tries to overstep her patriarchal boundaries and live a life of her 'very own'. She cannot say 'no' to her desires but to society. She cannot kill her 'self' but finally kills herself. She is not ready to surrender herself to the society which wants her to surrender her pleasure of life. She is not ready to live a hell like life. Giribala's defensive nature is seen even in her protest not to marry Latu Gohain from Bangara.

Giribala's mother says in this context:

“She showed her temper at the time of her wedding.”²¹

Even Giribala's mother has no consent to this wedding as she knew that the groom's moral character is loose. But she has no voice. She is subdued by the rules of the society. It is an honour to marry young Brahmin girls off before reaching puberty. Otherwise society will put shame on them. Giribala's mother says to the women gathers at her home when Giribala comes back as a widow:

“Listen, we hurried for her marriage in fear of you. Otherwise you would have informed the neighboring Gohain families that Amranga Gohain has become impure.”²²

This is the plight of woman in a patriarchal society. But Giribala dares atleast to raise voice though everybody puts a deaf ear to her crying.

Giribala is married off to that unstable man who has relations with different women. This marriage brings all the miseries to her life. She gets love neither from her husband nor her in-laws. Giribala's husband meets an unexpected death, leaving her alone to suffer more and more in life. Giribala comes back to her parents without being aware that another hell is waiting for her. On the day she comes back to her paternal

21. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah*, page - 26

22. *Ibid.*, page - 28

house one old woman says to her mother:

“...Send Giri back to her in-laws after a few days because for a woman husband’s house is heaven. A woman goes to heaven only if she dies at her husband’s house. There is no difference between a necked woman and one who leaves her husband’s house. It is horrible to be considered as naked when fully dressed.”²³

This is the reflection of the society that does not understand the pain of a woman who has lost her husband and also her unborn baby within one and half years of her marriage. Giribala reacts as a venomous snake listening to all these useless talks. She comes out of her room like a wounded tigress with her long hair loose on her back. She shouts angrily at the women:

“You have come to see me and you have seen me. Now just get lost.”²⁴

This is the outburst of a long dominated exasperation of a woman.

Giribala is on the verge of tragedy. Now she is a common widow to follow all the rules set for a Brahmin widow. Giribala’s elder brother Indranath has deep sympathy for her. Indranath atleast to give some relaxation to Giribala’s heavy heart, appoints her to assist Mark Sahib, a foreigner in his research work. In the course of their work Giribala unfolds her heart to Mark. Mark is the first outsider who has expressed his empathy for Giribala. This Mark Sahib has saved Giribala when she is

23. Ibid., page – 25

24. Ibid., page – 29

bitten by a snake. Giribala develops a passion for Mark Sahib. Now her heart waits for him.

It is the day of feast at her house. Giribala cannot take part in the feast as she is a widow. She has to take only veg food. She has almost forgotten the taste of non-veg or delicious food. The smell of cooked meat has aroused a strong sense of gluttony in her. Suddenly, she discovers a bowl full of mutton curry kept aside in a separate room. She feels tempted and voraciously eats a few handfuls of cooked meat. She feels:

“What a taste! Bah ...”²⁵

Giribala’s pleasure has lasted for a minute. She is caught redhanded and her mother has battered her badly. Her mother’s nail has torn her cheeks and shoulders. Giribala has to undergo a purification ceremony. Giribala has remained silent throughout the process of her purification. She does not feel guilty for what she is being punished. Giribala has no reaction. When she is left alone in a room following her purification ceremony, she feels crazy for Mark Sahib. She wishes to go out of her hell with Mark Sahib.

Giribala struggles to come out of her cocoon. Giribala moves freely with Mark Sahib. One day Mark has commented on her beauty. Giribala’s silent response to this comment is that of a beloved. Giribala’s cheeks turn reddish. Suddenly Giribala inquires after Mark Sahib if he has any intention of converting people to Christianity.

Giribala says to Mark:

25. Ibid., page 116

“Tell me Sahib, don’t you have any intention to convert people to Christianity? If by converting myself to Christianity I can be with you then?”²⁶

Giribala is ready to convert herself to Christianity if possible only to be united with Mark Sahib. At this moment Giribala has forgotten her religion and family. Now she wants to listen only to her inner voice. She wishes to be one with Mark by all possible means. She expresses her fear of losing Mark Sahib:

“I am afraid, you will leave.”²⁷

Giribala is crying for Mark Sahib, a Christian who is considered as untouchable by the Brahmin society. Giribala’s aunt Durga does not even let his shadow fall on her. Giribala’s mother does not offer him tea in their tumblers. Giribala, the daughter of the most respected Gohain and the head of a Vaishnavite Sattrā wants to live with that untouchable ‘Mlesh’ Mark Sahib. Giribala is actually mad with passion. She forgets her intuition and says to Mark Sahib that his Holy cross has been imprinted on her chest. Giribala says:

“Listen Sahib, the cross symbol you carry all the times has been imprinted on my chest. Your footprint is imprinted on my chest.”²⁸

But Giribala’s passionate words fail to motivate Saint Mark. Mark patiently tries to convince that she is thinking like that only because they have passed many times

26. Ibid., page – 148

27. Ibid., page – 148

28. Ibid., page – 149

together while working.

Giribala, instead of being convinced argues that she has never felt guilty of her so called sins whether of eating non-veg as a widow or growing intimacy with a foreigner. She considers nothing sinful that she does to bring happiness to her withered life. She is not ready to consider her deceased husband as God and live with his memories the rest of her life. She finds her husband even not worthy to be remembered. Suddenly, Giribala explodes like a fire saying that she cannot sacrifice her whole life for such a worthless husband. Giribala's strength surprises the readers. Giribala, only a teen ager, is still unaware of the complexities of life. But Giribala is matured with experience. Her bitter experiences have made her stronger day by day. She feels that society has done injustice to the widows like her. Therefore she feels no responsibility for that society and tries to break the boundaries. She wants a life that will never be granted to her by the society. She considers Mark Sahib as a savior. Giribala's courage has reached its height when one particular stormy night she runs to Mark Sahib with a hope to get a response from him. But as a blow to her hope, Mark Sahib has asked her to go back home. He says to her that she is breaking her age old glory. Mark even offers to lead her way back as she is impatient at that moment. But Giribala has paid no heed to his suggestion. Her action shows that she is determined to stay with him. She is not at all ready to go back to her in-laws house though it has already been decided by her family. Giribala repeatedly requests Mark to accept her but Saint Mark is not moved.

