

# Gender Studies and Indo-Canadian Literature



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Edited by

Mateti Prabhakar

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## FOREWORD

### MATETI PRABHAKAR, ED., *WOMEN'S RIGHTS, HUMAN RIGHTS*

“Women’s Rights” and “Human Rights” are the key terms to be explored in this multi-authored essay collection edited by Mateti Prabhakar; they are also the key terms needed to promote new narratives of social justice, of positive change in the lives of girls and women, and of human interrelatedness with one another and with the natural world. These are the topics addressed through a cross-cultural critical study of Canadian and Indian women’s writing, published in Britain. Many different critical approaches cohere under the banner of intersectional feminism, cultural studies, and environmentalism, always with an emphasis on textuality—the power of storytelling and the language of gender.

Mateti Prabhakar’s name is internationally known for his long research and teaching career in the fields of multicultural literature, gender studies, and human rights. I remember writing a foreword to his *Feminism/Postmodernism: Margaret Atwood’s Fiction* twenty years ago, and now he has assembled ten contributors from English, Gender, and Film studies departments in universities across India, to present a diversified perspective on key issues around women’s rights and human rights as they have evolved in our contemporary world. His five essays on Canadian and Indian women writers in this collection are evidence of his sustained commitment to the value of the humanities and to intercultural dialogue with its potential to change patterns of thought and social attitudes.

This three-part collection addressed to two different readerships, European and Indian, is an interdisciplinary study focused on literature in its many genres—women’s life writing, fiction, and poetry—plus one essay on the affective power of visual images. We are introduced to the complexities of gender politics in two different national contexts by two essays which highlight the cultural differences between concepts of feminism in Canada and India. Not only do they operate within different theoretical frameworks but also within different social and economic systems, while

there are also divisions within each national context related to structures of power. These are inevitably tied to race, class and caste, education and regional differences, not to mention new configurations of identity related to diaspora and alternative sexualities. Such is the contentious territory explored in the essays of Part 2 “Gender: Canadian Literature” and Part 3 “Gender: Indian Literature.” Differences yes, but also affinities, and it is through the genre of life writing, those I-witness testimonies by First Nations and Metis women in Canada, Aboriginal women in Australia, tribal women and transgenders in India, that cross-cultural analogies are most evident where the power politics of gender and women’s struggle for “human equality and freedom of choice” (to quote Margaret Atwood) are laid bare.

Prabhakar’s essays on the fictions of three white middle-class writers, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, and Margaret Atwood, form the core of the Canadian section as he traces shifts in Canadian attitudes to women, to human rights, and to environmentalism through these persuasive negotiators for cultural change. From Laurence, the “godmother of contemporary Canadian women writers,” whose *Manawaka* novels of the 1960s and 70s put gender issues at the centre of the social and political map, through Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) with her stories of resistance to gender socialization and discrimination, to Atwood who is now an international literary celebrity. Like Arundhati Roy, Atwood is a human rights activist and environmental campaigner as well as a creative writer, and Prabhakar’s essay “Deconstructing the Politics of Gender and Environment in Margaret Atwood’s Novels” explores her comprehensive agenda from *The Edible Woman* to her recent dystopias. His emphasis on gender politics in the first part of his essay is balanced by the second part of his essay which highlights Atwood’s environmental warnings which culminate in her speculations on global catastrophe. For these Canadian women writers, Survival, of the individual woman and of the human species, is the constant subtext.

The most intriguing section for Western readers is Part 3 with its six essays on gender politics in Indian literature—so many texts unfamiliar to many of us, such diversity of form and language, for some of these women work in regional languages which we can read only in English translation. Our first impression is that Indian women’s struggles for their human rights are positioned in a different context of religious and social traditions and of more rigid gender norms, where female heroism often takes the form of resistance to physical violence and psychological abuse, especially inflicted on underprivileged women. Goddesses and witches are not



familiar feminine icons in popular Western culture—at least, not on the surface—though stories like Mahasweta Devi’s “Breast Stories” discussed by Prabhakar, and the publicly framed images of Irom Sharmila’s sacrificial body are strong reminders of what lies in the depths of rape culture as it is practised across national boundaries. Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, addressed to a global readership, exposes the workings of power and its abuses against those human beings who are voiceless and powerless to control their own destinies, for she insists that storytelling remains a powerful tool for social transformation.

And there is hope, which is after all Mateti Prabhakar’s motivation in assembling these essays to promote cross-cultural understanding, but that hope may be “hedged about with barbed wire,” as Ursula Le Guin said of Atwood’s dystopias. The final essay on the biography of India’s first transgender college principal published in 2017 switches the narrative with a shining example of positive change in attitudes to gender and alternative sexualities, where conventional gender boundaries become fluid when seen from a trans-feminist perspective. It is towards the recognition of diversity and inclusiveness, to tell new stories about what it means to be human, that this collaborative project is directed. It is a wake-up call to find a way forward from legacies of sexism and violence where women’s rights will be recognised as basic human rights.

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# GENDER STUDIES: CANADIAN AND INDIAN LITERATURES: AN INTRODUCTION

M. PRABHAKAR

Potentially, feminist criticism can be engaged in one of the most important jobs in any intellectual activity—that of the critical interrogation of ideology for a readership who can seize on images and ideas for feminist action. Within the space of feminist criticism, feminists can explore a huge variety of cultural symbols and motifs in articulating their personal reading experiences. Feminist criticism can be nothing less than the political appropriation of culture. It could be a land of golden voices.

