

## **FEMINIST SENSIBILITY AS AN OFFSHOOT OF FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW**

**Dr. Rajani Sharma**

H.N.B Garhwal University  
(A Central University), Srinagar Garhwal  
Uttarakhand

**Dr. Shakunatala Kunwar**

Associate Professor  
Dept. of English, Modern European and  
Other Foreign Languages  
H.N.B. Garhwal University  
(A Central University), Srinagar Garhwal

### **Abstract**

The present paper aims at exploring the nature of feminist sensibility with a specific focus on the genesis of the term. The first segment of this paper is devoted to the conceptual analysis of feminist sensibility. It has been traced back as to how feminist sensibility is an offshoot of feminism itself, the surge of which came in mid eighteenth century owing to discriminatory attitude towards female sex. Hence, a brief history of feminism or Women Liberation Movement has been surveyed. Views of famous critical theorists such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Julia Kristeva have been analysed in order to understand the general concept of what feminism is and how feminist sensibility is analogous to this. In the successive parts of the paper, the concept of power given by Michel Foucault and Paul Jean Satre's philosophy of human existence have been understood as inclusive of the concept of feminist sensibility as these theorists and philosophers refer to individual responsibility to exist even in hostile condition with an inner awareness and ability to forge a viable and true identity in this patriarchal society after deconstructing the strictures of passive subjection of female identity.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Sensibility, Phallus, Power Politics, Human Existence, Women Liberation Movement, Feminine, Gender, Margin.

I was, being human, born alone;  
I am, being woman, hard beset;  
I live by squeezing from a stone  
The little nourishment I get. (Wylie278)

Since her birth, a girl is identified with the conventional images assigned to her by patriarchy, working through social, cultural, and domestic institutions with its immediate agents in family to smother her in the forms of sinister rewards and retribution. The overriding conception of a growing ideological structure is not to endow her with an opportunity and prospect to develop attributes linked to male breed. Apparently, this ideological structure seems to provide her protection, but at the same time, it is regressive enclosure around her female self. The central impression being that she cannot develop any quality associated with other half of humanity. This renders her incapable of having pertinent stamina and knack to fight back.

The central view is that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal, ruled by the Law of the Father, that is, organized in such a way as to subjugate women to men in every sphere of life ranging from family, religion, politics, economics, law, and the last but not the least, art and literature also. In the introductory part to *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir talks about the rudimentary asymmetry between the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ associating masculine with male to represent ‘absolute human type,’ that is, norms and standards, whereas ‘feminine’ represents womanhood and her conviction which are considered to be grounded in her femininity rather than in any other objective perception. A man “thinks of his body as direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as hindrance, a prison. . . . Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her nature” (de Beauvoir, *Second Sex* xvi). She also evinces “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other” (de Beauvoir, *Second Sex* xvi). The asymmetry between man and woman is the consequence of the importance attached to Phallus, an incarnation of transcendence for male that comes to symbolize domination and power observed in all domains of society where woman is considered object and other. Man and woman are essentially different from each other as they have different sexes; thereby they have different physical shapes and body chemicals, but masculinity and femininity are culturally constructed. Because of biological differences, male should be masculine and powerful whereas female feminine and submissive to conform to the interpreted and desired identity that male and female are supposed to conform to. This has created stereotypical gender identities set for both male and female. Men are considered rational, objective, authentic, and muscular, normative and objective because they belong to a superior sexed body while women are weaker, emotional, intuitive, irrational, and emotional because of their weaker sex. “Personality traits are distinguished in terms of polar opposites of masculine and feminine” (Das 144). The discrimination is also seen even in the linguistic structure as the pronoun “*he*” which stands for male point of view is employed to denote humanity. This reflects the habit of seeing, that male experience is the standard through which the experiences of the other half of humanity are also evaluated. The broad-spectrum is that it alleges to epitomize both men and women, but in reality it is an integral part of a deep-rooted-cultural-attitude that overlooks women’s experiences and thwarts women’s point of view to the wind.