Suddenly Giribala's life takes a new turn. She is found almost naked in one rainy night with Mark Sahib. Nobody questions them or wants to discover the truth. The society considers them guilty of moral transgression. The priest prescribes a severe

penance for Giribala through 'Meshdah'. The priest has ordered to build a shed of dried plantain and dried bamboo. Giribala is ordered to get in and come out once the shed is set on fire. But Giribala decides not to live the life which is not in her own control. Therefore she, to the utter surprise of all the beholders, does not come out of the burning shed. All the people cried with fear to come her out. But she is determined not to come out. Giribala's preferred death by immolation shows her protest against the exploitation of all the widows.

3.1.6: Feminism in Chinnamastar Manuhto:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Chinnamastar Manuhto* depicts feminine sensibility in a perfect manner. It shows the plight of woman in a patriarchal society. Goswami handles the feminine issues of violence against woman very realistically.

The central theme of this novel is that of blood sacrifice in Kamakhya temple of Assam. The novel shows a protest against the blood sacrifice in the name of Goddess Kamakhya. The novel also exposes the treatment of woman in the society where women are worshipped as Goddess Kamakhya, Goddess Manasha and so on. Here are two exploited women Dorothy Brown a foreigner and Bidhibala, an Assamese girl who suffer unto death. Dorothy Brown happens to be the wife of one Henry Brown, a professor of Cotton College. Dorothy is a victim of infidelity on the part of her spouse Henry. The fact is that when once Dorothy had gone to England for treatment, her husband developed an intimacy with a khasi woman. Dorothy's female ego is hurt by

her husband's infidelity. The pain of betrayal is clearly visible in her eyes. Dorothy's eyes look like 'two stains of freezed pain'.²⁹

Dorothy comes to meet Jatadhari at Kamakhya with a belief that none but he can console her. She comes to Jatadhari in search of peace of mind. Jatadhari asks her:

“Why has she come? No peace of mind”³⁰

Jatadhari tries to console her saying that no one is happy in this world. Dorothy is not satisfied with his words and wishes to be his disciple. She starts living alone in deserted Darvanga house near Kamakhya temple leaving behind her husband. It is Dorothy's ego or self respect that makes her fearless in this foreign land to stay alone in such a desolate house. Dorothy's husband considers it as a big slap in his face. Even she disapproves her husband's watchman. Dorothy says to clerk Munchi:

“From now on I have nothing whatsoever to do with your master. I shall decide what is best for my own welfare and honour.”³¹

Dorothy's husband is infuriated by her intimacy with Jatadhari. But Dorothy without caring her husband's reputation goes away with Jatadhari from Kamakhya and returns only after six months. It has created a suspect in people about the relation between them. The changed physique of Dorothy is considered as her long sought

29. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Chinnamastar Manuhto, page – 7

30. Ibid., page – 8

31. Ibid., page – 15

pregnancy.

Dorothy who comes to Kamakhya in search of peace is disturbed heavily by external forces. One night some evil persons break into her house and attempt rape on her. Dorothy has defended herself from them and also ripped the flesh of one's cheek. Later on she stands alone in the police station to identify the culprits. Dorothy shows bravery of disowning her husband Henry who has betrayed her for another woman. Finally she is shot dead by some unknown culprits probably appointed by her husband. She has died for raising voice in a male dominated society. Dorothy's brutal killing proves that a woman's life is not better than that of a sacrificial animal.

The novel also depicts the plight of Bidhibala. Bidhibala represents another facet of feminine sensibility. Bidhibala's orthodox father, for the sake of his family's honour decides to marry her off before reaching puberty. He fixes her marriage with an elderly person already married and also having children. Bidhibala is against this marriage but her father is adamant. Now Bidhibala has come to Kamakhya along with her father to sacrifice the buffalo that her father had promised to sacrifice when her marriage is fixed. It is ironical that Bidhibala's father is going to sacrifice the buffalo for the well being of his young daughter after fixing her marriage with such an elderly person. Bidhibala's proposed marriage itself is a hell fire for her. Bidhibala's father has forcefully bought the buffalo to the temple premises. The buffalo and Bidhibala are two sides of the same coin as she is also a victim of forceful marriage. Bidhibala can never think of sacrificing an animal for the sake of her well being. Therefore she, with the help of Ratnadhar, releases the buffalo at night secretly to save the innocent animal. This release of the buffalo symbolizes Bidhibala's crave to be released from her proposed ill-matched marriage. Ratnadhar, a sensitive youth who is against animal

sacrifice at Kamakhya, is tormented by the very thought of tender Bidhibala's marriage with such an aged man. He wants to express his heartfelt love and sympathy for her. Finally, in an adverse situation he expresses his desire to marry her with a view to save her from being a victim of an ill-matched marriage. But Bidhibala's father is determined not to change his decision and curses him to die.

Bidhibala joins a group of prostitutes as a protest and goes away from Kamakhya. But Bidhibala's destiny leads her the way that no one ever thought of. She returns to Kamakhya as a dead body. One of the prostitutes informs that Bidhibala has not gone with them for prostitution. She dies of hunger as she has stopped taking food in sorrow thinking that the buffaloes have been sacrificed.

The novelist presents how innocent people like Dorothy and Bidhibala have to sacrifice their lives for the inhumanity of some people. The novel shows man's cruelty to man.

3.2: Feminism in the novels of Anita Desai:

Anita Desai, as a woman novelist concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in a patriarchal society. She is concerned with thought, emotion and sensation of her women characters. She tries to understand the problems faced by women and exposes them in her novels. Desai has strong feminine sensibility. She exposes the inner world of sensibility and turmoil inside the mind of her sensitive women characters. Desai has never claimed herself to be a feminist though feminist ideologies are found in her novels. In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, Anita Desai says, "I find it impossible to whip up any interest in a mass of women marching forward under

the banner of feminism.”³²

Anita Desai portrays her women characters with an expert hand. She excels in handling feminine temperament in her novels. For Desai, content is more important than form. She herself writes, “What is feminine in literature is not style so much as matter.”³³

Anita Desai also exposes her deep feminine sensibility through her women characters in her novels.