—Maggie Humm

The term “Indo-Canadian” is used in the title of this book in a much broader sense to signify the trends of Gender Studies in Canadian and Indian literatures. The broad aim of the book is to explore the complex problem of gender discrimination and gender victimization as manifested in the fictional world of Canadian and Indian women writers. The history of the patriarchy is the history of the gender-based barbarities and cruelties perpetuated since time immemorial. The patriarchy has a history of 2500 years. The policy of patriarchy is to advocate male supremacy. This is a male-focused culture which is a primary force in the gender socialization. Gender as a social construct is the creation of a culture that causes inequality and the subjugation of women in society. Unfortunately, girl children are the victims of gendering or gender indoctrination, which is due to the ideology of patriarchal society. Phallocentric culture has institutionalized gender discrimination against girl children from the cradle to the grave. Both Canadian and Indian societies carry the enormous burden of gender discrimination. The problem of gender discrimination arises out of the gender politics of patriarchal society. Gender politics play a key role in fulfilling cultural politics through the socialization of gender ideology. Gender culture is prevalent in both Canadian and Indian societies. The problem of gender discrimination is related to the area of Gender Studies. Gender Studies is the systematic study of the problem of

gender culture. Gender culture is at the heart of a heartless male chauvinistic and sexist patriarchal society. Feminist activists and fiction writers have questioned the culture that has victimized girl children for centuries. This book aims at examining Canadian and Indian women's writing and feminist activism. The feminist cultural and literary studies that have so far been undertaken in Canada and India have not adequately explored the gender victimization of girls and women in their respective societies.

This book has been planned with a sense of commitment to the cause of girls and women who are the victims of a gender culture institutionalized by a patriarchal society. We need to change their destiny and liberate them from the chains of domestic slavery since they are our mothers and daughters. The study seeks to throw new light on the history of the feminist movement, women's liberation, and annihilation of gender culture, caste, class, race, and religion. This study contributes to the corpus of feminist studies in Canada and India and provides a broader understanding of gender, caste, class, race, and religion. This book has been designed with the following objectives in mind:

1. To disseminate an awareness of the gender victimization of girls and women in Canadian and Indian societies.
2. To make a scholarly contribution to the improvement of the conditions of girls and women, which is gradually taking place in society.
3. To uphold the human rights of girls and women.
4. To develop a cross-cultural understanding of the Canadian and Indian societies.

Ideologically speaking, Indian and Canadian societies have, to a large extent, been plagued by various socio-cultural problems, such as caste, class, sex, gender, religion, and race. Indian girls and women are not only the victims of gender politics but also the victims of caste, class, and religious politics. The female-male sex ratio of India has fallen from 976: 1000 (1961) to 948: 1000 (January 2021). The UN Report of July 22, 2014, entitled "Sex Ratios and Gender-Biased Sex Selection: History, Debates and Future Directions" also points out the falling sex ratio due to the gender discrimination against girls. The falling female population in India is due to the inhuman practice of female feticide. Newborn girls are treated as a financial burden due to the dowry system. The Dowry Prohibition Act came into force in 1961. But the dowry system hangs over

every household in Indian society. The system of dowry is a historical legacy passed from generation to generation. Consequently, the dowry system has become a part of Indian culture. Commenting on Indian society, the human rights activist writer Arundhati Roy says:

Deep at the heart of the horror of what's going on lies the caste system: this layered, horizontally divided society with no vertical bolts, no glue, no intermarriage, no social mingling; no human—*humane*—interaction that holds the layers together. So when the bottom half of society simply shears off and falls away, it happens silently. It doesn't create the torsion, the upheaval, the blowout, the sheer structural damage that it might, had there been the equivalent of vertical bolts. (Roy, *Conversations* 6)

On the other hand, Canadian girls and women are the victims of race, class, and gender discrimination. Commenting on Canadian society, the Native Canadian woman writer and activist Lee Maracle says:

I am still humbled by my youthful enthusiasm which was crushed by the realization of the depth and extent of racial, sexist and nationalist oppression visited upon Native women [...] We have fools available for the reconstruction of our houses, so few insights into who all are, collectively and individually, yet to rebuild we must. I sometimes feel like a foolish young grandmother armed with a teaspoon, determined to remove three mountains from the path to liberation: the mountain of racism, the mountain of sexism and the mountain of nationalist oppression. (Maracle, *I Am Woman* viii–x)

We have segregated human society on the basis of race, caste, class, gender, and religious lines into divergent groups, such as white and black, upper caste and lower caste, upper class and lower class, feminine and masculine, and higher religion and lower religion. These labels have polluted Canadian and Indian societies creating several socio-cultural problems such as utter poverty, penury, illiteracy, child labor, unemployment, social inequalities, and social injustices related to the violation of human rights. Canadian and Indian fiction produced by women responds emphatically to the new awakening of culture. This book deals with the protest against gender discrimination as represented in the fiction of Canadian and Indian women writers.