Misogyny and prejudice against women are evident in that literature which has been written by male writers. Aristotle, the famous philosopher and literary authority, for instance, remarks that “female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and that “we should look upon the female state, as it were, a deformity, one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature. On account of its weakness it quickly approaches its maturity and old age since inferior things all reach their end more quickly” (qtd. in Krishnaswamy 73-74). Male authors severely mocked at women. Alexander Pope in his mock epic *The Rape of the Lock* laughs at fair sex which he discards as fashionable dummy without rationalism. The famous Latin poet Ovid in his verse depicts a bizarre episode in which the tongue of a beautiful princess was cut out and thrown upon the ground, it could not forbear muttering even in that posture too. She is simply laughed at, but nobody cares for the pain that she bears. She is “dragged . . . by her hair along the ground” and then her tongue was cut off with no mercy (Ovid 190-191)

Whether it is American literature or British, woman holds a stereotyped and subordinate role; she is either ascribed the title of a goddess or that of bitch; virgin or prostitute and ultimately her identity as a human being is immersed in the conventional images, left to confront sexual discrimination and self-effacing sacrifice. Carol Pearson has surveyed woman’s place in men’s literary works: In every field of British and American Literature, in fact, whatever qualities are out of favour are identified as female. In middle ages, for example, an age of literature written mostly by unmarried clerics, lechery is represented in female characters such as Chaucer’s Wife of Bath and Criseyde. In the eighteenth century Age of Reason, female characters like Belinda in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* are satirized for their irrational behaviour. . . . (19)

This shows that patriarchal social structure is ordained from male point of view, where they hold central position in it while women occupy, as Julia Kristeva holds it to be, a stagnant marginal point, quite estranged and alienated from the linear order of patriarchy, often inclusive of chaos and faltering spaces, from where they cannot claim for an authentic domicile for themselves. The idealized and traditional role for a female in our society has been and is to grow feminine charm, marry, and live happily even after, devoting herself to the well-being of husband and children as a homemaker. If she fails to find a spouse, she is viewed as an oddity; if she is dissatisfied with her existence as a housewife and mother, the fault lay with her psychological make-up rather than with the system that pressurized her into that role. If they have any entry within the order, they can if they assume the conventional and stereotypical roles of a wife and mother because men are rather assured of the fact that they would cause no harm to the central position relished by them.

Thus there is either a glorification of womanhood in traditional roles or else their denigration when they do not fall into stereotypes approved by men. Both these expectations are highly unrealistic as both fail to recognize that women are human beings, neither goddesses nor bitches, but creatures of flesh and blood with ordinary human strengths and failings. (Jaidka 8)

The numbing force of patriarchy has its roots in the biblical myth of the genesis of Adam and Eve that affect the psychic culture of man resulting in a devaluation of women as secondary and inferior to men. Dr. Sushila Singh writes:

Because the tale represents a compilation of different oral traditions, it provides two contrary schemes for Eve’s creation, one in which Eve is fashioned later than Adam, an afterthought shaped out of his rib. We have

here an instance of male expropriation of the life force through a god who created the world without female assistance. (25-26)

If we accept the first tale of God creating both Adam and Eve together, there is possibility of discrimination against her because God is in the image of male and hence the later version seems to be harsher as she is taken to be an afterthought rather than the first creation and that too from Adam's rib. In other words, woman is thought to be inferior to man. Adam, the first man, as N. Krishnaswamy has quoted, remarks about Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman. Because she was taken out of man" (73). The suggestion is that man is supreme because God created man first and woman after him to offer her services to him: "Milton's line, 'He for God only, she for God in him' could well be cited as an example of the almost universally held assumption that man's purpose in life is to serve God, the state, the society, not least his own self-advancement, while woman's purpose is to serve man" (Das 144). Thus, female has been considered merely a means of perpetuating the male line of the husband, tribe, and race. Wives are excluded from owning property and were sometimes viewed as property; they were allowed almost no civic or religious roles. Bijay Kumar Das speaks with the same strain: "The social role of wife, mother, housewife assigned to women go hand in hand with a division into public and private domains" (144).