3.2.1. Feminism in *Cry, the Peacock*:

Anita Desai in her maiden novel *Cry, the Peacock* deals with a hyper-sensitive and cultured young woman and her psychological problems. Maya, the female protagonist of this novel has been carrying an obsession with death from her childhood. Maya is a victim of an incompatible marriage. Maya's marriage is the result of her father's deep friendship with Gautama, a lawyer. Maya's father has arranged the marriage between his daughter Maya and friend Gautama to mark their friendship. Maya suffers from this ill-matched marriage and the marriage actually fails at the end.

Maya is emotional and impractical in comparison to her rational and practical husband. They have lack of mutual understanding as there is a big age gap between

32. Dalmia, An Interview with Anita Desai, The Times of India, 29th April 1979

33. Anita Desai, Indian Women Writers, Butcher Maggie (ed.), The Eye of the Beholder: Indian Writings in English, page -58.

them. Maya lives in her imaginary world far far away from reality. She is unaware of the harsh realities of life. On the other hand Gautama has good experience of the complexities of life. Gautama pays no heed to Maya's hyper-sensitive and childish nature. Moreover, Gautama shows the least concern for her attractive physique. Hence their conjugal life becomes dull and uninteresting. The whole situation resulted in the alienation of Maya.

Maya is now a lonely, desolate and frustrated woman. She, to take a temporary relief from her miserable condition indulges herself in idle retrospection. Maya, being the daughter of a rich Rai Sahib, has passed her childhood in a very fanciful way. She recalls:

“My childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily. As a child, I enjoyed, princess like.”³⁴

Maya, whenever in sorrow wishes to be with her father for consolation. Maya as a motherless child has clinged to her father. She believes that her father can solve every problem. Actually she has father fixation. She tries to find her father image in Gautama. Gautama says to Maya:

“... a complex one ... taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration. You have a very obvious father-obsession ... which is also the reason you married me, a man so much older

34. Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, page – 41

than yourself ... unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy.”³⁵

Gautama's maturity is seen in the analysis of Maya's immature behavior. But as a husband he fails to understand her sensitive nature. Maya is a very lonely woman. Maya's childish nature and immature attitude to life is very much responsible for her loneliness and frustration. It is Maya's frustration that causes neurotic disturbances in her.

The novelist creates a gloomy atmosphere in the very beginning of the novel. She begins the novel with the death of Toto, Maya's pet dog. Maya's sadness is deepened by her pet dog Toto's death. Maya is so touched by Toto's death that she has cried for the whole day. On the contrary, Gautama is not at all touched by the death of Maya's pet dog. Gautama is only sorry that Maya has lost her play mate. But for Maya, Toto is her child substitute as she is childless. Maya reacts as a mother to Toto's death. She continues to repeat to herself meaninglessly, the fond names she has had for Toto. Maya realizes:

“Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child.”³⁶

The novelist projects the mother-child relationship between Maya and her pet dog Toto to show the importance of a child in the life of a married woman. Maya is dying for motherhood but she is not blessed with a baby. She has tried to console

35. Ibid., page – 122

36. Ibid., page - 15

herself by taking Toto in her lap. Toto's death shudders her heart. Maya feels as if she lost her own child. The death of Toto has influenced her so much that she has almost lost her mental balance.

The novelist presents Maya as an emotionally starved and sexually famished neurotic female character. Maya's feminine sensibility is to be loved by her husband. But her husband Gautama does not reciprocate her feelings. Maya is very young, beautiful and attractive. She cannot understand why her husband does not feel any physical attraction for her. Looking at her face Maya laments:

“... the round childish face, pretty ... the soft, overfull lips arched with vulnerable sweetness ... one might think it a lovable face. But it was not the face that a man like Gautama could love. He might be charmed by it, diverted for a while, but to capture him entirely ... it would have to be a finer one ... of an intellectual, refined by thought and reflection.”³⁷

Maya's inferiority complex resulted in her frustration. Gautama as a husband is unable to satisfy her by fulfilling her womanly desires. The 'woman' in Maya is hurt by the negligence of her husband. Gautama considers Maya as a pampered child. Most of the time he forgets that she is his young beautiful wife, waiting near his bed with a 'soft willing body'.³⁸

But for Maya, Gautama's tenderness works as a catharsis. Gautama does not consider sex as a part of life. But for Maya it is an important part of life where not

37. Ibid., page - 90

38. Ibid., page – 14

union but communion concerns. Moreover, she wants to transmit her thoughts to him. But Gautama is so occupied with work that he has no time for Maya. Maya's days are passed in endless waiting for him and nights, in hopelessness. Hence she becomes lonelier day by day. She complains to Gautama: "You don't speak to me". Gautama replies:

"I am so damnably busy these days, Maya." ³⁹

Maya's loneliness has intensified her obsession with death which she has been carrying in her heart from her childhood. Maya's obsession with death has started with the prediction of an Albino astrologer. The Albino astrologer has prophesied death either of Maya or her husband in the fourth year of her marriage. Maya recalls the prophecy:

"Death, to one of you when you are married and you shall be married young ... Death – an early one – by unnatural causes ... Four years after your marriage." ⁴⁰

Maya has almost recovered from her obsession when she was in her father's house. Her father had thrust the Albino astrologer's paper into fire. From that moment Maya's father has never mentioned about the prophecy, nor astrology, nor palmistry in her presence. He only asked his daughter to accept and forget. Now, being a married woman, she is again obsessed with death. Maya's unhappy married life compels her to look back as it is the fourth year of her marriage. Maya wants to share her fear with

39. Ibid., page - 145

40. Ibid., page – 30-31

her husband. But Gautama, a non-believer in such illogical superstitious fear refuses even to listen to her. He hoots at the mention of superstition. Maya says:

“Recently, I had hesitantly, fearingly attempted to take up the topic with he had disdained to discuss so puerile a subject, and dismissed it by saying, “palmistry? astrology?”⁴¹

Maya suffers alone in the lonely house. Gautama is far away from her world. Moreover, Gautama’s family is not with them. Hence living alone, she is caught in the shadow like net of the Albino astrologer. All the time Maya feels that death is lurking around her. Maya feels that her husband knows nothing of her. Her feminine ego is hurt so much when her husband shows no interest in her. She complains:

“Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing ... Nor will you ever understand ... and of how I can love. How I want to love ... when you are away from me, I want you ... you are untouched ... it is all true one of us will win, the other must lose.”⁴²

But Gautama is unable to follow her words. He considers love as a feeling without any ambition, without any desire and without any life except that which keeps it alive. Maya’s loneliness transforms her to a ‘non-existent’. She herself realizes that she is just an illusion as her name means nothing but an illusion.