## II

Literature is a versatile medium that lays bare the politics of gender and gender culture. As such, literature provides a particular kind of education:

“polite or human learning.” Literature is also “*valued* because of its ‘beauty of form and emotional effect’” (Robbins 8). Thus, literature promotes a feminist education and value system. It is a mode of expression which enables us to think about social change. It expands our experiences of the mind. As Rita Felski puts it: “Literature does not merely constitute a self-referential and metalinguistic system [...] but is also a medium which can profoundly influence individual and cultural self-understanding in the sphere of everyday life, charting the changing preoccupations of social groups through symbolic fictions by means of which they make sense of experience” (Felski 7). It holds a mirror to the socio-cultural problems in society. As Ruth Robbins puts it:

Literature is, after all, a social and economic product as well as a space for expression, for pleasure, for pain, for readers and writers. It provides us with ways of seeing ourselves and others. We might well act on what we see and on how we see it. It behooves us therefore to be aware of what we do when we read, when we write about what we read, and when we act on what we think. (Robbins 14)

Thus, literature provides an expressive forum for a feminist vision. This book is an interdisciplinary study of gender culture and fiction. Canadian and Indian women writers have fictionalized the grievances of innocent girls and women. They have portrayed the pathetic conditions of girls in a male-dominated and gendered society. The theoretical framework of the study, therefore, involves an understanding of the exclusivist nature of gender discrimination. It focuses on the human rights of women as presented in Canadian and Indian feminist stories. Canadian and Indian women writers have projected the gender cultural oppression of women embedded in Canadian and Indian societies through their fictional world. This book examines concepts of culture, gender culture, gender discrimination, and gender ideology in Canadian and Indian feminist fiction.

There has not been any full-length study devoted to the grievances of Canadian and Indian girls and women from a feminist literary perspective. Hence, there is a genuine need to pursue research on the theme of Gender Studies in Canadian and Indian literatures. A careful review of the following literature will be very helpful for a clearer understanding of the conception of culture in general and gender culture in particular. Gender Studies is an integral part of cultural studies. Cultural studies is an international academic discipline. It makes a thorough analysis of the cultural issues and their implications in a society. In his book *Culture and*

*Society* (1963), Raymond Williams, a cultural theorist, attaches four important kinds of meaning to the word “culture”: “an individual habit of mind; the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts; and the whole way of life of a group or people” (Williams 16). Thus, culture is the by-product of a social process. The concept of culture proliferates in the form of camera culture, gun culture, service culture, museum culture, deaf culture, football culture, and phallocentric culture. Culture, therefore, transforms into cultures. In short, it is a kind of a “*linguistic weed*” (Hartman 30). It breeds class, exploitation, power, and oppression. Thus, culture becomes “the heart of a heartless world” (Marx, *Early Writings* 244).

Richard Johnson sees culturalism as the new discipline of cultural studies. The term “culturalism” is a Marxist inflexion and an antithesis to structuralism. It is largely used within a literary-humanist tradition of thinking about the relationship between culture and society. The concept of culture is understood both as an “art” when we have a literary sense of culture and as a “way of life” when we have an anthropological sense of culture. Culturalism has distinct aspects, such as Romanticism, historicism, and hermeneutics, which developed as a reaction to the neo-classicist ideals that characterized the 18<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment. Culturalism is a broad international movement. Raymond Williams’ book *Culture and Society* gives us an account of the evolution of the British cultural tradition. There are three representative figures in the history of culturalism, namely Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis. Arnold is one of the most prominent figures in the history of the English cultural tradition. He penned the important book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). In his book, Arnold defines culture as “sweetness and light.” Culture is the best thing that has been thought and said. Culture is the study of perfection. It is internal to the human mind. In short, culture is a harmony of all the powers. It voices opposition to material civilization. Arnold says that culture is a social force which is quite contrary to material civilization. Human culture can be developed by the love of human perfection. Arnold has played a key role in the development of the conception of culture. On the other hand, T.S. Eliot stands for intellectual culture. In his book *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949), Eliot discusses the concept of culture. On the other hand, F.R. Leavis says that literature has moral truths and bears the value of life. He draws a connection between literary and non-literary culture. In his book *Two Cultures?* (1962), Leavis says that there is “a social culture and an art of living behind the literature” (Leavis 190). Thus, literature holds a mirror to

the social culture developed by a particular society. The eminent cultural critic, Raymond Williams has analyzed culturalism. He says that culture is essentially the whole way of life. He expands the range of culture to include class. He presents a picture of the plurality of class cultures. He classifies cultures on the basis of class-social relationships. Traditional culture works alongside its bourgeois system of interests and values. Culture is the structure of feeling. Literature is a medium to absorb and master the structure of feeling which represents the interests of some particular class. Williams discusses cultural materialism in his book *Marxism and Literature* published in 1977. Cultural materialism focuses on materialism and western Marxism. It is a theory of culture as material practice. It emerged as a wider movement in the 1960s and the 1970s. It is widely influential in literary and cultural studies. It has also influenced the feminist materialism of Terry Lovell and Janet Wolff.

Poststructuralist cultural theory showcases the cultural politics of difference. The politics of difference exposed by the new social movements have inspired cultural theory. Cultural theory embraces the new postmodern pluralism. Thus, it opens up the theoretical space which enables the culturally marginalized sections of society to assert their own cultural freedom. The struggle for cultural freedom is evident not only in cultural studies but also in spheres such as radical feminism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and black studies. Cultural theory theorizes the nexus between the operations of difference in language and culture and those of socio-historical difference, especially in respect of gender and sexuality, nationality, race, and ethnicity. The key concepts in this theoretical cultural formation are binaries, such as male/female, white/black, and upper class/lower class. Human society is the result of a plethora of cultures which have prevailed throughout the world. Social relations are established over time. According to Marx, the history of this society is the history of class struggle. Marx says that society as a whole is split up into two hostile camps—the bourgeois and the proletariat. Commenting on the concept of class, William Goode says:

The function of class or ethnic mores in patriarchy is largely a matter of how overtly displayed or how loudly enunciated the general ethic of masculine supremacy allows itself to become. Here one is confronted by what appears to be a paradox: while in the lower social strata, the male is more likely to claim authority on the strength of his sex ranks alone, he is actually obliged more often to share power with the women of his class who are economically productive; whereas in the middle and upper classes,



there is less tendency to assert a blunt patriarchal dominance, as men who enjoy such status have more power in any case. (Goode 74)

Thus, class, which has been formed by the bourgeois capitalist society, is suffused with gender discrimination. In order to understand the nature of class, it is important to make a detailed study of Marxism. Marxism is an inquiry into the dialectical view of social transformation. It is also an analysis of class relations and conflict within society. Class and gender were the byproducts of capitalism in the 19th century. The prominent German philosophers: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are Marxist theorists. Marxism is a sociological theory. It is a philosophical theory that encompasses views on social change.

Marxism also attempts to analyze the miserable conditions of women prevalent in a patriarchal society. This theory shows how men dominate women and take total control of women in all spheres of life. Friedrich Engels analyzes the gender oppression of women in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Women's subordination is not a result of their biological disposition but of the social relations of male domination which exist in the nuclear family. Engels investigates social phenomena concerned with female sexual morality from a Marxist historical perspective. We need to eliminate women's oppression in all its forms. Marxist feminists like Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai are against capitalist forms of feminism. Radical feminists disregard Marxist feminism as a bourgeois ideology. Orthodox Marxists attempt to combine Marxism and feminism. The radical feminist Gayle Rubin has raised her voice against Marxism. As an activist and theorist of gender politics, Rubin has written on a wide range of subjects including feminism, sadomasochism, prostitution, pornography, and lesbian literature as well as anthropological studies and histories of sexual subcultures. She devised the phrase "sex/gender system" (Rubin 161) in her essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex" (1975). She came to prominence with the publication of her essay. She also criticizes Marxism for its incomplete analysis of gender under the system of capitalism. She dismisses the gender-blind character of Marxist fundamentalists.

### III

Gender Studies is a new field. Now, it is one of the most innovative and dynamic fields in the area of social sciences along with many other disciplines. Since the 1970s, Gender Studies has become both an important

area of academic study and a major discipline within the social sciences and humanities. Many universities in India and abroad have offered courses and programs in Gender Studies which have grown from the Women's Studies courses that surfaced under the influence of the Second wave feminism of the 1970s and the 1980s. Gender Studies courses appeal to many students because the gender issues they deal with are relevant to their lives. It, now, deals with men and masculinity as well as women and femininity. This, in turn, echoes a more general acceptance of the importance of Gender Studies as a useful discipline and an acknowledgement of its relevance to the present-day scenario.

The history of Gender Studies is traceable to the period of universal women's suffrage and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. The women's liberation movement, on the one hand, gives birth to Gender Studies but on the other hand, Second wave feminism nurtures Gender Studies. Gender Studies appeared in American universities for the first time in the 1970s, at a time "when the simple fact of saying that women can become an object of study was conceived as a radical act" (Boxer 10). Initially, the field of Gender Studies was called "Female Studies." But this has been replaced with the more comprehensive term "Women's Studies." Women's Studies highlights the fact that the field contains studies envisioned by women, concerning women, and belonging to women. At the beginning of the 1970s, the foundations were laid for a new field of study called "Women's Studies." Commenting on the launch of "Women's Studies," Ginsberg says: "For the first time, women were not only learning about themselves, but were actively *creating* and *owning* knowledge based on their own personal and political experiences" (Ginsberg 10). Women's Studies demonstrates how women's academic knowledge has been misdirected and their scientific contribution has been underestimated in society. From its very inception, Women's Studies had a very clear objective to transform "the university so that knowledge about women was no longer invisible, marginalized, or made other" (Ginsberg 10–11).

Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary study of women, gender, and feminism. Women's Studies not only examines the status of women in society but also seeks to improve the conditions of women's lives. Women's Studies challenges the marginalization of women as "the second sex." Adrienne Rich's essay "Claiming an Education" stresses the need for women's education. As a discipline, Women's Studies is the systematic study of gender. Ideologically speaking, Women's Studies has been born out of the feminist movement and its protest against the exclusion of

women from positions of power. It enables us to understand the multiple roles played by women in a male-dominated society. Women's Studies is defined as "a comprehensive literature that embodies its concern for women's equality and development and seeks to find explanations and remedies for the unequal position of women in society" (Kaushik 14).

Thus, Women's Studies is regarded as a method of research. It analyzes the origin and basis of gender discriminatory practices and gender violence against women in a patriarchal society. It serves as a critical tool or instrument to analyze the social reality of women's subjugation. As an academic discipline, Women's Studies focuses on contemporary empirical research from a gender perspective. It has developed its own theories based on contemporary feminist thought. It seeks to highlight how women have been deprived of their basic rights to health, food, nutrition, education, and employment in contemporary society. It shows how women have primarily been treated as sex-objects or reproductive-machines throughout history. Women are an integral part of human society. Therefore, the study of women's grievances is essential for the all-round development of any society. It also stresses the need for utilizing women's creative or productive talents for the betterment of society. As a philosophy, Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to the oppressive social realities of women's lives in contemporary society.