Literature of women, about women portraying their emotions, feelings, and preoccupation, not only in the past but also in the present is subject to rejection. It is undervalued as trash on the ground that it is written by women and is not, at all, normative. If literary history is traced back, there had been and even today can be sensed a general assumption regarding the works of (White) male authors that they retain the stance of universality by representing the experiences of all readers and universality is the major criterion of high magnitude. Since female authors and all authors of color did not describe experiences from white male point of view, they could not be considered a part of the literary canon. Fame does not necessarily bear the imprint of universality, for many women writers who enjoyed extensive popularity all through their life were not "canonized" in literary histories that focused primarily on male writers. There is a mode to underestimate the contribution of women writers. Matthew J. Bruccoli inscribes the 1920 "an age of achievement . . . in American literature" in the Preface to the recent edition of *The Great Gatsby* enlisting twelve authors among whom only Wila Cather is a woman (qtd. in Tyson 84). Ellen Glasgow, Susan Glaspell, Nella Larson, Ednainscribes the 1920 "an age of achievement . . . in American literature" in the Preface to the recent edition of *The Great Gatsby* enlisting twelve authors among whom only Wila Cather is a woman (qtd. in Tyson 84). Virginia Woolf, the most famous novelist tries to highlight the predicament of female writer who suffers from psychological repression in male governed literary tradition through the anecdote of Shakespeare's fictional sister Judith. Being "wonderfully gifted genius" like her brother Shakespeare, she also strives to seek her future in theatre but is faced with obnoxious and offensive antagonism ranging from her father's indignation to the sneering laughter and exploitation in the theatre company. Such was her frustration and fragility that she commits suicide (*Room* 46). Woolf wants to point out that "genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people" and that if woman had been born with potential for genius she "would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage (*Room* 46 and 48). Although the parable is fictional, it is based on the actual life circumstances related to such women authors as Lady Winchilsea who were mocked for their writing attempts and many writers like Currer Bell, George Eliot and George Sand had to conceal their authorship (Woolf, *Room* 50). The dualistic tradition, promoted through male tendency, is that man and

woman are quite different from each other and that they represent the qualities of head and heart respectively. The view that man is active and heroic while woman is passive strengthens the acrimony towards her accelerating the denial of her genius.

Undoubtedly, patriarchal society is oppressive for female due to gender stereotypes. But the irony with women's lot is that they themselves, though unconsciously since they are taught by the agents of patriarchy, contribute to this repressive system by willingly internalizing the conventional images assigned to them. Judith Fatterly, as Annamma Joseph has quoted, finds that a woman is subjugated by a deliberate confusion of her consciousness:

Yet, even worse than the loss is the confusion of consciousness which obscures the nature of loss and often the fact of loss itself. Hemmed about with the myths and images and dogmas and definitions and law and strictures and God and Man, and fear and fear and fear, she is deceived into believing the theory about bit of her flesh and the bite of apple and is kept from knowing what she is bereft. (13)

She internalizes the values and norms prescribed for her that she should perform her duties to please others. She should remain at home, bear children, and care for the wishes of her husband to the best of her ability. Lois Tyson has described the conventional patriarchal social structure with its detrimental gender roles:

By *patriarchal woman* I mean, of course, a woman who has internalized the norms and values of *patriarchy*, which can be defined, in short, as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. *Traditional gender roles* cast men as rational, rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions in family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world ), paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job. . . . (85).

The general phenomenon of human history has oppressed female self who had been deprived of equal educational, occupational rights because of man's monopoly to own economic, political and social power. In the United States, they were barred from the study of Latin because the rigors of these languages were too great for their minds. Moreover, they were not allowed to attend the World-Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1872 because they were not males. Susan B. Stanton was arrested as convict for entering a polling booth in 1872. Many women responded to such discrimination. This was the beginning of feminism.

The seeds of women's liberation movement or feminism were sown in mid eighteenth century with the ferment of questioning spirit regarding the discrimination meted out to women against men. Feminism means the advocacy of women's rights to the full citizenship – that is, political, economic and social equality with men. Abigail the most famous lady first asked her husband, John, to remember the ladies in framing the constitution. Mary Wollstonecraft's most sensational treatise *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* came as a strong advocate to cherish the rights of women. With her single-minded condescension on derogatory social and economic system, Wollstonecraft demanded for equal access to education along with social and economic rights for women. She gave a new direction to feminism by discarding reproachful cliché of femininity. She opined that femininity was culturally constructed rather than inherent characteristics of women. Similarly, the contribution of John Stuart Mill, the most famous

economist and social reformer of his time, to defend women cannot be disregarded. *The Subjection of Women* written by him was the most litigious work to inflame strong resentment among the general crowd of his time because in that work he concentrated on the abilities of women with an enthusiastic plea to affirm their rights to enter any professions of their choice. He also supplicated their right to vote. His responsive-outlook concerning women was discerned when he advocated women's liberation as a prime requisite for the growth of society.