It is already mentioned that Maya is so much disturbed by the prophecy as it is

41. Ibid., page – 67

42. Ibid., page – 96-97

the fourth year of her marriage and she is sure of death. She wants to live her life until death. At night Maya hears the love cries of the peacocks. The peacocks cry:

“Pia, pia’ Lover, lover. Mio, mio – I die, I die.”⁴³

The peacocks are aware of death. They dance knowing that they and their lovers are all to die when the monsoon comes. The peacocks fight before they mate. Maya trembles at the mortal agony of their cry for both lover and death. But Gautama, a detached person fails to hear them.

Maya has become almost mad. She feels that Gautama has nothing to do with her, nor with life. So, she decides to release Gautama as he has no right to live. She decides to survive. Hence Maya kills her husband as she considers him unfit to live as he has no contact with this world or with her.

3.2.2: Feminism in Voices in the city:

Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* exposes the feminine psyche of Monisha, the female protagonist. Monisha, like Maya, the protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock*, is a victim of ill-matched marriage. Unlike Maya, she suffers in a joint family of her husband. Maya has always longed for the company of her mother-in-law whereas Monisha is frightened of her mother-in-law. Both Monisha and Maya are similar in the fact that they are hyper-sensitive sterile women.

The novelist portrays Monisha as a representative of the oppressed group of young brides of India. Monisha is the young wife of middle class Jiban. Monisha is an intellectual girl. Monisha’s attitude to life can be understood from her bringing a bag

43. Ibid., page – 82

full of books with her when she first comes to Jiban's house. Jiban, a middle-class officer in a Government department fails to understand the quality of such an intellectual wife. Jiban is a dull, passive and indifferent husband. Monisha, after her marriage with Jiban has turned to be "a sleepwalker, ghost, some unknown and dread entity." ⁴⁴

The novelist shows how a young girl of promising future has lost her life after marriage. Monisha describes her plight in the following words:

"Why am I so sad? Why am I so afraid? ...They put me in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me, they can only read and misinterpret." ⁴⁵

Monisha as a girl, has dreamt to conquer the world. But her marriage with Jiban leads her to a realm of colourlessness filled with unnatural silence. Monisha has come as a bride to live with the joint family of Jiban. She is unable to adjust herself in the over-crowded family from the very beginning. The family members do not show any warmth towards her. They treat her not as one of them but as an outsider. On the other hand, her husband Jiban is never with her. Monisha's dream as a new bride shatters as she remains busy:

"... serving fresh chapatis to the uncles as they eat, of listening to my

44. Anita Desai, *Voices in the City*, page -146

45. *Ibid.*, page – 239

mother-in-law as she tells me the remarkably many ways of cooking fish, of being Jiban's wife.”⁴⁶

Monisha is confined to the four walls of her in-laws house doing household things. It is not that Monisha does not want to serve the family. But it would have been easier if the family gives her a sense of ownness. Monisha has not got any scope to realize that she is an important part of Jiban's family. For Monisha the family has remained only 'Jiban's family'.

The novelist shows how far a woman is affected by the lack of privacy through the character of Monisha. Monisha has nothing like private. Her private room is always occupied by her sisters-in-law. They often discuss about her physical problems resulted in her childlessness. Sometimes they open her wardrobe in order to inspect her collection of saris. They laugh looking at her wardrobe full of books. In these awkward moments Monisha wishes to be alone to read some books. In Jiban's house, even Monisha's overies are not her very private property. The family members discuss about her problem of infertility openly. They talk:

“No, no, the doctor has said it is not the womb. It is these tubes ... Fallopian or Pallopian ... they are blocked.”⁴⁷

Monisha's feminine ego is hurt listening to their discussion relating to her her private organs. She feels as if they struck in her face brutally with their voices. She has no room of her own where she can hide herself from their eyes. Therefore she says:

46. Ibid., page - 111

47. Ibid., page – 113

“I am glad they give me so much work to do. I am glad to be occupied in cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children’s hair ...Alone I could work better and I should feel more – whole.”⁴⁸

Monisha is tormented by her sense of ‘non-existent’. She has no child, she has not a loving husband, nor a family of her own. The ‘devil city’ Calcutta has given her so much pain in her life. Monisha has tried her best to make everyone happy in Jiban’s family. She prepares food, she massages the legs of her mother-in-laws and sings lullaby for the babies. She is a caged woman. She has no connection with the outside world except through letters. Reading one letter from Amla, her sister Monisha realizes that she is going smaller day by day in comparison to her own sister. She feels:

“... with all her talents, her career, her confidence, her gaiety, she is very large indeed, larger than I ... I am already too small to be regarded much by any one. I will be invisible yet.”⁴⁹

Monisha’s feminine ‘self’ is dwarfed by her in-laws accusation of theft. Monisha is dumbstruck with shock to know that her in-laws have blamed her of stealing her own money, Jiban’s money. The suspicion is reflected in every silent face of her family members. Monisha’s mother-in-law shouts at her:

“Money has been stolen, you know, Jiban’s money ...Only you were in

48. Ibid., page – 115

49. Ibid., page – 139

the room at that time ...I say, I will not have a thief in my house. Who is to tell who this thief is? After all, you were the only person who was in the room all day.”⁵⁰

The word ‘thief’ has burnt through her skin. Monisha eagerly looks at Jiban with a hope that he would stand by with her at least at this moment. But Jiban does not look at her being offended with her. Monisha understands that even her husband Jiban also questions her innocence. Monisha is disheartened to be regarded as of lower level. She is sad to see their low mentality to consider her as a thief. When Monisha informs Jiban that she has taken the money to pay the hospital bills of her brother Nirode, he says that she should have asked him before taking his money. Monisha feels sorry that she has no right on her husband’s money. This incident is enough to prove the lack of understanding between Monisha and Jiban as a couple.

The marital discord of Monisha leads her life to destruction. She lives a lifeless, dull and boring life. She has lost all the hopes of life. Monisha writes:

“I am turned into a woman who keeps a diary. I do not like a woman who keeps a diary. Traceless meaningless, uninvolved – does this not amount to non-existence, please?”⁵¹

Anita Desai has portrayed the mental agony of a sensitive woman continuously dwarfed by the torture at her in-laws house through Monisha. Monisha’s loneliness,

50. Ibid., page – 137

51. Ibid., page – 140

sterility and loss of self confidence have killed the inner woman in her. She has lost all the capacity to tolerate everything. Finally she in utter desperation kills herself by self immolation.