For instance, in her article "Women's Studies—Renaissance or Revolution?" Adrienne Rich describes Women's Studies as "a pledge of resistance" (Rich 35). It is an antidote to gender discrimination and victimization. In her essay "Toward a Woman-Centered University," Adrienne Rich highlights the need for Women's Studies in universities. Despite difficulties, the discipline of Women's Studies has gained momentum and grown stronger with women's awareness of human rights to education. Until the first half of the 1980s, Women's Studies focused on explaining the reasons for women's subordination and oppression. Women's perspective changed radically at the beginning of the second half of the 1980s. Different women's movements campaigned to be treated differently. These movements fail to define the concept of woman in general. As Raducu says: "The studies developed until that moment focused on a restrictive understanding of the notion of 'woman'; they implicitly referred to the category that the women initiators of the women's studies belonged: white, middle-class, heterosexual, usually Christian, etc. It was inevitable that the other women who did not belong to this category would feel left aside, unrepresented and it was also

inevitable that they would make their voice heard, because their interests and needs were not addressed by the dominant perspective in the women's studies of their time" (Radcu 21). Raducu explains the reasons for the emergence of Gender Studies:

The claim for difference became a vivid subject of debate in Gender Studies over the 1980, the 1990 and in the 21st century, and made an important shift in the problematic of Gender Studies: the problem of the power relations inside the categories corresponding to each gender became as important as the initial problem concerning the power relations between genders. In the 1990s, as well as nowadays, women of different color, religion, social condition, sexual orientation claimed to be treated differently, according to their needs and interests. Therefore, Gender Studies, though still focusing on gender differences between women and men that explained the male domination and women's oppression, begin to explore the power relations and the inner hierarchies of each gender. (Raducu 21)

#### IV

Gender Studies is the scientific study of phallogentric/patriarchal culture. It is a field of interdisciplinary study devoted to revealing gender roles, gender identity or status and gender temperament. The objective of Gender Studies is to lay bare the complex problem of gender discrimination and gender victimization institutionalized in the patriarchal system. As Raducu says: "Gender Studies draws attention to gender inequalities designing ways to remedy justice" (Raducu 17). It has played a key role in transforming patriarchal society over the last few decades. It reveals that knowledge production is a historic, cultural, and social phenomenon. As Raducu says:

Therefore, Gender Studies imposed, facing many difficulties, though, as we shall see in the present paper, the acknowledgement of gender as a category that intervenes at all levels and stages of the knowledge process, thus challenging the traditional view of knowledge production and contributing to the transformation of the traditional academic sphere. At the same time, Gender Studies through their contribution to a better understanding of gender construction and meaning, contributed to the transformation of social and cultural practices, thus transforming society in a durable and efficient way. Gender Studies imposed, in the course of their short existence, gender as a fundamental category for the analysis of all forms and systems of human organization and social life. (Raducu 17)

Gender Studies shows how, unfortunately, gendered language has marginalized girls and women as second-class citizens and made them the victims of a phallogentric value system in a bourgeois capitalist and sexist society. Gender Studies investigates what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society.

### **Objectives of Gender Studies**

1. To develop an understanding of the patriarchal world and its gender politics through the diverse experiences of women in terms of the social construction of gender, race, class, and sexual identity and the interlocking nature of these forms of gender oppression.
2. To promote an awareness of the sources of gender victimization of girls and women in contemporary society due to cultural politics.
3. To radically change the mental attitudes of the institution of patriarchy towards girls and women.
4. To improve the conditions of women and plead for women's empowerment for social change.
5. To apply feminist concepts and theories of gender to one's life experiences and enjoy human rights.
6. To sharpen our ability to discuss the status of women.

## **V**

Gendered society has formulated language to fulfil its aims and objectives, such as discrimination, double moral standards, exploitation, and oppression. Phallogentric language is the flesh and blood of a gendered society. The patriarchy exercises its gender power politics through the medium of gendered language. Gender is the parasitic relation of dominance and subordination. Gender relations are not equitable-gender divisions. Robert Jesse Stoller defines gender as "the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person" (Stoller 9). Thus, masculinity and femininity are the components of gendered language. Gender may be defined as cultural, whereas the term "sex" refers to the biological components of maleness and femaleness. Thus, the concept of "sex" is considered to be biological. Gender is psychological and therefore, cultural. Stoller says: "*Gender* is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and 'female,' the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (Stoller 9). Throughout history and in all civilizations, the patriarchal system of gender relationship is a phenomenon which Max

Weber has defined as “*herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination” (Weber 323).

Feminist criticism has a symbiotic relation to Gender Studies. The basic premise of Gender Studies is the revolutionary ideology of feminist criticism, which addresses and helps support a “viable counter-culture.” Feminist criticism has made a significant contribution to the evolution of Gender Studies by means of its contribution to feminist thought and action. As Maggie Humm says:

The institutional argument for feminist criticism is now more secure with women’s studies having some place in education, and thus women’s writing receiving critical attention and re-evaluation. But the argument for a specifically feminist criticism is not only to give more adequate attention to women writers but, by giving a space to the woman critic, to give space to the idea of women theorists. (Humm 5)

The growth of Gender Studies is inseparable from feminist criticism. The pioneers of Gender Studies: Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous, Kate Millet, Germain Greer, Betty Friedan, and Ann Oakley have been major sources of intellectual inspiration for feminists by virtue of their substantial and significant literary criticism. They have emerged as feminist thinkers by becoming conscious of gender victimization, and by criticizing the politics of patriarchy, the power of symbols, and the cultural ideology of gender system.