Women's Liberation Movement has definitely made women cognizant of the prevailing inequality in this so-called patriarchal society by advocating their rights. Historical records referred to one of the formal meetings of women's rights movement in the United States held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Out of this meeting came statements challenging the notion of female and male spheres of influence. Thus, beginning with the Seneca Falls Convention (1848), the American women schooled in reform struggles began a serious fight for women's rights to hold title to property, to establish business, to look after earnings, and to act as a witness. They asked for equal access to professions, to trades, to education, and to pulpit. Sushila Singh regards Seneca Falls Declaration quite significant for feminism as "the quest for suffrage was found to be strong bond uniting three generations of women who believed . . . that only through the exercise of the franchise would eradicate the existing legal, economic, and social inequalities affecting women" (18). Elizabeth Cady Stanton's declaration of the Rights and Sentiments established a blueprint to acknowledge the right of American women to elective franchise. Though American women would not gain the right to vote until Suffragist Movement in 1920, throughout the remainder of nineteenth century, many feminist goals were gradually realized such as the rights of married women to control their own property. When due to Suffragist movement, an elective Franchise to vote was assigned to women; it was considered that the ultimate vision conceptualized by women had been achieved. Even then in the years to come, social pressures continued to restrict women's freedom as "constitutional barriers had done earlier" (S. Singh 13). Betty Freidan's feminine mystique evolved to sanctify the elements to women's experiences, which paradoxically proved to be more oppressive for them. In consequence there emerged a reawakening of a new mode of thinking in 1960 when the example of Civil Rights Movement and the dissatisfactions of college going educated women converged with this approach. Betty Freidan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) called national attention to women's plight and the founding of National Organization of Women in 1965 provided women a new power to have more rights to discard psychological and social fetters. Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided women the right to abortion. Likewise, the decline in alimony and child support combined with the rising divorce rate, enabled women to have an access to economic equality. The wave of feminist movement (1960) came to build a new kind of family life. Despite differences, most feminists advocate equal economic rights, support reproductive rights, including the rights to abortion, and criticize traditional definition of gender roles for public achievement and domestic responsibilities. Many try to reform language so that it does not equate with men as humanity. Many also complained vigorously against women (wife battering and rape) and against denigration of women in media.

The Women's Liberation Movement and the oppressive patriarchal structure initiate an urge to retaliate patriarchal coercive power to assign a new ideology to women. But new ideology can be achieved by getting beyond patriarchal ideological stricture. Feminism would enable us to construct a new ideology where both male and female would be accredited with equal rights. Thus, 'Feminist Sensibility,' is derivative of feminism itself which means in "its broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and the interest in

feminine problems” (S. Singh 21). It is a consciousness to react to the immediate environment that originates from the unbiased reflection of females in oppressive system. This implies that it originates in the perception of something wrong with societal treatment of women and tends to investigate into the reasons and dimensions of female subjugation and oppression and thereby achieves women’s liberation. This is an urge of contradiction against society which brings about significant alteration in the position of women and when the position of women in social structure is altered, there emerges new conception of female self and “society comes directly into conflict with old ideas about women’s role, destiny and even her nature” (S. Singh 31). The feminist picks up certain features of social reality pertaining to women as unbearable, and hence makes contradiction imperative to negate social reality for transforming social orders as to facilitate women.