Thus, the novelist, through the character of Monisha shows the predicament of many Indian brides who suffer at her in-laws family so much that they put an end to their miseries by suicide.

3.2.3: Feminism in Bye-Bye Blackbird:

Anita Desai's feminist sensibility is found in her third novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* published in 1971. The novel depicts the tragic predicament of a very sensitive woman Sarah who is in quest of personal identity. Sarah the wife of an Indian immigrant is a victim of a male-chauvinism. Sarah suffers from identity crisis:

“She had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity and she sat there, staring as though she watched them disappear. Or could only someone who knew her, knew of her background and her marriage, imagine this? Would a stranger have seen in her a lost maiden in search of her name that she seemed, with a sudden silver falling of the light of glamour to an unusually subdued and thoughtful Adit?”⁵²

Sarah is born and brought up in England. She has learnt to live her life in an English way. Sarah gets married to Adit Sen, a born Indian working in England. Adit Sen has migrated to England in search of work. Adit is a clerk in a small tourist

52. Anita Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, page -33

agency. He has met Sarah in a cocktail party in London. Adit is impressed by her reserved nature and so he has chosen Sarah as a life partner. Adit says to Sarah:

“You are like a Bengali girl. Bengali women are like that reserved, quiet. May be you were one in your previous life. But you are improving on it – you are so much prettier.”⁵³

Adit marries Sarah only because she looks like an Indian girl. While selecting Sarah as his life partner he has not considered her identity as a born English. Adit wants her to be a Bengali wife in his house even in England. Sarah, a silent girl, follows her husband and adopts the Bengali style of cooking. She learns the Bengali cooking only for the sake of her Bengali husband. She also buys spices for cooking Indian meal. She explains to one of her friends about the properties of different spices used in cooking. She says:

“Each curry is made with a different combination of spices. Adit won’t have curry powder in the house. He flings it out of the window if I get any.”⁵⁴

Sarah suffers psychologically in the course of maintaining double identity – as an English daughter and as a wife of an Indian. Sarah becomes lifeless as a doll after her marriage with Adit. She is torn between two culture and two countries namely India and England. Sarah is humiliated by her colleagues for marrying an Indian immigrant. She works as a Secretary to the head of a school. Her colleagues torture

53. Ibid., page – 74

54. Ibid., page – 75

her mentally, unnecessarily asking her this and that about India and her Indian relatives. They ask her whether she has an Indian stamp in possession. They also ask her about 'her plans', her husbands 'plans'.⁵⁵

The English children make fun of her shouting, "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry" which sounds like "Mrs. Curry" to her.⁵⁶

Sarah suffers from identity crisis. She thinks:

"Who was she – Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari ... or Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary ... kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency."⁵⁷

Sarah pretends to be self-confident in front of other fellow English people. But actually she has lost her self confidence. After school Sarah visits the super market to buy a bottle of mango chutney. She also buys a Lyons blackberry pie so that the salesman does not suspect her identity. She knows that she will have her Patna rice and her pickles in the market but she comes back to buy them from one of the small shops.

Sarah is living with her Indian husband Adit who does not even know that Sarah is suffering from identity crisis. For him Sarah's anguish is arisen from her loneliness. Therefore he proposes her to visit her friends in the evening. Sarah refuses his idea as she is afraid to meet her old friends any more in fear of being humiliated for marrying an Indian immigrant. Adit, on their marriage anniversary asks Sarah to

55. Ibid., page – 39

56. Ibid., page – 34

57. Ibid., page – 36

wear sari and jewellery while going to enjoy their special day in an Indian restaurant. But Sarah replies in that dress she looks like a Christmas tree. Adit reacts angrily to her reply.

Sarah, like Maya and Monisha in Desai's '*Cry, the Peacock*', and '*Voices in the City*' respectively, is a victim of incompatible marriage. But unlike Maya and Monisha, she is pregnant. Sarah's longing for a Christian marriage exposes her psyche. She says:

"I've never been to a Hindu wedding so I don't know how to compare, but I do know that a Christian wedding is touching and charming and – heart-wringing." ⁵⁸

Once Sarah admits that if she had not married Adit she would have lived a free life like her English friends. Sarah and Adit seem to be two different inhabitants of two different Poles – East and West. It seems that their marriage was based on nothing. Sarah is no more capable of maintaining two different identities parallelly. She questions herself:

"Where was Sarah? ... she wondered if Sarah had any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world whether English or Indian." ⁵⁹

Sarah is exhausted of her daily quest for self-identity. Now she resolves to go to

58. Ibid., page – 186

59. Ibid., page – 36

India with her husband Adit who is also home sick these days. Even her school head, Miss Morris' offer for a better job prospect fails to motivate Sarah. She remains firm in her decision and resigns from her job. Sarah feels a bit sad to leave her job, her house and her country behind but it does not last longer. Sarah wants only a true identity and nothing else. Even her husband wishes that their son will be born in India. Sarah is going to say goodbye to her motherland. She thinks:

“... it was her English self to which she must say goodbye. That was what hurt – not saying goodbye to England.”⁶⁰

Sarah makes up her mind to welcome her new country India as it is. She is sure that in India she will feel quite at home.

Thus, Desai gives a psycho-analysis of a frustrated woman Sarah who suffers immensely at the loss of her identity in her own country. The most significant thing about Sarah is that she accepts her husband's decision to go back to his country as a devoted wife leaving behind her own motherland.