Contemporary feminist thought is a product of the 1960s, which is the beginning of Second wave feminism. Second wave feminism has emerged as an intellectual movement for women’s liberation. Historically speaking, the Second wave feminist movement is the first and foremost of the new social movements in the world to generate its own distinctive woman-centered feminist cultural theory. Women’s revolt against patriarchal cultural politics is as old as the history of the institution of patriarchy itself. Many feminist intellectuals, fiction writers, and scholars teaching in the humanities, especially in literary studies, consider women’s oppression as having cultural rather than biological roots. They look upon women’s cultural production/freedom as central to the program of “consciousness-raising” for social change. Woolf points out the material constraints on women’s cultural freedom/production. In her criticism and fiction, Woolf connects women’s consciousness with literary modernism, which has drawn the attention of later feminist intellectuals like Gilbert and Gubar. A feminist cultural vision can be traced to the French revolution. Mary

Wollstonecraft penned the path-breaking book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in response to the systematic inequality of women in all spheres of life. In her book, Wollstonecraft envisages that women's inequality is not, in fact, natural but socially constructed. She also argues that women are not weak but they are "in particular rendered weak and wrecked, by a variety of concurring causes: inadequate parenting, bad education, the lack of property rights, and exclusion from the political sphere, as well as the negative effects of literary-cultural life: the ideology of romantic love which makes women mere creatures of sentiment, and bad novels which reproduce a false picture of reality rather than intelligent analysis" (Wollstonecraft 79). The book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is an attack on the gender ideology of femininity that considers women's inequality as natural. According to Wollstonecraft, literature is a powerful tool which makes social transformation possible.

The feminist classics: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) share a commitment to Gender Studies as a way of analyzing the gender system with the ideological force of literature. Thus, they appropriate literature for the promotion of feminism. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) connected feminism and cultural criticism. These writers have pioneered the most systematic feminist literary criticism in Gender Studies. De Beauvoir asks, "What is woman and why is she misrepresented in male texts?"; Millet questions: "What are sexual politics and how are they represented in literature?"; Friedan and Greer ask, "What are particular stereotypes potent and why do women accept them?" They have addressed the problem of gender discrimination and victimization of women through a systematic analysis of cultural forms. They have emphasized the need for feminist criticism in order to subvert the cultural repression of women in contemporary society. They have examined the gender system of patriarchy as it is represented in literature and culture. Commenting on their contribution, Maggie Humm says:

De Beauvoir's training was in philosophy, Millet's debt was to the social and sexual historian Steven Marcus, and Friedan and Greer were journalists. Although Millet used her research for a doctorate and Greer was teaching at the University of Warwick, their criticism was a novel alternative to traditional academic criticism. It was revolutionary in scope for it amalgamated critiques from the social sciences and the arts. But what is most revolutionary was the importance this criticism attached to the language of sexuality. It is for these reasons that the feminist criticism of de Beauvoir, Millet, Friedan and Greer represents an enormous

breakthrough in describing women's oppression in literary form. (Humm 21–22)

Each one of these revolutionary texts: *The Second Sex*, *Sexual Politics*, *The Feminine Mystique*, and *The Female Eunuch* is very much a part of their own cultural movement. Thus, they are inspired by the historical context of the post-war culture. Post-war feminist criticism is a synthesis of cultural criticism and literary criticism. The texts compare the distorted images of women and the conditions of femininity in a male-dominated society with the reality of everyday women. They look at culture as symbolic of male social attitudes and literature as a spokesperson for male emotions and fears. In other words, literature is analyzed according to gender ideology. Maggie Humm says: "Literature emerges in their writings as having a formal homology with the working of patriarchy. Texts, literary or cultural, are read as models of patriarchal power. All four writers engaged in a psychological critique intent on unveiling the ideological nature of 'beliefs' and 'values'" (Humm 22–23). When we closely observe the titles of all these four books, we understand that they deal with the conception of sex and gender and envisage that women's status is gender-determined. De Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* says that the misrepresentation of women is the result of sexual/gender politics. Millet's *Sexual Politics* is a handbook on male sexual/gender ideology. Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer believe that consciousness-raising will promote education as the agency of social change. Their books are interdisciplinary studies of literature and gender culture. They bring together literature and popular culture in order to illustrate social issues since literary and cultural forms are the instruments of socialization.

The existentialist feminist thinker and political activist writer Simone de Beauvoir penned the revolutionary book *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir is acclaimed as the architect of post-war feminist criticism. *The Second Sex* is regarded as a classic. For instance, Betty Friedan describes *The Second Sex* as "Americanised." Shulamith Firestone dedicated her book *The Dialectic of Sex* to Simone de Beauvoir. Juliet Mitchell highlights *The Second Sex* as the "most important of the 'totalising' studies on the oppression of women" (Mitchell 300). *The Second Sex* provides an analysis of femininity. It vividly illustrates de Beauvoir's philosophical framework of existentialist feminism. She occupies a central place in contemporary feminism as she articulates the condition of women in *The Second Sex*. *The Second Sex* discusses the place of women in a gendered society. The thesis of her book is that women should be treated as free and



autonomous human beings like all others. She raises her voice against the marginalization and objectification of women. De Beauvoir says:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other* ... it is through the eyes, the hands, that children apprehend the universe, and not through the sexual parts. The dramas of birth and of weaning unfold after the same fashion for nurslings of both sexes. (De Beauvoir, SS 267)

Beauvoir points out the male-biased view of gender by referring to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities embedded in patriarchy. De Beauvoir organized the Right to Abortion Campaign in 1972 and supported radical feminists.