The suggestion being that this is “the consciousness of victimization. To apprehend oneself as a victim is to be aware of an alien and hostile force which is responsible for blatantly unjust treatment of women and for stifling and oppressive system of sex roles” (S. Singh 31). The victimization is the transgression of the powerful against those who are powerless. In patriarchy power, hostile to woman, is assigned to male who controls the system. The system itself is powerful which makes men powerful and renders women powerless. However, this victimization with woman’s forbearance and sentimentality unleashes ferocity on her male counterparts. It includes a number of emotions: feeling of desires and psychic pains. According to Jean Paul Sartre, “Consciousness is being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies other than itself” (10). The fundamental premise of Sartrean philosophy of human existence is conceived in terms of individual responsibility and authenticity of self implying that human existence precedes essence; that human beings do not have internal essence or rather forge their own values and meanings in this world of existence. He envisions human beings born into this world of void, mud and chaos with abridged latitude to abide by this mud and chaos and thus leading a docile, passive supine and acquiescent existence in a semi-conscious state burdened with individual responsibilities, scarcely aware of his / her authentic real self. But this is one aspect of human existence. He / she may acquire his / her blazing values by taking recourse within the innermost recesses, though is faced with an anguish of immediate individual responsibility, to emerge as a triumphant soul overcoming the passive and subjective position by surmounting all sorts of hurdles, with the energy discharged from the locus of self-awareness. This energy is the output of total sacrifice to some determined conviction; the conviction that enables him / her to drag himself / herself out of the ‘mud’ and begins to exist and reach a state of transcendence to exercise power of choice to render meaning to existence and universe.

It implies that this sensibility or consciousness is an awareness of an individual’s direct experience and a determination of a particular conviction to assert her true identity. For a woman, it further exhausts itself to capture an object. But when the immediate environment acts as hindrance to the realization of self, the female self is regressed into negation and faces a problematic riddle before her as “who am I? What can I believe in? This is a paradoxical dilemma of identity. Ann Snitow’s classical vignette “A Gender Diary” is significant to reveal this quandary. It scrutinizes the central but paradoxical facets of woman’s identity. On the one hand, there is stress on the “need to build the identity ‘woman’” by giving it an extensive and solid meaning; and on the other, there arises another authentic and essential “need to tear down the very category ‘woman’ and dismantle its all-too-solid history” (Snitow 9). Snitow says to her friend: “Being a woman has always been humiliating, but I used to assume there was no exit.

Now the very idea “woman” is up for grabs. “Woman” is my slave name; feminism will give me freedom to seek some other identity altogether” (Snitow 9). The exemplary conversation between Snitow and her friend suggest that with the emergence of post-war women’s movement gender-identity has redefined itself with all the more freedom, contrary to the notion of what used to be considered natural, imposed and inevitable, where choice rather than rigid prescription would rule; that is “a subtle psychological negotiation about just how gendered we choose to be” (Snitow 9). The feeling of abjection along with shame and humiliation is evoked in the consciousness of women about their existence in the dominant culture and initiate them into an euphoric realm of creative paradox since “abjection and euphoria fuels contemporary feminism” for “abjection’s ordinary meaning denotes being thought inferior, either by oneself or by others, something unworthy and vile or less than human, something to be cast out” (Glover and Kaplan 8). She suffers from a strongly disappointing emotion about being female, characterized of agony and dilapidation and consequently evoked abjection due to horrified claustrophobia under which she is always trapped. Julia Kristeva regards this feeling of abjection convincingly significant to evolve a new self in her *Power of Horror*: “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against threat that seem to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1). This feeling of abjection erupts out onto the surface when she simultaneously tries to live up to perceived social models of femininity and attempts to resist them altogether.

The ‘paradox,’ Joan Scott has argued, is constitutive of feminism itself. Appropriating the opinion of Olympe de Gouges, the author of *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen*, she demonstrates that feminism emerges from the consciousness of “a woman who has only paradoxes to offer and not problems easy to resolve” (4). Paradox is a linguistically balancing act generative of poetic meaning as female confronts the dilemma of her own subjectivity consuming her psychic energy in the universal concept of human. She neither wants to be a woman in traditional gobbledygook nor feels free to identify herself with general humanity because of obdurately intractable and depressing nuance of femininity. Femininity is a part of female subjectivity, which she wants to cast off and desires to be recognized as a ‘woman,’ not in traditional terminology, but with a new face and voice of hers which enables her to fling open ‘a world of transformative potential possibility and creative.’

It suggests the demands of internal world of self to annihilate the external – a prerequisite for self-consciousness – to retort to male authoritarianism. She moves away from the clutter of day to day living in order to take an inward turn in search of peaceful core of inner being, the deepest possible state of consciousness. To reach this state of consciousness, she has to confront the hurdles posed on her path leading to self-realization, that is, the answers of the above mentioned riddles. She grinds down the impediments and the arising issues such as the feelings of unworthiness, but such feelings gently go in downward spiral after internal arguments about them. Then, what emerges is her new being and with its uprising, she begins to think independently and infinitely as any lesser thoughts are then healed within the light of greater truth. In the presence of her innermost-real-self as the ultimate consciousness, the Outer / Other than Self seems quite insignificant. She perceives everything with the knowledge of self.