3.2.4: Feminism in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*:

Anita Desai's novel '*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*' portrays a completely different woman from those of her other women characters like Maya, Monisha and Sarah. In this novel, the novelist deals with a middle aged married woman already having four children. The female protagonist Sita is pregnant for the fifth time but she does not want to deliver her baby though she wants to keep it inside her womb. The

60. Ibid., page – 215

matter is very complex in the sense that Sita does not want to abort, nor give birth of her baby. She just wants to keep it by stopping the natural process of birth. When Sita's husband asks her whether she wants an abortion she bursts out as:

“Mad! ... you're quite mad. Kill the baby? It's all I want. I want to keep it, don't you understand?”⁶¹

The novel depicts the unhealthy married life of Sita and Raman. The marital disharmony between Sita and Raman creates problem in the day-to-day life of Sita. Sita is in the same boat with Maya and Monisha in respect of her sufferings as a wife. Sita is a very sensitive wife like Maya and Monisha. The husband-wife alienation problem lies at the root of all other troubles. Sita is a very pessimistic and whimsical woman. She is unhappy with her husband. So to say, she is quite obsessed with her charmless married life. She is tired of giving birth of children though she finds pleasure in them. Sita's husband is unable to understand her feminine self. She complains to Raman:

“What do you know about my condition? I've told you – I've tried to tell you but you haven't understood a thing.”⁶²

Sita feels that she has lost her individuality in her married life. Sita's ideology is completely different from that of Raman. Both Sita and Raman have different principles and approaches to life. Sita wishes to break the shackles and run away from this boring life. She wants to say 'No' to this bitter life with Raman and to all the

61. Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, page -31

62. *Ibid.*, page – 30

demands associated with this life. Sita is so much tormented that she finds people:

“They are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals.”⁶³

She wants to go away in search of her ‘self’.

Sita is now over-forty, grey and aging. When she lost her father in her youth, Raman’s father arranged the marriage between Raman and Sita out of pity rather than for love. She was unable to adjust herself in her father-in-law’s ‘age-rotten’ flat and also with the environment of the household. She behaved provocatively with the family members who were stolid, still and calm. She started smoking in public as an act of revolt. But the family accepted even such an outrageous outsider like Sita. When the situation goes out of control, her husband moved to a small flat with her. Therefore, it can be said that Sita’s suffering is self created. Now Sita feels that due to the lack of harmony in her marital life –

“... she lost all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it ...”⁶⁴

Sita is puzzled whether by giving birth she is performing an act of creation or destroying it by bringing to a world of violence and hatred. She becomes tired and disappointed.

Sita is determined not to bring her baby into this world where there is no love and respect. She hopes that it can only be possible at Manori island , the island of

63. Ibid., page – 43

64. Ibid., page – 50

miracles. Sita has passed her childhood at Manori, the island which was turned to be an island of magic by her father. According to Sita Manori has the magic to stop the natural process of birth. The novelist presents Sita as a neurotic woman who believes that she can keep her baby in her womb by not giving birth. She goes to Manori along with two of her children. She arrives Manori as a pilgrim 'to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn.'⁶⁵ But her dream shatters just after her arrival to find that Manori is no longer the island of her childhood. It has lost its former beauty. The island is in miserable condition. Sita's father's house is also not at all in a good condition. The house is standing alone with 'coldness, white ashes and waste'.⁶⁶ Sita's children Menaka and Karan are totally upset to come to such a deserted house in a deserted island without having any modern facility leaving behind their cosy house and family at Bombay. They sit in silence by the lantern like a pair of owls. Sita, who has come in hope of peace, feels guilty in no time for bringing her children to the island.

Sita tries to adjust with whatever she gets in the island. But her children, accustomed to the town life, feel bored and refuse to compromise. Menaka, without the conscience of her mother, writes to her father to take her back. Sita has secretly wished that Raman would miss her and come to take her back. It is obvious that being a wife she would think like that. Moreover, she is a pregnant woman living in an island where there is no hospital. So Sita expects that Raman will come for her.

65. Ibid., page – 28

66. Ibid., page – 26

Raman arrives soon after receiving his daughter's letter. When Raman arrives Sita feels excited as a young girl. The novelist explains Sita's reaction:

“... felt rising in her a positive cyclone of feminine instinct, a mental reckoning of the clothes she had with her preferring this, rejecting that, seeing herself thus. Then, with a swift onslaught of shame, she rejected such thoughts and did not change, on purpose.”⁶⁷

When Raman enters Sita feels comfort and security. She thinks that he has come to fetch her from the island. But when she comes to know that he has come on Menaka's request to take her back, she feels betrayed. She feels:

“Their betrayal had torn her open with such violence, now violence poured from her like blood. In it was also the shame, the disappointment: he had not come to see her, to fetch her, as she had supposed ...”⁶⁸

Sita's feminine ego is hurt so much that she feels more frustrated and neglected. But Raman considers her desperation as melodrama.

Sita, finally understands that she is escaping from her duties whereas Raman is performing the same wholeheartedly. Raman believes that life should go on in spite of all the barriers. Sita finally returns to Bombay with Raman from her magic island. She returns not under compulsion but deliberately to face life. Sita for the sake of her

67. Ibid., page – 119

68. Ibid., page – 122

family compromises with her situation.

3.2.5: Feminism in Fire on the Mountain:

Fire on the Mountain is one of Desai's outstanding novels where she deals with the feminine psyche of an old lady Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul has been married to one Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. Now after the death of her husband she comes to live at Carignano, a deserted house in the hill-station at Kasauli. She comes to live all alone at Carignano to lead the rest of her life as a recluse. Nanda, as a wife of a Vice-Chancellor and mother of several children has ever longed for a place of her own. She has craved for peace and solitude. Nanda Kaul has wished to be alone in some isolated place away from the hustle and bustle of the city. At Carignano she feels:

“Everything she wanted was here ... in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life ... at last she had it.”⁶⁹

The novelist, through Nanda Kaul, shows the secret of a feminine heart. As an individual, a woman also wants her own time and space. Nanda Kaul even at her old age comes to Carignano in quest of her 'self'.

Nanda Kaul feels that as a wife of a Vice Chancellor and mother of his children, she has lost her own identity as a woman; as Nanda Kaul; as an individual self. Though Nanda Kaul's identity as a Vice Chancellor's wife had coveted jealousy from

69. Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, page – 3

many but she was never proud, of herself. Actually she had never been happy with her scholar husband as he had brayed her throughout their married life.

Nanda's husband had kept Miss Davidson, a Mathematics teacher as his mistress throughout his life. Nanda's dignity as a wife was hurt at her husband's disloyalty. She suffered from negligence and betrayal. There can be nothing more painful for Nanda than her husband's infidelity. But she had never protested against it. Nanda's position had been reduced to that of a care taker than a wife and a mother in her own house. Her husband and children showed the least care for her. They did not know about the fire burning in her heart. She felt uncomfortable and isolated in her husband's house.