Betty Friedan has been instrumental in advancing the women's rights movement as one of the founders of the National Organization for Women. With the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 Friedan broke new ground for women's liberation by exploring the cultural stereotypes of femininity constructed by patriarchy. The book situates feminist literary criticism as a useful mode of gender cultural analysis. It seeks to interrogate the multiple gender roles played by women in a patriarchal society. *The Feminine Mystique* is a useful guide to Gender Studies both in the way Friedan analyzes the gender culture prevalent in the patriarchy and offers feminist cultural solutions to the gender discrimination and victimization of women. She demonstrates how literature serves gender ideology. The book pleads for a "New Life Plan" of hard work and creativity. Friedan says: "She must learn to compete, then, not as a woman, but as a human being" (FM 328). Friedan's feminist criticism seems to reconstruct the cultural forms of the concept of woman as a human being. She offers the ideal female model in her "lifelong commitment to an art" (302). *The Feminine Mystique* paves the way for an important cultural moment in feminist literary criticism. The humanities are crucial to Friedan's feminist cultural agenda. She gives her educational "shock treatment" through "an intensive concentrated re-immersion in, quite simply, the humanities" (324). At the National Conference for Women (NOW, 1966), Friedan delivered her lecture on the seven fields: education, employment, religion, sexism, women's image in mass media, women's political rights, and the family to explore the problem of gender discrimination.

Published in 1970, the cultural celebrity Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* is a revolt against the gender discrimination shown against women in the fields of education and employment. The book documents the traditional images of women as they emerge in popular culture and literature. It is the model for popular culture criticism. It provides an ideological analysis of the features of misogyny in gender culture. She uses literature as a medium to expose the gender roles assigned to women in patriarchy. It has a clear impact on feminist thinking. It also raises its voice against gender oppression in the form of the domestic violence perpetrated on women. It also questions and challenges the gender indoctrination of girls and women. It is also an indictment of women's domestic slavery in the institution of patriarchy. It outlines how women have to change their social status and become architects of their own future by thinking beyond social conditioning. She sets out the agenda for feminist cultural criticism. She strongly opposes Freud's theory of psychoanalysis for its masculine ideology and construction of femininity. In her thought-provoking book *The Female Eunuch*, Greer comments: "Freud is the father of psychoanalysis. It had no mother [...] Freud himself lamented his inability to understand women" (Greer 83). She gives a clarion call to women to rebel against suffocating gender roles by refusing stereotypical femininity. She urges women to revolt against gender culture. She has played an important role in promoting feminist consciousness among all sections of society by bringing feminism into the public conscious. She has facilitated the debate for women's liberation. *The Female Eunuch* is a powerful book for the feminist movement and it has influenced a generation of women.

The radical feminist thinker and activist writer Kate Millet has written another feminist revolutionary book called *Sexual Politics*. De Beauvoir's deconstruction of patriarchal ideology in *The Second Sex* forms the basis of Millet's *Sexual Politics*. *Sexual Politics* is Kate Millet's major contribution to the field of Gender Studies. She has chosen to attack patriarchy through literary criticism by providing a wide range of evidence from biology, sociology, education, anthropology, and psychology. She uses literary analysis to look at gender politics from the point of view of various other contemporary discourses. She demonstrates how contemporary literature is full of sexism and violence. She has revolutionized the reading of literature. She confronts the discourse of literature as the record of gender ideology. In her groundbreaking book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet describes the gender system as "a most

ingenious form of interior colonization” (Millet 25). We have classified men and women into two groups—masculine and feminine. We have also attributed masculine language and feminine language to men and women. Gendered language is the result of gender politics. We have established the colonies of gender discrimination and gender oppression in our mindsets. In other words, the gender system of patriarchy is the heartless social segregation of human beings. Commenting on the gender system, Kate Millet says:

It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power. (Millet, SP 25)

Millet’s *Sexual Politics* is a psychoanalytic feminist critique of literature and gender ideology. She attacks Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis for its phallocentrism. Millet asserts: “Freud, beyond question is the strongest individual counterrevolutionary force in the ideology of sexual politics” (Millet 178). She assesses how literature contains and creates an ideology of gender system by distinguishing between sex and gender. She is able to show the misogyny of literary constructions and analysis. She uses feminist literary criticism to deconstruct the attributes of masculinity and femininity in male writing. Millet’s research in comparative literature enables her to address the theory of the social construction of gender. She feels that gender is a product of the social environment and social conditioning. She is the pioneer of feminist literary criticism. The aim of Millet’s feminism is reformist, even evolutionary. She believes that feminism is to be “accomplished by human growth and true re-education” (Millet 363). She articulates sexual/gender politics in her book *Sexual Politics*. For Millet, literature provides a powerful creative energy to signify social reform.

These four critics see their feminist criticism as an antidote to gender culture. They advocate for the demolition of gender ideology. Their feminist criticism can help women to break out from the narrow confines of their objectification and survive as independent and autonomous citizens in society. They have attempted to alter gender culture and the very experience of reading literature. They have changed literary values through their pioneering contribution to feminist criticism.

Gender Studies reveals how male domination and female subordination are socially and culturally constructed. Like the inequalities between castes, classes, and races, gender differences are man-made. They are social, historical, and cultural constructs. Socialization is a process of internalizing patriarchal laws, such as male values, norms, and beliefs. Socialization, which teaches children gender roles, is called gendering or gender indoctrination. Relations based on gender are called gender relations. Gender relations are hierarchical relations of dominance and subordination. Throughout history and in all civilizations, legal, economic, and social restrictions have been imposed on women's basic human rights. A long line of feminists, from Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir to the present-day feminist thinkers, have performed a systematic study of contemporary feminism and Gender Studies. Gender Studies has influenced a generation of writers like Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich to write texts from a woman's point of view.