Thus, this sense of victimization is generative of consciousness enabling women to speculate the causes of victimization and an evolved sense of solidarity with other victims to crack self-linked taboos, with its familiarity with paradoxical emotional states. This is a dynamic force which radically alienates woman from this tangible world to shatter its very root; however,



this process of alienation is very painful crumbling her until the moment of realization comes as it divides them against themselves:

It perceives woman as a being who sees herself as a victim and whose victimization determines her being-being-in-the-world as resistance, wariness, and suspicion. Woman is immersed in society that exhibits to her an aspect of malevolent ambiguity. She is an outsider to her society, to many of the people she loves, and to the still unemancipated elements in her own personality. (S. Singh 31-32)

The implication is that when a woman intends to deconstruct the idealistic images and self-linked taboos imposed on her to develop her self; she suffers from guilt when gazed with derision and condemnation. She feels sturdy and fragile, aggressive and offended at the same time, desiring to demolish and to belong to that very structure, on the other hand, at the same time. But gradually with a sense of her gender and sexuality and with her consciousness of patriarchal cage, she resolves to challenge the phalanx of repressive forces. She interprets her victimization and vulnerability with the atoms of experiences accumulated in her psyche; and she, as usual, makes an enormous search for an authentic female identity in self-created and even more viable female tradition because none, except her, is aware of this newly discovered land of vision. Nannaerl O' Keohane describes this sensibility as a perception of essentialism of one's self prior to all societal biases and also includes a revision of woman's status:

. . . inquiry into women's own experiences of sexuality revises prior comprehension of sexual issues and transforms the concept of sexuality itself – its determinants and its role in society and politics. According to this revision one 'becomes a woman' – acquires and identifies with the status of female . . . a complex unity of physicality, emotionality, identity, and status affirmation. (17)

Foucaudian concepts of power relations and the ethical cultivation of selfhood are significant in order to understand the operational effect of disciplinary micro-forces on body, and here, especially female body itself. Though he never proclaimed an overt acclamation of raising feminine issues, yet deviants had always been the subject of his discourse, and thereby the vision of feminism would not be complete unless Foucaudian ideas are incorporated in this analysis. In *The Spectacle of the Scaffold*, Michel Foucault's investigation of the body invested with relation of power and domination penetrates that each body is a site caught up in the grip of complex mechanism of micro-physics of disciplinary powers. "The subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology," but "it may be subtle, make use of neither of weapons nor of terror or yet remains of a physical order" (30). He explicates that "the power . . . exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy. . . . In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated" (32). Within the tendrils of subtle exercise of micro-forces of disciplinary power, the body is subjected through a more or less constant "mechanics of power" the "coercions [of which] . . . act upon the body, [as] a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior." Accomplished through myriads of institutional methods, the coercion is exercised, which is "the meticulous control of the operations of the body which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 136). Though Foucault showed little interest in women's issues regarding their particular positioning within the micro-practices, however, Foucaudian