Nanda, a responsible woman, has lived her whole life for others and now she wants to live only for herself. She is already fed of too many of servants, guests and children. She recalls:

“The old house, the full house of that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her.”⁷⁰

She feels happy when there is no more responsibilities to carry on. Now her busy and responsible children have their own families and employments to deal with. With the death of her husband, Nanda Kaul's role as a Vice- Chancellor's wife ends. Now as a free woman, she wishes to enjoy her widowhood peacefully all alone without any kind of interference. So she has come to her Carignano house at Kasauli to

70. Ibid., page – 31

enjoy absolute solitude. She thinks:

“She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again.”⁷¹

It must be mentioned that it is not the first time that Nanda Kaul has longed for solitude or for her own private time. She had already practiced it when she was a very busy wife of a Vice Chancellor. She kept herself indoor for an hour to enjoy her own time at that time of her life when she had so many children to look after. She enjoyed her own time when there were piles of works to be done or so many orders to be given. She was determined not to respond to anything or anybody else within her hour of rest from three to four o’ clock every afternoon. Nanda Kaul announced her ‘existence’ through her ‘one hour silence’. The novelist writes:

“Everyone in the house knew it was her hour of rest, that she was not to be disturbed.”⁷²

This was her hour of private triumph.

Nanda Kaul is living at Carignano like a recluse as she has ever wished for in her life. She wants Carignano all for herself. Nanda finds the kind of solitude that she has longed for. But suddenly a letter comes to disturb the quiet stream of Nanda’s life.

71. Ibid., page – 32

72. Ibid., page – 25

Nanda thinks:

“Here was a letter and she would have to open it. She resolved to say
‘No’ to whatever demand or request it contained. No, no, no.”⁷³

Nanda has done so much to her children. She feels that her children are ungrateful to her. The letter comes from her daughter with the information that her grand-daughter is arriving at Carignano soon. Nanda is very much reluctant to involve anybody else even her great grand-daughter in her life. She does not want to take any more responsibility as she is tired now. She groans:

“Discharge me ... I’ve discharged all my duties. Discharge.”⁷⁴

Nanda understands that things are not going according to her plan. Now she is ready to welcome her great grand-daughter Raka. Through this acceptance, though reluctant in the beginning, the novelist explores another facet of feminine sensibility. When Raka arrives at Carignano, Nanda feels uneasy, secretly considering her as an intruder. Later on she feels that Raka does not want to be a part of Nanda’s life. Raka likes to live all by herself. Nanda realizes:

“If she was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and
obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by
instinct.”⁷⁵

73. Ibid., page – 14

74. Ibid., page – 33

75. Ibid., page – 52

Both Nanda and Raka do their best to avoid each other. Raka wants nothing but ‘to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli’. ⁷⁶

Nanda feels that Raka is an emotionally deprived child. Raka is deprived of parental love and care. Raka, in this very tender age, has lost faith in human relationship. Raka’s parents’ disturbed married life has the worst impact on her psyche. Raka is not at all social. Looking at Raka’s life style and love for solitude Nanda says to her:

“You really are a great grand child of mine aren’t you? You are more like me than any of my children or grand children. You are exactly like me, Raka” ⁷⁷

Now Raka the little ugly creature has aroused the mother in Nanda. Nanda feels slowly attracted to poor Raka.

The novelist tells us about Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul. Ila is also a victim of patriarchal society. She struggles for survival throughout her life. Nanda dislikes the company of Ila Das. Ila Das is a government welfare officer working against child marriage. She comes to see Nanda Kaul at Carignano. When she comes back, people laugh at her ‘odd jerky figure’. ⁷⁸

76. Ibid., page – 52

77. Ibid., page – 71

78. Ibid., page – 147

Ila has already made an enemy in the village where she is appointed as a welfare officer by an attempt to prevent his seven years daughters marriage. Preet Singh, the girl's father has already been searching for an opportunity to take revenge on her. On Ila's way back home in the evening from Nanda Kaul, Preet Sing raped her and strangulated her to death. The novelist shows the insecurity of women irrespective of age through the rape and murder of Ila Das, an aged woman.

Nanda Kaul is shocked to receive the news of Ila Das' murder. Nanda feels somehow responsible for her brutal killing. Nanda thinks that she could have stopped this violence by not letting her go back in the evening. Nanda's guilty feeling unfolds another facet of feminine sensibility again.

Nanda, being a woman, feels for another woman. Nanda behaves as if she was not ready to accept Ila Das's murder as a fact. She cries:

“No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be. It was a lie – Ila was not raped, not dead.”⁷⁹

Nanda Kaul is unable to bear the weight on her heart and dies just after receiving the news of Ila's death. At that very moment Raka enters the room to inform her 'Nani' that she has put the forest on fire.

The novelist shows the tragic life of women in her novels. Desai explains again and again how women suffer in a male-dominated society. Nanda Kaul and Raka

79. Ibid., page – 158

suffer psychologically whereas Ila Das, physically. All the women in this novel are lonely, deprived, oppressed and exploited. Raka's act of putting the forest on fire is an act of revolt. Raka's feminine sensibility to bring a change in the old order where only women suffer can be clearly seen in her bringing out her inner fire into a real one.

3.2.6: Feminism in *Clear Light of Day*:

Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* is considered as a postcolonial feminist novel. The novelist shows a strong feminist consciousness in the persona of Bimala (Bim). The novel criticizes the prevailing question regarding the position of woman in the society. Bim an Indian woman faces challenges and burdens in a patriarchal society. Bim has everything that a woman of her age desires to have. She has the potential to lead an independent life. But after the death of her parents she is forced to take the responsibility of her siblings and her widowed aunt. The novelist presents Bim the chief protagonist of the novel as a victim of circumstances.

Clear Light of Day revolves round the family of Mr. Das, an officer of an insurance company. Now, the family has four siblings – Raja, Baba, Bim and Tara along with an alcoholic aunt Mira. Baba is a mentally retarded son of Mr. Das. The novel covers the happenings in the life of the four siblings of the Das' family from their childhood to maturity.

The novelist portrays the character of Bim, the eldest sister of Raja, Baba and Tara as an aggressive and frustrated woman. Bim an ageing spinster lives in her father's old decaying house. She is presently teaching History in a college. Bim lives an ascetic life and her earthly pleasure is in buying books. Bim is a pathetic woman

without warmth and love in her life. Actually she is so much engaged with her family business that she has no time for love. Bim has to educate her siblings and help them to establish in life. She has to take special care of her mentally retarded brother Baba and her alcoholic aunt. Bim acts as both father and mother to her siblings.