Elaine Showalter is highly regarded for her interdisciplinary research in the field of humanities. She has promoted Gender Studies through her effective teaching and committed research in the area of Women's Studies in Rutgers University and Princeton University. She pursued her doctoral research on "The Double Critical Standard: Criticism of Women Writers in England" in 1969 at the University of California. She actively participated in the New Women's Movement and served as the President of the Princeton Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1969. Showalter's active involvement in the National Organization for Women brings her into close contact with feminist activist writers like Kate Millet and art historians like Linda Nochlin. During this early period of activism, Elaine Showalter entered the limelight with the publication of her book titled *Women's Liberation and Literature* in 1971. She has also written *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1978). It is the best-known gender consciousness-raising text to date. In her book, Showalter has brought to light the women writers whose work has been devalued due to gender discrimination. The book has been considered an authoritative text in the area of Gender Studies. She served as a Visiting Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Delaware during 1976–77. She worked as an editor for several feminist scholarly journals, such as *Women's Studies* and *Signs*. As a member of the Modern Language Association (MLA), Showalter carried out commissioned research work on "The Status of Women in the Profession" during 1971–72. Showalter's lecture "Towards a Feminist Poetics" delivered in 1978 is an ideological protest against the policies of

patriarchy. This lecture finds a place in *Women's Writing and Writing about Women* and *The New Feminist Criticism* published in 1979 and 1985, respectively. Showalter's lecture, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," discusses gynocriticism. She heralds a new era in the history of feminist literary criticism. She occupies a prominent place in the field of feminist literary criticism by virtue of her progressive theory of gynocriticism. As a feminist literary critic, Showalter finds fault with the theory of feminist criticism that looks upon women as readers of male-produced literature. She exposes the gender politics of male writers in her feminist criticism. She proposes a theory of feminist criticism called gynocriticism, which upholds the role of a woman as the writer of her own experience. As a feminist scholar and critic, I would like to look at Showalter's gynocriticism as a concept which is of women, by women, and for women. This theory highlights the creativity of women. Showalter's gynocriticism is a milestone in the history of Gender Studies and interdisciplinary research.

Published in *The Journal of Critical Inquiry*, Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981) is a fine piece of gender criticism. In her essay, Showalter presents a comprehensive survey of contemporary feminist literary criticism. She emphasizes the need for feminist theories to work out a framework in close collaboration. She envisages that we need to approach women's writing from a cultural perspective. Women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse" that embodies the social, literary, and cultural conditions of both women and men. Published in 1985, Showalter's book *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* presents a provocative cultural analysis of women's oppression in the history of psychiatry. Her book, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture* (1990) is a cultural analysis of the anxiety wrought by women's sexual liberation and the corresponding scourges of syphilis and AIDS. Published in 2001, Showalter's book *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* is a survey of feminist icons, intellectuals, activists, writers, and philosophers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Fuller, Eleanor Marx, and Simone de Beauvoir. Her other books include *Teaching Literature* (2003) and *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers* (2009). Thus, Elaine Showalter has contributed a lot to the growth and development of Gender Studies as a feminist scholar, teacher, critic, activist, writer, and editor.

Gender Studies has found fertile ground in Canada and India. Gender Studies has influenced a generation of Canadian women writers of fiction

like Doris Hilda Anderson, Audrey Thomas, Ethel Wilson, Carol Shields, Sheila Watson, Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Aritha Van Herk, Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, Jeannette Armstrong and Lee Maracle and a host of other contemporary Indian women fiction writers like Nayanathara Sehgal, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpandey, Arundhati Roy, Amrita Pritam, Mahasweta Devi, Bama, Ranganayakamma, Abburi Chaya Devi, and Volga to write texts from the point of view of women. They have been deeply influenced by the different schools of feminism, such as liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern. They have projected a feminist view of life and its transformations in their fiction. They have laid the foundation for Gender Studies through their fiction. Fiction and storytelling are twin weapons used to achieve gender equality. Thus, Gender Studies has become a part of literary theory.

Now, let us look at the stories of Canadian and Indian women writers. Why do we have to turn to the stories of Canadian and Indian women writers as part of Gender Studies? The culture of a country, whether it is Canada or India, is a repository of various rituals, customs, conventions, and values. The values and beliefs system embedded in the gender culture in Canadian and Indian societies deeply influences the members of both societies. Canadian and Indian women writers suggest an alternative vision through their stories and provide powerful expressions of their feminist ideology. Thus, Canadian and Indian women's writing has its own vibrant power to illuminate our feminist vision "in the manner of the burning bush. It shows the light and heat which signal the divine presence of truth" (Gold13). Canadian and Indian women writers propose feminist alternatives to transform the plight of women in phallogocentric societies.

## VI

This book has been divided into three parts. Part-A: "Gender: Canadian and Indian Literatures" contains two chapters. The first chapter entitled "The Issues of Gender in Canadian and Indian Literatures: An Overview" presents a vivid picture of Canadian and Indian societies. It focuses on women's liberation and the gender issues addressed by the Canadian and Indian fiction writers. It also attempts a brief but comprehensive survey of Canadian and Indian writing to bring out the parallels and contradictions between writers from both countries. It succinctly sums up the various schools of feminism and points out their limitations and strengths. It traces the history of Canadian feminism and discusses the divergent views that