interpretation of body (especially female body), the positioning of which caught within the disciplinary code of conduct divulges the operation of multiple institutions, the consequential gender role stereotypes and hence the emergence of subjected female body or victimized female self. Foucault has also used a pun upon the wide-ranging term ‘subject’: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power, which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 30). Thus, the self emerges as a result of an “on-going” process of “subjection, at the level of those continuous and interrupted” exercises of micro-forces “which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours . . . subjection in its material instance as constitution of subjects” (Foucault, *Power / Knowledge* 97). But Foucault has also posited the possibility to come out of this subjection through a cultivation of self or through the cultivation of self which can preserve a space of freedom for the subject. Hence, he shifts his attention from the “history of power to the history of self” (Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault* 225-226). Foucault knows that to tackle with this subjected position, an equally effective strategy is required; and that the free space for the self can be retained through resistance to the complex mechanism of micro-forces. This resistance can be executed by an anti or counter disciplinary power. Power itself is the only mode of gaining or of changing the position of the subjected to become a subject. Once in his interview, he declares that power is always “dispersed, heteromorphous, localized . . . accompanied by numerous phenomena of inertia, displacement and resistance . . . there are no relations of power without resistances” (*Power / Knowledge* 142). Foucault admits that he views power not as an oppressive force or an apparatus to execute conspiracy, it is just another issue that the subtle operations of micro forces cannot be visualized on the subject (body) itself; rather power is fluid by nature which shifts its location; hence he divulges the possibility of power struggle between free subjects. According to Foucault, as Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell have remarked, “Power is exercised by free subjects only over free subjects and only in so far as they are free” and that “power is granted a neutral” character which is “open to all, even if it appears to be held by a few” (203). ‘A free subject over free subjects’ implies a subject with the knowledge of power to resist victimization and oppression is a perpetual process of culture. “Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who do not have it” (Foucault, *The Spectacle of the Scaffold* 32). The micro physics of disciplinary power in the form of internalized surveillance “exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has upon them” (Foucault, *The Spectacle of the Scaffold* 32). So the knowledge of subjection is power itself which opens an avenue of free space. The result being that a complex counter power (knowledge as power) to resist the conspiracy that may exert its pressure may come with the knowledge of power; that is the knowledge of being powerless as well as the apprehension of losing it is the main contributing factor of Foucault to feminists discourses. The positive note discerned in Foucaudian discourse of power relation is the neutrality and fluidity of power itself.

Another significant issue raised by Foucault in his later work is his avowed commitment to the possibility of self-creation. It is true, as he says, “We cannot jump outside the situation and there is no point where you are free from all power-relation”; however, he claims that “you can always change it . . . we are always free – well, anyway, there is always the possibility of changing” the system itself (Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault* 167, and 292). Thus subjected self, in turn, may become subject through a cultivation of self and having knowledge of one’s subjected position, which too, is power in itself.

Thus 'feminist sensibility' sharing Foucaudian disciplinary concept of micro-physics of powers comes out as a deliberate and new mode of perception, retaliation and subsequent revision and alteration of patriarchal patterns to give power and rights to women who have been wrongly and meticulously subjugated by her male counterparts. It gives a new orientation to culture and historical period by placing human need, sensibility and human potentialities above all social biases and discriminations. Cracking the pervasive patterns of subordination, it envisions a new ideology and new woman with new selfhood and power which are beyond the region of disjointed feminine self.

As it has already been mentioned that feminist sensibility is identical with feminism itself to have given new voice to females against the violence and injustice done to them. After Women's Liberation Movement of late 1960s, feminist ideology has gained ascendancy and female voice is heard with special heed. This sensibility has opened up a new vista of perception, of revision, reinterpretation of existing gender biases and sexual politics in history, culture, society and family, language and literature.

### **Works Cited and Consulted**

- Das, Bijay Kumar. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Bantam and Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Spectacle of Scaffold*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977.
- -. *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- -. *Power / Knowledge*. Ed. and Trans. Colin Gordon. New York: Prentice Hall, 1980.
- -. *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. London: Penguin, 1997.
- Glover, David and Cora Kaplan. *Genders*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Jaidka, Manju. *From Slant to Straight: Recent Trends in Women's Poetry*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2000.
- Joseph, Annama. *Feminism and the Modern American Poetry*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.
- Krishanswamy, N. et al. *Contemporary Literary Theory: A Student Companion*. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2001.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- MacCannell, Dean and Juliet Flower MacCannell. "Violence, Power and Pleasure: A Revisionist Reading of Foucault from Victim's Perspective."
- Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*. Ed. Caroline Romanzanoglu. New York: Routledge, 1993. 203-238.
- O'Keohane, Nannaerl. *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1998.
- Pearson, Carol and Katherine Pope. *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*. New York: Bowker, 1981.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- Singh, Sushila. *Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2004.

- Snitow, Ann. "A Gender Diary." *Conflict in Feminism*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990. 9-47.
- Mills, Sara. *Michel Foucault*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Tyson, Louis. *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York and London: Harvest and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- Wylie, Elinor. "Let No Charitable Hope." *Modern American Poetry*. Ed. Louis Untermeyer. New York: Hartcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969.