Bim does not let her siblings feel insecure and helpless. She takes each and all responsibility on her shoulder. Bim sacrifices her happiness on the altar of responsibility. Bim refuses to marry her suitor Doctor Biswas with whom she could have a prosperous life for the sake of her family. Mr. Biswas remarks:

“Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others – to your sick brother and your aged aunt and, your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them.”⁸⁰

Bim thinks that Mr. Biswas cannot understand her feelings for her family members. She refuses to marry him considering him not fit for her. She thinks that after marriage Mr. Biswas might come in her way. Therefore she is afraid to bind herself in wed lock. The irony of the novel lies in the fact that inspite of all the sacrifices Bim has made, she gets nothing in return, not even a single show of gratitude from her siblings. They have no time for Bim as they are busy in their life.

Bim's elder brother Raja, after being efficient, escapes from his responsibilities towards his family. Bim hopes that Raja would take care of this fatherless family. One

80. Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, page - 148

day her dream shatters when Raja informs her that he is going to Hyderabad. He asks Bim:

“I have to begin my life sometime, don’t I? You don’t want me to spend all my life down in this hole do you? You don’t think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you?”⁸¹

Bim is shocked when Raja goes away to Hyderabad to meet Hyder Ali. Later on Raja marries Benzir, Hyder Ali’s daughter and adopts their life style. Bim’s sister Tara wants to lead an orderly life. She escapes from her boredom at her old Delhi house by getting married to one modern diplomat Bakul. Bim is left alone with her mentally retarded brother Baba. She mutters:

“So now there are just you and I left, Baba. Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone’s gone, except you and I. they won’t come back. We’ll be alone now. But we don’t have to worry about anyone now – Tara, Raja or Mira – Masi.”⁸²

The novelist shows how Bim’s feminine heart sinks to be separated from her own siblings.

Bim’s present situation has transformed her into an aggressive woman. Raja’s self love makes her feel pity for herself. Raja only cares for his own future and happiness. He has no time to think about his sister who has sacrificed her own life for bringing them up as a mother. Raja does not think twice before leaving his mentally

81. Ibid., page – 153

82. Ibid., page – 154

retarded brother on the hands of Bin who has already shouldered the responsibility of all of them. Raja's self-centred attitude irritates Bim. To be mentioned, Bim has no less potential than Raja. But Raja shines in life whereas Bim remains a dwarf under the pressure of her responsibilities. The novelist shows how a woman is ready to sacrifice herself for the welfare of her family. The novelist also shows how Bim does not complain against anyone and suffers mentally. She is tortured by the futility of her desires.

Tara comes once in a year to her parental house. Bim feels little comfort when Tara visits as it takes her back to her past. Bim wants to forget her childhood days. Tara feels nothing new in their old Delhi house as everything even the house stands as it was. Tara dislikes her mentally retarded brother Baba's repeated playing of the same old records on gramophone. She finds everything strange. She feels uneasy under the heaviness of the unchanged atmosphere of the house.

Bim accepts life as a challenge. She spends her childhood very actively as her brother Raja does. She grows to her girlhood nourishing a dream to be a heroine. Raja also wants to be a hero and his wish is fulfilled in his youth. Tara always wants to be a mother and her wish is also fulfilled. In the last chapter of the novel Tara lets us know about their childhood dreams. Tara asks Bim:

“Can you remember how we used to ask each other ‘what will you be when you grow up?’ and I only said “A mother” and you and Raja said “Hero and heroine.”⁸³

83. Ibid., page – 239

Bim replies sorrowfully that her dream has been disappeared in the bottom of the well by their house. Bim's mind occupies with a suicidal tendency at the thought of her lost dream. She says to Tara:

“The hero and the heroine – where are they? Down at the bottom of the well – gone, disappeared ... I always feel that – that I shall end up in that well myself one day.”⁸⁴

Tara is shocked to find how disappointed Bim is! Actually Tara thinks that Bim has found everything she wanted in life. Bim as a college teacher has both money and respect. She is famous among her students as a good teacher. She is also a learned person as she reads so many books. Tara fails to understand the psyche of her elder sister – who has voluntarily chosen the life of a spinster.

Bim is angry, unhappy and upset. She is restless and indifferent. Bim's behavior shows that she has lost self-control and self-confidence. Now she faces a problem regarding their insurance firm. She asks Baba to go to attend a meeting in the office even after having the knowledge that he is not mentally fit. Bim does not want to go by herself. In this problematic moment she helplessly imagines how better it would have happened if Raja had taken care of all these things.

The novelist has exposed the position of a woman in an Indian society through the character of Bim. Woman is always considered inferior to man. In a patriarchal society woman is suppressed, oppressed and exploited. The society considers woman

84. Ibid., page – 240

as fit for household works only. Bim revolts against this system:

“I don’t understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and – and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realized – and Raja doesn’t realize – that, that doesn’t prepare you for running an insurance business.”⁸⁵

Bim realizes that the society does not recognize her as Florence Nightingale or Joan of Arc for her sacrifices.

The novel ends with a positive note as Bim really comes out triumphantly as a ‘heroine’ of her conflict between hope and hopelessness; love and hatred; gain and loss.

Bim understands that she should forget and forgive. Bim changes her attitude to life. She realizes:

“Time the destroyer is time the preserver.”⁸⁶

Bim recalls how she loved Baba, Raja and Tara and all of them who lived in her house with her. She knows that there could be no love deeper than this one. They are really all parts of her, completely inseparable. Now she considers herself guilty of

85. Ibid., page – 236

86. Ibid., page – 277

whatever mistake her siblings have done. Now Bim feels only love and yearning for her siblings. Bim feels:

“ ... by the clear light of the day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, there gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect.”⁸⁷

Thus, Bim’s feminine self is enlightened by a self-less love for her siblings in particular and humanity as a whole.

3.3: Conclusion:

Thus, the novelists have presented the predicament of women in a patriarchal society. The women characters in their novels are sensitive and self defiant. The novelists bring out feminine sensibilities in their novels. Their women characters are alienated, depressed, suppressed, oppressed and exploited. Some of them are neurotic women. Their women characters are always in quest of establishing their feminine self.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami is primarily concerned with the plight of the widows whereas Anita Desai is concerned with the fate of the married women. Goswami also shows her concern for the women labourers. She brings out the feminine sensibility in the weak and dispossessed women. Anita Desai’s married women characters are victims of incompatible marriage. They sacrifice themselves in the altar of marriage.

87. Ibid., page – 251